Brokerage firm catering to troops ordered to pay $12M fine Page 8

STARS AND STRIPES®

Snoop Dogg plays it cool in any scene

Page 18

Marine's photos of Iraq on display at University of Md.

Page 15

Johnson on verge of trade to Yankees

Back page

Pitcher Randy Johnson

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DOD asks to resume anthrax vaccination

Officials cite law allowing HHS to act in emergencies Page 3

Guard triples re-up bonus

Soldiers overseas will get $15,000 tax-free

Page 8

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY MORGAN LOOSLI
Stars and Stripes

AP

New Jersey Army National Guardmen deploy for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

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News Tracker ... What's new with old news

States

Cherry conviction: A state appeals court Friday refused to vacate the murder conviction of ex-Klansman Bobby Frank Cherry in the deaths of four black girls in a 1963 church bombing in Birmingham.

An attorney for Cherry, who died at a prison hospital last month at the age of 74, had asked the Court of Criminal Appeals to vacate the conviction under an Alabama law that allows such action if a defendant dies while a conviction is being appealed.

The appeals court rejected the motion, saying it had already ruled against Cherry's appeal and that the law vacating convictions with the death of a defendant does not apply.

Human smuggling trial: In the months after 19 illegal immigrants died in a sweltering trailer during a border crossing, authorities have brought three people to trial for their involvement in the smuggling ring they say caused the tragedy.

By the time the jury began deliberating the case Thursday, there were only two.

After the prosecution rested its case, U.S. District Judge Vanessa Gilmore dismissed charges against Claudia Carrizales de Villa, saying prosecutors had not proven she had profited from a restaurant that authorities said was a sham business intended to feed border crossers.

Gilmore rejected dismissal requests from the attorneys of Victor Jesus Rodriguez and Fredy Giovanni Garcia-Tobar, who face 58 counts of harboring and transporting illegal immigrants and could receive life in prison if convicted.

Maryland fires arrest: A security guard accused of burning down homes at the suburban Washington housing development where he worked told investigators he was upset his employer did not show enough sympathy after his infant son died this year.

Aaron L. Speed, 21, who worked for Security Services of America, told police he left his job from August to October because of SSA's "indifference to the death of his infant son," according to court papers.

When asked by investigators who might have started the fire, Speed said: "Someone who works at the site and recently experienced a great loss."

Louima abuser speaks out: Justin Volpe, the former New York City patrolman who shocked the city seven years ago by torturing a prisoner with a broken broomstick, says he feels sorry for Iraqis held at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison.

The musings of Volpe — serving a 30-year sentence for attacking Abner Louima inside a Brooklyn police station — are featured in the upcoming issue of GQ magazine. The profile of Volpe is culled from his letters, journals and exchanges with visitors. He's barred from giving interviews.

"I feel for those prisoners at Abu Ghraib," Volpe, 32, told his father. "They're human beings." His sympathy extends to the soldiers accused of abusing prisoners as well. "They went over there to serve, they stepped over the line ... ," he said. "I feel for both sides. It's a tragedy."

Hispanic rights leader steps down: Sitting in a hotel lobby in the Mexican border town of McAllen, Raul Yzaguirre marveled at the urbanization of what was once a somnolent center of cattle ranches and citrus groves.

Now, symbols of affluence — golf courses, luxury cars and gated developments — mix with the shantytowns of the newest immigrants.

And businesses no longer ignore the spending power of the more than 80 percent Hispanic population.

Wash. governor ballot recount: King County election worker Ryan Aumoeualogo carries a box of newly recounted ballots back to a secured area in Tukwilla, Wash., on Thursday, where ballot boxes continue to pile up at the King County recount headquarters. Republicans announced plans Thursday morning to sue King County over 573 newly discovered ballots that could change the outcome of the closest governor's race in Washington state history. The county's Canvassing Board voted Wednesday to prepare the 573 absentee ballots for inclusion in the hand recount, over the objections of Republicans who urged the county to investigate the ballots first.

"The culture has changed," said Yzaguirre, president of the National Council of La Raza. "I mean, to walk into HEB [a Texas-based supermarket chain] and feel like you're in Mexico is pretty profound."

When he steps down from a 30-year term as president this month, Yzaguirre will leave the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights nonprofit organization with 35,000 members and a budget of $28 million.

When he took over the group in 1974, it had no money and a squabbling staff.

U.S. Rep. Ruben Hinojosa, a Democrat who represents the district where Yzaguirre grew up, said Yzaguirre has been instrumental in bringing Latinos together.

AIDS drug investigation: The Rev. Jesse Jackson called for a congressional investigation into reports that U.S. health officials withheld research from the White House that showed an AIDS drug distributed to hundreds of thousands of Africans posed serious risks.

He also said the U.S. government should immediately halt the drug's distribution in Africa.

The Associated Press reported Monday that the National Institutes of Health knew about problems with the drug, nevirapine, as early as 2002, but did not tell the White House before President Bush launched a plan that summer to distribute the drug throughout Africa.

World

Pinochet appeal delay: A court on Friday postponed until next week a decision on whether to uphold the indictment and house arrest of former dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet.

Pinochet was indicted Monday by Judge Juan Guzman for the kidnapping of nine dissidents and the killing of one of them during his 1973-90 regime. Guzman said he was certain the 89-year-old retired general was competent to stand trial.

Defense lawyer Pablo Rodriguez on Friday argued again that Pinochet was unfit for trial because of health problems including mild dementia, diabetes and arthritis.

The indictment is the third attempt to try Pinochet for human rights violations during his regime. In 2001 Pinochet was indicted in a different case but the Supreme Court dropped the charges on health grounds.

Yushchenko poisoning: Ukrainian opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko was poisoned by TCDD, the most harmful known form of dioxin, the scientist who conducted tests on the presidential candidate's blood said Friday.

Abraham Brouwer, professor of environmental toxicology at the Free University in Amsterdam, said that the dioxin was TCDD, chemically known as tetrachlorodibenzo-paradioxin.

TCDD is produced inadvertently during manufacturing processes that use chlorine, such as paper and pulp bleaching. It is also produced by incinerators and usually ends up mixed with other dioxins produced by the same processes.

However, the tests conducted by Brouwer at BioDetection Systems in Amsterdam found Yushchenko was poisoned with pure TCDD, not a mixutre.

That rules out many sources, such as an incinerator or factory.

Gadhafi presidential comments: Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi says his decision to abandon nuclear weapons helped President Bush get re-elected.

In an interview airing Friday on Italy's RAI TV, Ghadafi said the U.S. presidential election was America's way of rewarding Tripoli for renouncing the nuclear program.

Gadhafi renounced the weapons program last year, a turnaround that ended Libya's international isolation. In turn, the United States lifted most of its commercial sanctions, as did the European Union. The EU also eased an arms embargo.

War crimes conviction: An appeals chamber at the U.N. tribunal for the former Yugoslavia on Friday confirmed the conviction and 25-year sentence of a regional Bosnian Croat politician for an ethnic cleansing campaign against Muslim civilians in central Bosnia.

It upheld part of the conviction of a second defendant, but reduced his sentence to six from 15 years. Mario Cerkez, a military commander, was released two weeks ago in anticipation of the lighter sentence.

Judge Wolfgang Schomburg said the panel of five appeals judges found chief defendant Dario Kordic had played a key role in a plan in 1993 "to kill military-aged men, expel civilians and destroy houses."

Stories and photo from wire services

Pentagon seeks OK for anthrax vaccine

DOD cites law that allows HHS to act in emergencies

BY JOHN J. LUMPKIN
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is seeking emergency authority to resume administering the anthrax vaccine, saying troops in South Korea and the Middle East are at risk.

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz made the request in a Dec. 10 letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson. The No. 2 official at the Pentagon cited "a significant potential for a military emergency involving a heightened risk to United States military forces of attack with anthrax."

Wolfowitz did not describe any specific threat, but pointed to a classified intelligence assessment from last month regarding anthrax. He did not detail the assessment.

HHS is considering the request, a department spokesman said.

Anthrax vaccinations by the military have been suspended since late October, when a federal judge ordered the military to stop requiring personnel to take the vaccine. The judge, responding to a lawsuit by six members of the armed forces, found fault in the Food and Drug Administration's process for approving the drug.

The military's request for emergency authority comes under the Project BioShield Act of 2004, which says that HHS, in response to a terrorist attack or other emergency, can allow the use of drugs that had not finished the FDA process, officials said.

"We are concerned for the health and safety of our service members, particularly in worldwide operations involving the war on terrorism," said William Winkenwerder Jr., the assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, in a statement provided by the Pentagon. "Intelligence indicates an ongoing threat of anthrax against our military forces."

An HHS official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the BioShield law was envisioned to be used after an attack has occurred to protect the American public from an outbreak, not to pre-emptively protect a part of the U.S. government.

U.S. District Judge Emmet G. Sullivan first ordered a halt to the mandatory vaccinations a year ago, saying that vaccine was being used for an unapproved purpose. Soon after, the FDA issued an order intended to give the vaccine final approval for use to prevent inhaled anthrax.

Sullivan later lifted the ban, except for the six plaintiffs, who asked Sullivan to reinstate the prohibition. He agreed, finding fault in the government's process for approving the vaccine.

With the FDA's final approval overruled, the anthrax vaccine is considered investigational. Congress has prohibited the military from giving investigational drugs to soldiers without their consent unless there is a presidential waiver.

Since 1998, 1.2 million troops have been vaccinated against anthrax. Before they were stopped, hundreds of service members had been punished or discharged for refusing them, according to the Pentagon.

Official: Saddam's defense minister to face hearing

Gen. Sultan Hashim Ahmad to appear in court alongside another notorious general, Chemical Ali

BY PAUL GARWOOD
The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Saddam Hussein's defense minister, who surrendered to American forces last year, will appear alongside another notorious general — known as Chemical Ali — when investigative trials open next week, an official said Friday.

Gen. Sultan Hashim Ahmad, who gave himself up in September 2003 at a coalition military base in the northern city of Mosul, will be among the first two to face the hearings, which interim Iraqi Prime Minister Prime Minister Ayad Allawi announced will commence next week.

An Iraqi government official said Thursday that Saddam's notorious former right-hand man, Ali Hassan al-Majid — known as "Chemical Ali" for his use of chemical weapons — would head the list of 11 top regime members to appear at the initial investigative court hearings.

"Chemical Ali and Sultan will be the first to face the hearings," the official, who is familiar with the proceedings, told The Associated Press.

Allawi's government has made a new push to start the trials ahead of Jan. 30 elections, in which campaigning has started amid continued insurgent violence.

On Friday, gunmen attacked a car in the northern city of Mosul, killing three people who appeared to be foreigners and their Iraqi driver. The bodies of the four victims, including one whose head was almost severed, were seen lying on the road alongside their burning car.

At least one body was set alight. Eyewitnesses said one of the slain men appeared to be in his 20s and another in his 40s and that they were dressed in jeans.

Police Capt. Zeid Waseem said police received reports that three of the dead were foreigners but their nationalities were not immediately known.

A day earlier, a person was killed in Mosul when seven mortar rounds struck near local government offices, police Capt. Mohammed Abbas said.

Mosul, Iraq' third largest city, was initially peaceful after the U.S.-led invasion but it has become a worrisome trouble spot since U.S. and Iraqi troops invaded the insurgent stronghold of Fallujah, west of Baghdad, in November.

U.S. military spokesman Lt. Col. Paul Hastings said security forces in western Mosul found the bodies of six unidentified Iraqi civilians who had been shot to death. Two more bodies were found in a town 20 miles to the east. Since Nov. 10, about 160 bodies, including many affiliated with the Iraqi National Guard and police, have been found in the Mosul area.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Embassy confirmed the name of an American kidnapped six weeks ago in a deadly attack in the Iraqi capital, and his family pleaded for his release.

Roy Hallums, a worker for a Saudi company that does catering for the Iraqi army, was seized Nov. 1 along with two other foreigners after a gunbattle in the upscale Mansour neighborhood. An Iraqi guard and one attacker were killed.

Hallums' wife, Susan, of Corona, Calif., said in a telephone interview Friday that she has not heard from the kidnappers. She is separated from her husband, the father of two daughters.

"I want to plead for his life and send out prayers and hope that he will be released," Susan Hallums said. "There has been no proof of life since he was taken."

The embassy confirmed Hallums' name and abduction but would give no other details.

South of Baghdad, a fire an oil pipeline near the capital's Dora refinery sent thick black billowing smoke pouring into the sky Friday. Insurgents regularly attack the country's oil infrastructure.

Insurgents also fired rocket-propelled grenades at a compound in Baghdad's Green Zone used by Australian troops stationed in the Iraqi capital, a defense spokeswoman said Friday. There were no injuries.

The former defense minister, Ahmad, was No. 27 on America's list of 55 most-wanted regime figures. He surrendered on Sept. 19, 2003, to Lt. Gen. David Petraeus, who was then the commander of the 101st Airborne Division.

Ahmad is in U.S. military custody at an undisclosed location in Baghdad.

During the 1991 Gulf War, Ahmad, then a lieutenant general, served as deputy chief of staff and head the Iraqi delegation at cease-fire talks.

AP

A car burns in the northern Iraqi town of Mosul on Friday. According to eyewitnesses, gunmen stopped the car and killed four occupants, three of which are believed to be foreigners.

Ahmad was responsible for persuading Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf to allow Iraq to use military helicopters on official business. The allies came to regret that decision later when the Iraqis used helicopters to quell rebellious Shiites in Basra and Kurds in the north.

The Kurdish mediator instrumental in bringing Ahmad said at the time of the surrender that the deal was sealed after the Americans agreed to remove his name from the 55 most-wanted list, a move that would have seen him released without trial after his initial questioning ended.

It was not immediately clear if the alleged arrangements remained in place.

Saddam, 67, will not be among the group to appear in next week's court hearings, which will be open to some media representatives, officials have said.

The former Iraqi president met with a defense attorney Thursday for the first time since his capture a year ago. The unidentified attorney spent four hours with the former dictator at Saddam's undisclosed detention site.

The Iraqi interim government's push to get the trials for Saddam's former lieutenants under way before the Jan. 30 national elections has led to dissent even within the Iraqi Cabinet.

Justice Minister Malik Dohan al-Hassan told the Geneva daily newspaper Le Temps in an interview published Thursday that the trials should be held only "after the establishment of an Iraqi government with ballot-box legitimacy."

U.S. deaths in Iraq

The Associated Press

As of Thursday, Dec. 16, 2004, at least 1,304 members of the U.S. military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. At least 1,019 died as a result of hostile action, the Defense Department said.

The figures include three military civilians.

The AP count is six higher than the Defense Department's tally, last updated at 10 a.m. EST Thursday.

The British military has reported 74 deaths; Italy, 19; Poland, 13; Spain, 11; Ukraine, nine; Bulgaria, seven; Slovakia, three; Estonia, Thailand and the Netherlands, two each; and Denmark, El Salvador, Hungary and Latvia one death each.

Since May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had ended, 1,166 U.S. military members have died, according to AP's count. That includes at least 910 deaths resulting from hostile action, according to the military's numbers.

The latest deaths reported by the military:

■ One Marine was killed Thursday in Iraq's Anbar province.

The latest identifications reported by the military:

■ No identifications reported.

81st BCT's raids keep fellow soldiers safe

Guard unit snuffs out insurgent activity in Iraq

BY RON JENSEN
Stars and Stripes

AL SHAHABI, Iraq — Using the pre-dawn darkness as cover, about 50 soldiers from the 81st Brigade Combat Team on Friday took into custody five men believed to be behind the mortar attacks and roadside bombs that make life dangerous in and around nearby Logistics Support Area Anaconda.

Company B, 1st Battalion, 185th Armor, part of the 81st BCT's Task Force Tacoma, grabbed three of the men in two separate raids. No shots were fired and no one was hurt in the raid.

"It was routine," said Sgt. Biff Yelensky, while the men were being identified and their homes searched. "We got the two targets we were looking for."

At another house 100 yards away, other soldiers from the company grabbed a third man, the final person in the company's game plan.

At the same time, another platoon from Task Force Tacoma was about 1,000 yards away taking two more men into custody. They are also believed to be behind the deadly activities in the area.

"We had enough information, we're going to put these guys away for a while," said 1st Sgt. John Larson.

They were described by 1st Lt. Rodolfo Hall, company executive officer, as "HVTs" — high-value targets.

The men, now being held at Anaconda, are believed to be involved in hijacking and kidnapping for ransom. The money they gain is then used to fund efforts to kill Americans at the base, the largest support base in Iraq. They've also been involved in murder, the Americans believe.

The 81st BCT is a National Guard unit from Washington state, augmented by a battalion from California and a company from Minnesota. Its main mission is force protection. Company B is from California.

The troops rolled out in the freezing darkness of early morning Friday, reaching the target — which was only a few miles away — before 6 a.m. The convoy of nearly a dozen vehicles included two M1A1 Abrams tanks and a field ambulance.

They perform these types of raids frequently, whenever intelligence has the goods. But the risk of each mission still creates a nervousness.

"Especially here. These guys are hijackers and murderers," said Sgt. 1st Class Juan Puentes, who teaches high school English in Los Angeles.

He said the winner of any fight is not in doubt, but the worry about the first shot is always there.

SEE RAIDS ON PAGE 5

RON JENSEN/Stars and Stripes

Soldiers of Company B, 1st Battalion, 185th Armor, a California National Guard unit, search a house in Al Shahabi, Iraq, early Friday after taking a man who lives there into custody on suspicion of planting roadside bombs.

Maintaining perimeter control no easy task

BY JOSEPH GIORDONO
Stars and Stripes

MUHAMMAD BAQII, Iraq — Often in the unconventional combat facing American troops in Iraq, the "cordon" part of a "cordon and search" mission is the most difficult.

While one section of troops raids a target, others block off the surrounding area, providing security and trying to deal with the inevitable crowds of onlookers, curious children and agitated locals caught up in the traffic.

That was the case Thursday, when troops from the Louisiana-based 2nd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment raided a farm compound northwest of Baghdad. Corps-level intelligence reports said the compound was being used to manufacture and store roadside bombs and that it was being used as shelter by as many as 50 insurgents.

As infantrymen working from Bradley fighting vehicles and Humvees searched the compound, other troops dealt with an increasingly large crowd on the streets outside. The "Voodoo" soldiers of the National Guard battalion's Headquarters and Headquarters Company tried to manage the traffic, reaching for a balance between providing security, searching vehicles and allowing innocent locals to go about their everyday business.

"This is getting messed up," hollered Sgt. Joseph Shanks, a 25-year-old from Baker, La., who normally works at the Georgia Pacific paper company. "They're letting more vehicles in, but they aren't letting any out."

In a briefing before the raid, soldiers at the checkpoints surrounding the target compound were told to check for identification, search vehicles and allow local traffic to pass through. But once the Iraqi vehicles entered the search area, most couldn't find a way out.

Sgt. Bradford Domingue, a medic, and Sgt. Bryan Fisher, right, check medical documents presented by Iraqi men at a checkpoint outside of a search area near Baghdad.

JOSEPH GIORDONO
Stars and Stripes

So, as the soldiers dismounted and tried to run the checkpoints, more and more vehicles piled up. Small groups of Iraqi men began gathering; conspicuously absent were the crowds of children that usually converge on groups of U.S. soldiers. While the kids can sometimes be a nuisance, soldiers say they're more nervous when the kids don't show up: It could be a sign, soldiers say, that some sort of attack is imminent.

Sgt. Bryan Fisher, a 31-year-old construction worker from Chalmette, La., and Staff Sgt. Robert Burns, a 36-year-old sheriff's deputy from New Iberia, La., chased down a suspicious white truck that kept turning around and trying to find a road out of the area. After a few tense moments, the soldiers determined that the truck was what its two occupants said it was — a delivery truck full of eggs headed for Baghdad. But because neither man had identification, their photographs were taken and information on who they said they were was recorded.

Inside the compound, soldiers were coming up empty in their search for bomb-making material or men with the surnames Hussein and Wissam, whom intelligence officers had ordered arrested on sight.

SEE CORDON ON PAGE 5

The "Voodoo" soldiers of the National Guard battalion's Headquarters and Headquarters Company tried to manage the traffic, reaching for a balance between providing security, searching vehicles and allowing innocent locals to go about their everyday business.

Increased airlifts in Iraq don't overtax USAFE

BY BEN MURRAY
Stars and Stripes

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — Increased military cargo flights in Iraq have had little effect on airlift squadrons based at Europe's cargo-hauling hub, airmen and U.S. Air Forces in Europe officials said this week.

The Air Force's top general said Tuesday that C-130 Hercules and C-17 Globemaster cargo lifters have picked up their pace over the past month to decrease the time ground troops spend on dangerous supply routes. But USAFE officials said they have not been asked to provide more aircraft.

Contardo

Crewmembers of Ramstein C-130 crews just back from Iraq likewise said their missions in Iraq did not change noticeably in recent weeks.

Lt. Col. Bill Arthur, director of operations at USAFE's Air Mobility Operations Control Center, which oversees Ramstein aircraft being sent to Iraq, said USAFE had "not received any requirements," for the base's 18 C-130 Hercules since the stepped-up airlift began last month.

BEN MURRAY/Stars and Stripes

Staff Sgt. Thomas Ward from the 86th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron got a holiday welcome Thursday from his wife Kerri, his daughter Samantha, 2, and son Asa, 8, when he returned to Ramstein Air Base, Germany, from a rotation in Iraq. Air Force planes are carrying more cargo in Iraq to ease the burden on ground troops.

On Tuesday, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. John P. Jumper told reporters in Washington that transport planes in Iraq were carrying 25 percent more now than they had when he last visited in early November.

Cargo lifters have carried an average of 450 tons of supplies per day over the past month, up from an average of about 350 tons per day, according to media reports.

But Capt. Mike Contardo, a Hercules co-pilot with the Ramstein-based 37th Airlift Squadron — who returned from Kuwait on Thursday after 60 days in the region — said his missions were "pretty steady-state."

Contardo and his crew primarily moved personnel in and out of Baghdad and Balad, Iraq, but they also moved some cargo. Aircrews flying missions into Iraq are already so busy that more planes or different types of cargo would likely just get assimilated into the mix, Contardo said.

"There's enough Hercs out there that it wouldn't change much," he said.

With the return of Contardo's aircraft this week, all of Ramstein's C-130s are back in Germany.

Air Force cargo missions may continue to expand in Iraq, with the tonnage of daily shipments continuing to rise, according to media reports.

Arthur said he couldn't speculate on what resources USAFE might be required to provide in that case.

"It's really tough to say what those requirement [might be]," he said, but added that USAFE is "postured to respond," to any increased mission demands.

Lovelace

That an increase in cargo missions might mean more flights over dangerous territory didn't seem to faze the pilots.

The airmen said they'll deliver their cargo when and where the mission requires.

"If they put it in the back, we'll take it anywhere," said Capt. Marc Lovelace, another co-pilot with the 37th Airlift Squadron.

E-mail Ben Murray at: murrayb@mail.estripes.osd.mil

Cordon: Hard to keep order at scene

CORDON, FROM PAGE 4

Back outside, Sgt. Bradford Domingue, a 26-year-old former emergency medical technician from Carencro, La., was helping on the checkpoints. With a military-issue booklet of Iraqi phrases, Domingue was dealing with three men in a car who said they needed to leave because of a medical condition.

Domingue looked at the medicines they handed over, asked rudimentary questions about their problem and even checked an Iraqi version of a heart-monitor readout.

"Even the heart strip is confusing," he said, as he used a mix of the phrase book and sign language to communicate with the vehicle occupants. Eventually, after a search of the vehicle, the men were allowed to pass.

For the guardsmen of the 256th Brigade Combat Team, the learning curve has been steep. In less than two months in Iraq, they've come to a better understanding of the local culture, they said. But some things are still baffling.

"They don't have a house, but they have a satellite dish. I don't understand it," Fisher said, as they drove past a family standing next to a satellite dish sitting by the shell of a crumbled house.

The raid, which kicked off around 2 p.m., finished a few hours later with no arrests or weapons found. But for the soldiers element, the day was far from over. After the other units headed back to base, "Voodoo" troops continued on to Sabaa al-Boor, a town U.S. military officials say is being targeted by insurgents for harassment and as a possible safe haven. The town is just east of Fallujah, and some U.S. intelligence officials say some of the insurgents that escaped the assault there earlier this month have moved to Sabaa al-Boor.

Units from the 256th BCT have been focusing on the city, trying to keep it from falling under insurgent influence. So, as darkness fell Thursday night, a few dozen troops went on a walking patrol of the unlit streets.

Just before midnight, they pulled back onto their base at Camp Victory, took off their gear and prepared for another day.

E-mail Joseph Giordono at: giordonoj@pstripes.osd.mil

Raids: Proactive protection

RAIDS, FROM PAGE 4

"You don't know what to expect when you go in there," said Larson, 37, who is on permanent duty with the Guard in California.

The soldiers didn't kick the door in and barge through. They knocked. When the door was opened, they quickly moved inside and began an accounting of every person there. One man ran, but was found in a nearby house.

At one house in Al Shahabi, the target lived with his wife and four young children. The soldiers made sure the children were warm while they began a search of the house after taking the father into custody.

The children, all quite young, looked on in wide-eyed wonderment, seeming puzzled at the activity of the nighttime visitors.

"I have three children myself," said Yelensky, who is a full-time military member. "I'm a little sympathetic to the children."

After the targets were grabbed and secured, soldiers began searching the houses, room by room. They looked for contraband, which could be anything from illegal weapons to large sums of cash. Soldiers took a handful of audio tapes from one house in case something important is on them.

They also took away shell casings, which, Larson said, can be used to make fake roadside bombs. While dealing with a fake bomb, he said, they can be caught by a real one.

After the soldiers' presence was known, two OH-58D Kiowa helicopters from 1st Squad, 17 Cavalry Regiment were called in to provide cover from the air and search for any approaching threats. The unit from Fort Bragg, N.C., recently arrived in the theater.

Staff Sgt. James Heaney, who manages a Home Depot in Port Orchard, Wash., was in the platoon nearby that grabbed two men. He said the intelligence that led to this raid came from someone grabbed in an earlier mission.

"We should be working our way up to the big guy," he said.

The soldiers were happy but not jubilant after their early morning success. They were back at the base in time for breakfast. And they may have put a dent in the effort to harm Americans.

"For the soldiers," said Heaney, "this is a big morale boost."

E-mail Ron Jensen at: jensenr@mail.estripes.osd.mil

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Officer to face trial

Capt. Rogelio M. Maynulet, a 1st Armored Division officer, will face trial in February on a charge of assault with intent to commmit murder and dereliction of duty in the death an unarmed and wounded Iraqi, a judge determined during a Friday arraignment.

The judge, Col. James Pohl, announced that the court would hear motions on Jan. 25, and the trial itself is scheduled for Feb. 22 through 25. It is tentatively to be held at Wiesbaden Army Airfield in Germany.

Maynulet did not enter a plea, said Maj. Michael Indovina, a 1st AD spokesman. Maynulet will face a maximum combined sentence of 20 ½ years.

Maynulet's tank company had fired shots at a car to end a May 21 car chase near Kufa, Iraq, wounding both the driver and passenger. Prosecutors say the 29-year-old Chicago native then murdered the driver, who had already had part of his skull blown away.

Fellow officers, however, say Maynulet killed the man as an act of mercy after a medic pulled him from the car. The soldiers believed the men were associates of radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

Maynulet is now assigned to the division's Headquarters and Headquarters Company.

Shot to avoid Iraq duty

PHILADELPHIA — A soldier who allegedly had a relative shoot him so he wouldn't have to return to Iraq could face military discipline.

Army Spc. Marquise J. Roberts, of Hinesville, Georgia, suffered a minor wound Tuesday to his left leg from a .22-caliber pistol, police said. He was treated at a hospital, then arrested after he and a relative allegedly admitted making up a story about the shooting.

After giving differing accounts, "they just broke down and confessed that they concocted the whole story so he didn't have to go back to the war," police Lt. James Clark said Thursday.

Police charged Roberts with filing a false report and charged a cousin, Roland Fuller, with aggravated assault and other charges.

Roberts could face military discipline if the charges prove true, said Lt. Col. Cliff Kent, a spokesman for the Army's 3rd Infantry Division, but the civilian case probably would proceed first.

Roberts, who was visiting family in Philadelphia, initially claimed he was shot during an attempted robbery, but Fuller had said the incident occurred at another location during an argument, according to Clark.

Memorial set for GI

A memorial for Pfc. Joshua A. Ramsey, 19, a military policeman with the 95th MP Battalion, was held Friday in Mannheim, Germany, as well as on Thursday in Baghdad.

Ramsey, who is from Defiance, Ohio, died Dec. 12 in Baghdad from noncombat-related injuries. He is the second troop to die from the Mannheim community, according to the 293rd Base Support Battalion, based in Mannheim.

From staff and wire reports

Depot still not full speed with armor

BY JEFFREY MCMURRAY
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Growing scrutiny about the speed at which the Pentagon is adding armor to military vehicles in Iraq hasn't increased the work hours at Anniston Army Depot, which built more than a third of the steel-reinforced Humvee doors produced this year.

In June, the around-the-clock production of the kits at the Alabama site was cut back to one daily nine-hour shift.

That and other issues have prompted Rep. Mike Rogers, a Republican from Anniston, to ask Pentagon officials why the depot isn't called on to produce more armor for a variety of military vehicles and why the reinforced Humvee doors it has produced aren't being delivered to soldiers more quickly.

"I'm just looking for some answers," Rogers said Thursday.

As for the shortened hours at the Anniston Army Depot, deputy to the commander Jesse Poor said he wouldn't be surprised if 24-hour work days for the armored kits resume soon. But Poor says the expected increase has nothing to do with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's highly publicized conversation with a soldier in Kuwait about the need to add armor to vehicles more quickly.

Rather, Poor said, the Pentagon will soon roll out the armored plates to protect five-ton trucks based overseas. Assuming Anniston has a role in making them, longer hours would be necessary, he said.

"If production starts this month, I think you'll see kits installed in January," Poor said.

"There will be no delay. You manufacture, paint, brack it and pack it, ship it and install it in a very short time frame. I'm talking days here, not weeks or months."

Poor said the Anniston depot has produced more than 3,000 of the 9,600 Humvee kits that have been produced since Dec. 3, 2003.

Depot officials still haven't heard from the Pentagon about what its next job will be in the drive to reinforce overseas fighting vehicles. Whatever it does, Rogers and business boosters in Alabama say the depot's work underscores the need for such depots.

There has been speculation the Pentagon might try to reduce the number of depots as part of the base realignment and closure process next year.

AP

Nenio Cook, left, Jimmy Nelson, center, and Jarrod Douthitt process armored Humvee doors at the Anniston Army Depot, in Anniston, Ala., on Wednesday.

Sri Lankan mistaken for American in Iraq recalls hostage ordeal

BY SHIMALI SENANAYAKE
The Associated Press

HENDALA, Sri Lanka — Day after day, locked in a cement room somewhere in Iraq, the hooded men beat him. They told him he would be beheaded. "Ameriqi!" they shouted, even though he comes from this poor Sri Lankan fishing village.

The militants were convinced truck driver Denesh Dharmendra Rajaratnam was an American.

"Two men wearing black beat us with wires and poles and asked if I was a black American," said Rajaratnam, who made it home Sunday after 46 days as a hostage in Iraq. "I told them I was Sri Lankan, but they didn't believe me and hit me harder."

A fellow truck driver, a Bangladeshi, was kidnapped with him. Three Iraqis and two Egyptians later joined them. All were severely beaten — and most were eventually killed, he said.

"We were unfed and without water," Rajaratnam, 37, said in his home outside Colombo, Sri Lanka's capital. "I wasn't sure how many days it went on, since I didn't know the difference between night and day."

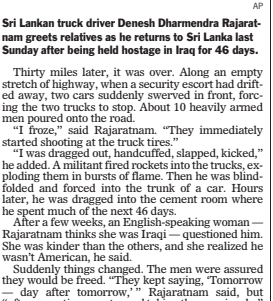
His kidnappers called themselves the Islamic Army In Iraq and are among militants waging a brutal campaign of hostage-takings, beheadings and bombings trying to force American troops from Iraq and frighten others from supporting the U.S. effort.

One by one, Rajaratnam said, captives were taken away and killed: the Egyptians beheaded, the Iraqis shot. One day, four hooded men dragged Rajaratnam and his Bangladeshi colleague, Abul Kashem, from their makeshift cell. A banner was hung above them, and armed men stood beside them.

"I was terrified, I knew this was what happened before a beheading," Rajaratnam said. "The Bangladeshi started crying. I begged them not to harm us, that we were only doing our job."

Rajaratnam had taken the driving job with a Kuwait-based company hoping to save enough of his pay — $204 a month — to send his three young sons through school. In June 2003, he signed a two-year contract and flew to Kuwait. For more than a year, he drove a truck there. Then, promised more money, he volunteered to go to Baghdad.

A few days later, his truck was loaded with boxes labeled "U.S. Army," destined for a U.S. base. At the border, he got a helmet and a flak jacket. Officials there had one piece of advice: drive fast.



AP

Sri Lankan truck driver Denesh Dharmendra Rajaratnam greets relatives as he returns to Sri Lanka last Sunday after being held hostage in Iraq for 46 days.

Thirty miles later, it was over. Along an empty stretch of highway, when a security escort had drifted away, two cars suddenly swerved in front, forcing the two trucks to stop. About 10 heavily armed men poured onto the road.

"I froze," said Rajaratnam. "They immediately started shooting at the truck tires."

"I was dragged out, handcuffed, slapped, kicked," he added. A militant fired rockets into the trucks, exploding them in bursts of flame. Then he was blindfolded and forced into the trunk of a car. Hours later, he was dragged into the cement room where he spent much of the next 46 days.

After a few weeks, an English-speaking woman — Rajaratnam thinks she was Iraqi — questioned him. She was kinder than the others, and she realized he wasn't American, he said.

Suddenly things changed. The men were assured they would be freed. "They kept saying, 'Tomorrow — day after tomorrow,'" Rajaratnam said, but "after some time we stopped taking them seriously."

After weeks of quiet diplomacy, the two men were driven to an isolated spot and handed over to a lawyer on Dec. 5. "I feel as if I died and have been reborn."

Gen. sees successful Iraqi future

Knight Ridder Newspapers

WASHINGTON — Despite heavy fighting in recent months, most of Iraq remains relatively stable, and the country is on track to hold elections by Jan. 30 and achieve a stable government by the end of 2005, the U.S. commander of multinational forces in Iraq said Thursday.

Gen. George Casey's assertions were among the most unequivocal to date by a senior military officer with firsthand knowledge of conditions in Iraq since the insurgency gained steam a year ago.

Casey conceded that more combat lay ahead and that opposition to the fledging Iraqi government was well organized and determined, but he said that victory was still possible.

"My view of winning is that we are broadly on track to accomplishing our objectives," said Casey, who briefed reporters on his analysis of the war nearly six months after taking command.

Casey defined victory as "a constitutionally elected government that is representative of all the Iraqi people" with Iraqi security forces providing "domestic order and denying Iraq as a safe haven for terror. And I believe we will get there by the end of December '05."

As a result of last month's military offensive in Fallujah, which he called a "liberation," the city of 300,000 is no longer a haven from which insurgents can base, plan and launch attacks against U.S. and Iraqi security forces, Casey said.

MILITARY UPDATE

Tom Philpott

Stateside housing allowances to rise

For 2005 BAH rates at more stateside locations, see the online version of this column at www.stripes.com

Monthly housing allowances for 910,000 servicemembers living off base in the United States will climb by an average of 8 percent effective Jan. 1, say Defense Department officials.

The rise in individual rates, however, will vary significantly, from no change for some grades in some areas to as much as 20 percent to 30 percent for military renters in high-cost areas such as Hawaii.

Revised BAH rates have no direct impact on servicemembers living off base overseas. They get an Overseas Housing Allowance which is adjusted in the spring and fall each year to reflect changes in out-of-pocket costs for stateside peers and changes in the dollar's value relative to local currency.

The 2005 Basic Allowance for Housing rates not only will keep pace with an average 4.4 percent rise in rental costs nationwide over last year but also are high enough to close a remaining 3.5 percent gap between 2004 BAH and median rental expenses nationwide.

BAH recipients will enjoy a fifth and final "above-inflation" annual adjustment that since the year 2000 has eliminated a 22 percent disparity between stateside allowances and rental costs reported in housing surveys.

With the new rates, said Tim Fowlkes, director of BAH for the Defense Department, out-of-pocket costs for stateside renters will fall to zero, assuming they rent at the local median cost for the type of housing deemed appropriate to their pay grade.

"If they choose to rent above the median rent, then they would have some out-of-pocket costs," Fowlkes said. "Likewise, if they choose to rent below the median, they would actually have some extra" cash to pocket.

The chart shows 2005 rates for U.S. locations with large populations of servicemembers. Rates for all areas can be found online at: **https://secureapp2.hqda.pentagon.mil/perdiem/bah.html**

BAH rates are set so that servicemembers of equal rank and with the same dependency status have equal purchasing power to rent housing, regardless of where they are assigned. The tax-free allowance is to cover not only median rental costs locally but average utility expenses — electricity, heat and water — and renter's insurance.

Total BAH payments in 2005 will reach $12.3 billion, up $2.5 billion, or 25 percent, from 2004. An additional 90,000 members will qualify. Some of that growth, Fowlkes said, results from mobilized Reserve and National Guard members who are eligible to draw BAH while activated. Their BAH typically is based on where their families reside while they are deployed.

Also, he said, thousands more active duty families are eligible for BAH this year due to housing privatization, a program to move families out of aging military units and into new or renovated private sector housing with developers agreeing to set rent equal to members' monthly BAH.

Stateside, BAH is paid both to military homeowners and renters but the allowance is based on rental costs alone, avoiding the complex financial experience of homebuyers who can claim tax breaks on mortgage payments and often realize capital gains on the sale of their homes.

Most BAH recipients are married and thus receive BAH at the higher "with dependents" rate. A sampling of nationwide averages shows with-dependents BAH rising in 2005 by $47 a month for grades E-1 through E-4, $60 a month for E-8s, $63 for O-3s and $83 for O-5s.

For a complete list of BAH rates and more on the topic, go to **www.stripes.com.**
To comment, write Military Update, P.O. Box 231111, Centreville, VA 20120-1111, e-mail **milupdate@aol.com** or visit **www.militaryupdate.com**

A sample of Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) rates as of Jan. 1, 2005

BASES	FORT STEWART, GA		FORT BRAGG/ POPE AFB, NC		HAMPTON/ NEWPORT NEWS, VA		FORT DRUM/ WATERTOWN, NY		CAMP LEJEUNE, NC		TACOMA, WA		HONOLULU, HI	
dependents	with	without	with	without	with	without	with	without	with	without	with	without	with	without
E-1	$781	$687	$809	$654	$910	$759	$735	$503	$759	$586	$974	$750	$1698	$1161
E-2	781	687	809	654	910	759	735	503	759	586	974	750	1698	1161
E-3	781	687	809	654	910	759	735	503	759	586	974	750	1698	1161
E-4	781	687	809	654	910	759	735	503	759	586	974	750	1698	1161
E-5	804	735	846	733	960	828	830	632	827	657	1079	831	1773	1472
E-6	852	762	957	777	1005	868	1024	701	935	701	1271	884	1922	1633
E-7	943	783	985	812	1091	914	1082	738	974	764	1349	982	2089	1703
E-8	1042	813	1017	868	1186	969	1145	858	1017	848	1435	1117	2274	1802
E-9	1132	828	1094	902	1285	983	1195	903	1068	882	1509	1176	2496	1849
W-1	854	773	957	795	1006	892	1025	720	936	734	1272	935	1925	1670
W-2	983	813	998	867	1130	969	1108	858	992	848	1385	1116	2165	1802
W-3	1104	830	1036	906	1245	984	1185	909	1044	885	1489	1182	2388	1853
W-4	1143	875	1116	964	1300	1027	1199	1038	1078	945	1517	1291	2538	1964
W-5	1189	965	1209	992	1365	1112	1216	1096	1116	984	1550	1368	2711	2130
O-1E	962	804	992	846	1110	960	1094	830	983	827	1366	1079	2126	1773
O-2E	1086	825	1030	895	1228	980	1173	893	1036	874	1473	1163	2355	1838
O-3E	1150	852	1131	957	1310	1005	1202	1024	1084	935	1522	1271	2565	1922
O-1	809	759	859	772	965	861	846	695	839	692	1101	870	1790	1623
O-2	851	796	954	833	1004	943	1018	793	933	804	1267	1043	1919	1747
O-3	1099	835	1035	917	1241	989	1182	935	1042	896	1485	1202	2380	1868
O-4	1208	952	1248	988	1392	1100	1223	1088	1133	978	1563	1357	2784	2107
O-5	1282	1012	1399	1007	1496	1157	1250	1126	1196	1004	1616	1409	3066	2218
O-6	1293	1104	1411	1036	1508	1245	1260	1185	1206	1044	1629	1489	3091	2388
O-7	1308	1126	1427	1057	1526	1270	1275	1209	1220	1065	1648	1519	3127	2436

Source: Department of Defense

Stars and Stripes

U.S. forces close latest chapter in French military cooperation

BY JAMEY KEATEN
The Associated Press

PARIS — The Yanks are leaving — and many French didn't even realize they were here.

The last U.S. military contingent in France said adieu to the country on Friday with a fittingly low-key ceremony. With European forces taking over peacekeeping in Bosnia, the Americans are being redeployed elsewhere, thus ending a chapter of unsung cooperation between Paris and Washington.

Little known even to some experts, the 774th Expeditionary Air Base Group of about 100 airmen wrapped up its decade-long mission at a huge air base in the balmy Mediterranean town of Istres.

The pullout had nothing to do with trans-Atlantic squabbling that erupted over the U.S.-led war in Iraq, but with the end of a NATO peacekeeping role in Bosnia earlier this month, officials said.

"There's nothing symbolic about it," said military expert Etienne de Durand of the French Institute of International Relations in Paris. "This is mainly a technical maneuver."

French-American relations frayed in the run-up to the Iraq war, when President Jacques Chirac led international opposition to the U.S.-led campaign to oust Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein.

Col. Joe Abbott, who oversees U.S. Air Force operations in Istres from Aviano Air Base in Italy, said bonds between the French and American air forces transcend any political discord.

"Political disagreements come and go, but our alliance is stronger than that," he said. "Our relationship with the French air force is something that's been very stable and dependable."

The force, made up mainly of reservists and Air National Guard airmen, will return home and could face redeployment in a less cushy location — possibly Iraq, Abbott said. They are the last large-scale American military force remaining in France, he said.

To many, the mere presence of U.S. forces on French soil these days may have appeared strange. But since 1994, Istres had served as a launch pad for U.S. KC-135 airborne refueling planes supporting NATO jets enforcing a no-fly zone and some U2 spy planes over the Balkans.

That mission continued quietly in the background of the sharp decline in French-American ties.

Brokerage firm agrees to $12 million fine

First Command accused of lying about investment fees, returns; most customers are troops

BY LEO SHANE III
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A brokerage firm that caters almost exclusively to military personnel agreed this week to pay a $12 million fine to settle claims it misled customers about their investment fees and returns.

First Command Financial Planning will refund about $4 million to certain customers who bought mutual funds from the firm between 1999 and this year, in a settlement with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and the National Association of Securities Dealers, the brokerage industry's self-policing organization.

The remainder of the fine will go into a military education fund run by NASD, according to the association's head of enforcement, Barry Goldsmith.

The firm's customer base includes over 297,000 current and former military families. According to SEC estimates, about 40 percent of the current active-duty general officers, about one-third of the commissioned officers, and about 16 percent of noncommissioned officers are customers of First Command. The majority of its sales agents are retired military officers.

The company employs about 1,000 sales agents — mostly retired military officers — in some 200 branch offices near military bases in the United States and several foreign countries, including Germany, England, Spain and Italy.

United States and several foreign countries. A statement from the company noted that the settlement did not involve any of the firm's life insurance policies or banking services, and only involved how investment plans were sold, not concerns over the mutual funds themselves. The company neither admitted nor denied wrongdoing as part of the settlement.

Before the settlement, First Command had announced it would stop offering its systematic investment plans, the focus of the investigation. In addition to the fine, the firm will also have all of its advertising preapproved by an independent consultant for two years.

Goldsmith said sales agents for the broker dealer misled customers in saying their high up-front costs of the funds — in some cases 50 percent of the money being invested — encouraged clients to stay in the plan because they would face large losses at first, which would diminish over time. Company data showed otherwise.

Agents also said the systematic investments had lower long-term costs than other mutual funds. Goldsmith said in many cases the opposite is true, and clients didn't fully understand the fees associated with First Command's plans.

"We found it very troublesome that the people who were sold these plans had a lot on their minds and were not given all the appropriate information," he said. "And the median age of their investors was 25, which meant [First Command agents] were dealing with people without much investing background."

The investigation also resulted in a $25,000 fine and a 30-day suspension for First Command district supervisor James Provo, based in Charleston, S.C., who responded to an Air Force officer's e-mail complaint about the company by telling the officer that he could lose a permanent change of station assignment and informing his squadron commander that the company might file a grievance against the officer.

Payouts will be available only to First Command clients who purchased and ended their investment plans within the last six years. Goldsmith said customers with active plans can try to recoup their losses through arbitration, and in light of the settlement he expects many clients to do so.

For more information: www.nasdfoundation.org/
E-mail Leo Shane at: shanel@stripes.osd.mil

Army Guard triples bonuses for re-enlisting

BY LEO SHANE III
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Army National Guard has tripled re-enlistment bonuses and increased new enlistment bonuses by 67 percent in an effort to boost its ranks, Pentagon officials announced this week.

At a press conference on Thursday Lt. Gen. Steven Blum said the Army Guard has fallen short of recruiting over the past two months, largely blamed on troubles in Iraq. Officials hope the bonus increases will entice more new recruits, and retain more of the Guard's 360,000 current members.

The Guard has had a particularly difficult time recruiting active-duty soldiers into its ranks. Stripes reported in November that just more than half of the 7,000 active-duty soldiers that the Guard sought to transition into its ranks did so in fiscal 2004.

As of Dec. 14, bonuses jumped from $5,000 to $15,000, for current servicemembers who re-enlist for six years. For those who are currently serving abroad, that money will be tax-free.

For new recruits, the signing bonus will grow from $6,000 to $10,000.

Mark Allen, spokesman for the Guard, said the new figures bring the bonuses more in line with those offered by the Army, which is especially important for Guard members serving abroad.

"What do you say to a guy who is serving in Iraq and is seeing an active-duty guy earning more in bonuses than he is?" Allen asked.

"We haven't changed these for many years. This will give more equity to our people there."

Bonuses for Army recruits and re-enlistees depend on individuals' rank, specialties and length of service. Allen said the Guard's bonus structure will apply to everyone who joins.

National Guard officials have said they expect the total number of reservists and guardsmen on active duty in the war on terrorism to remain above 100,000 for the next two years.

Department of Defense officials estimate Army Reserve soldiers make up about 40 percent of the 148,000 troops in Iraq.

E-mail Leo Shane at: shanel@stripes.osd.mil

AP

Stefanie Pabon, left, and her twin sister, Darlene, of Manchester, N.J., both with the 119th Combat Support Battalion of the N.J. Army National Guard, depart Tuesday for deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom from Fort Dix, N.J.

National Guard: $20B needed for equipment

BY BRADLEY GRAHAM
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Worn down by the war in Iraq and security demands in the United States, the National Guard announced Thursday that it needs $20 billion in new weapons and equipment over the next three years to continue to meet all its overseas and homeland commitments.

Without the money to "reset" itself, Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, the head of the Guard, warned that the reserve force "will be broken and not ready the next time it's needed, either at home or for war."

His remarks to reporters came as the Bush administration is preparing to submit an emergency spending plan totaling more than $80 billion to cover war costs and remedy equipment shortages throughout the military. Guard officials have asked that $7 billion of the supplemental be earmarked for their troops, and they intend to seek an additional $13 billion in later budget requests.

By speaking out now about the Guard's needs, Blum said he was trying to "put a marker against the supplemental" and other subsequent budget submissions "and make it stick." He said the Army's active-duty leadership had been sympathetic to the Guard's plans, so his message appeared directed beyond the Pentagon at the White House and Congress where final authority over funding rests.

"This has got to be addressed now," he said of the Guard's weakened condition.

The $20 billion request represents a huge increase over the $1 billion to $1.5 billion a year in new equipment that the Guard has received in recent years. Blum said the funds would go toward a wide range of purchases, including aircraft, vehicles, radios and weapons.

Once a force intended to be held chiefly in reserve for a potential large war abroad — and used periodically in the United States for disaster relief and other emergencies — much of the Guard has been pressed into service over the past three years to assist in homeland defense missions and in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Before the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Guard members generally expected to give up only one weekend a month, plus two weeks a year, for training exercises. But as of Sept. 30 this year, more than 90,000 members of the Army Guard had been deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan or other countries in the name of the war on terrorism.

About 42,000 are currently serving in Iraq or Kuwait.

Blum said the Guard was "under-resourced" and "under-equipped" before this surge in activity. A large portion of the equipment that Guard members have taken to Iraq, he said, needs replacing because it has been battered by repeated use under harsh conditions and was dated to begin with.

Blum said Guard units departing Iraq are leaving much of their equipment behind for incoming units to use. "If they don't have equipment" after returning home, "they're useless," he said.

IN THE WORLD

Afghan troops storm prison to end standoff

BY AMIR SHAH
The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghan troops stormed a notorious prison Friday in an assault that commanders said ended a standoff sparked by a bloody escape attempt by four inmates, once suspected of belonging to the al-Qaida terror organization.

Explosions ripped through the area around the Pul-e Charkhi jail as troops — firing rocket-propelled grenades and small arms — launched the assault just before nightfall. Soon after, soldiers reported the last holdouts in the prison were killed, bringing the day's death toll to four inmates and four guards.

The standoff began in the morning when four inmates — three Pakistanis and an Iraqi — overpowered and killed a guard, then used his weapon to kill three other guards. Two of the inmates were killed in that battle.

The other two remained holed up for 10 hours before the assault, taking pot shots at the hundreds of security personnel ringing the prison, keeping them from reaching three wounded soldiers trapped inside the sprawling complex.

One soldier involved in the fighting emerged and told reporters that the rebellion had been put down and that all those involved in the jailbreak had been killed.

Another soldier, who called himself Zabullah, later came out and told reporters: "We killed them," but gunfire soon erupted again.

After one last burst of gunfire, troops visibly relaxed and went through the pitch-black area with flashlights. "We searched all the rooms, and it's now under control, so we're leaving," said Amin Jan, an army commander.

The guard who was killed at the start of the breakout attempt was leading the prisoners to morning prayers about 7 a.m. when he was attacked with razors, then beaten and stabbed to death, said warden Abdul Salam Bakhshi. The guard's AK-47 rifle was then used in the subsequent battle.

Pul-e Charki prison is where three Americans are serving sentences of eight to 10 years there for torturing Afghans on a freelance hunt for terrorists. Jonathan Idema, Brent Bennett and Edward Caraballo are seeking to overturn their convictions in a trial that embarrassed U.S. and NATO forces.

It was not clear if they were being held in the part of the prison where the standoff took place.

AP

Afghan security police officers stand guard in front of the Pul-e Charkhi prison in Kabul on Friday, where a bloody escape attempt left at least eight dead.

Cuba counters U.S. decor with Abu Ghraib billboard

The Associated Press

HAVANA — Cuba responded Friday to U.S. diplomats' refusal to take down Christmas decorations by putting up a huge billboard in front of the U.S. Interest Section emblazoned with a swastika and showing photographs of Iraqi prisoners being abused by American soldiers.

The billboard, put up overnight, had a large swastika in red and the word "fascists" covered with a "Made in the U.S.A." stamp.

An American diplomat in Havana speaking on condition of anonymity said Friday that the torture of prisoners at Iraqi Abu Ghraib prison has been reported and discussed openly, and that those responsible are being prosecuted.

The U.S. Interest Section, headed by chief James Cason, ignored a demand earlier this week to remove Christmas decorations that included a reference to dissidents jailed by Fidel Castro's government.

The trimmings included a Santa Claus, candy canes and white lights wrapped around palm trees — and a sign reading "75" — a reference to 75 Cuban dissidents jailed last year.

Turkey compromises

BRUSSELS, Belgium — The Dutch prime minister confirmed Friday that Turkey had accepted a compromise formula on recognition of Cyprus, paving the way for talks next year on Turkish membership of the European Union.

"Turkey has accepted the hand we offered to them," Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, whose country holds the current EU presidency, told reporters.

U.S.-Japan missile defense

TOKYO — Japan and the United States on Friday agreed to boost cooperation in their missile defense programs — the first step in carrying out new defense guidelines.

Japan's Defense Chief Yoshinori Ono and U.S. Ambassador to Japan Howard Baker penned a memorandum that allows the two nations to share information on ballistic missile defense systems, a Defense Agency spokesman said.

From The Associated Press

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Sharon: Israel ready to work with Palestine

Israeli prime minister might offer state for Palestinians if violence, terror ends

BY STEVEN GUTKIN
The Associated Press

HERZLIYA, Israel — Declaring 2005 a year of opportunity, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon held out the prospect of an independent state for the Palestinians if they stop violence and said he is ready to coordinate a Gaza pullout with them.

Sharon

Sharon's speech was strikingly optimistic, a sign of change in the post-Yasser Arafat era, but Palestinian leaders said it fell short of expectations.

In Gaza, fighting continued. Israeli troops raided the Khan Younis refugee camp Friday after Palestinian mortar fire killed a Thai worker in a Jewish settlement and injured 17 people, including 11 soldiers, in the past week.

Five Palestinians, including at least three gunmen, were killed in Friday's army raid. Bulldozers began knocking down buildings, and hundreds of Palestinians fled their homes for fear the army would demolish them. Dozens sought refuge in a hospital.

Seventeen Palestinians, including an ambulance driver, were wounded in the fighting, hospital officials said. One Israeli soldier was wounded when Palestinians fired an anti-tank missile at forces in the area, the army said.

Addressing an academic conference Thursday evening, Sharon said Arafat had been the main obstacle to peace and his death in November turned 2005 into a "year of great opportunity."

Sharon has signaled he would work with Arafat's successor, likely to be PLO chief Mahmoud Abbas, the front-runner in Jan. 9 presidential elections. Sharon said he would do his utmost to allow the vote to proceed, including redeploying troops.

"We stand before a unique window of opportunity. Who knows when we will have this opportunity in the future. We must not miss this opportunity to reach an agreement," Sharon told the Herzliya Conference, an annual event organized by the Interdisciplinary Center, a college and think-tank.

Sharon said he is determined to go ahead with the planned withdrawal from Gaza and four West Bank settlements in 2005, "with conviction and without hesitation." Sharon is in negotiations with the moderate Labor Party to join his coalition, as a buffer against threats from hard-liners to bring him down.

The withdrawal is set to start July 3 and to be completed within three months. A final Cabinet vote on approving the pullout was initially scheduled for June.

However, Sharon adviser Asaf Shariv said Friday that the final vote might be held several months earlier, to allow for possible legal challenges and practical preparations. The Maariv daily said the vote could be held as early as January.

Withdrawal opponents hoped that with final approval still months away, they could topple Sharon or find another way to stop the plan. If Sharon decides to hold the vote in coming weeks, it could intensify opposition among hard-liners in his Cabinet.

Sharon said that the withdrawal could lead to future peace talks.

Palestinian Cabinet minister Saeb Erekat said Sharon should have negotiated the Gaza plan with the Palestinians, but that the Palestinians welcome any withdrawal.

Sharon on Thursday held out the prospect of Palestinian statehood, provided the Palestinians stop militant groups from attacking Israel and carry out reform.

However, Sharon also said Israel would seek to annex large Jewish settlements in the West Bank and keep all of east Jerusalem, the sector captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war and claimed by both Israel and the Palestinians as a capital.

The Palestinians want all of the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem for their state.

German doctors use stem cells from fat to grow new bone for girl's skull

BY MALCOLM RITTER
The Associated Press

Surgeons have used stem cells from fat to help repair skull damage in a 7-year-old girl in Germany, in what's apparently the first time such fat-derived cells have been exploited to grow bone in a human.

The girl had been injured two years before in a fall, which destroyed several areas of her skull totaling nearly 19 square inches, the German researchers reported.

Other surgeons had failed to correct the defects, and the girl wore a protective helmet. Her brain could sometimes be seen pulsating through the missing areas of her skull.

But several weeks after the stem-cell surgery, she was able to leave her helmet behind, the researchers report in the December issue of the Journal of Cranio-Maxillofacial Surgery.

The skull is now smooth to the touch, the missing parts replaced by thin but solid bone, said Dr. Hans-Peter Howaldt of the Justus-Liebig-University Medical School in Giessen, Germany.

The child was not identified.

Howaldt, who performed the surgery last year, said the damage was too extensive to be repaired with bone grafts from her body. He said the hope was that if bits of the child's bone were mixed with stem cells, the cells would turn into bone-building cells that would create additional bone.

That appears to have happened, Howaldt said in a telephone interview Thursday.

"I cannot prove that our success comes from the stem cells alone," he said, "but the combination of the two things simply worked."

In August, other German doctors reported growing a jaw bone in a man's back muscle and transplanting it to his mouth to fill a gap left by cancer surgery. The researchers used bone marrow, which also contains stem cells, to help grow the bone.

But it's not clear whether the stem cells were responsible for the bone growth.

So Roy C. Ogle of the University of Virginia, an expert in skull reconstructive surgery who has been studying bone regeneration from fat-derived cells, said he considered the new report to be the first indicating that any kind of stem cell had been used to grow bone in a human.

"It is a very big deal," said Ogle, who called the study a landmark.

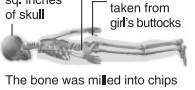
He agreed that the study didn't prove that stem cells provided the new bone. But it also indicates that the implanted cells did no harm, which has been a concern with using stem cells in people, he said.

Ogle said many surgeons would have augmented the child's bone with a mineral paste or collagen instead of stem cells. Howaldt said he believes it's better to use the body's own tissue.

Stem cells repair young girl's skull

Surgeons in Germany used stem cells from fat tissue of a 7-year-old girl to help repair major damage to her skull, which one expert called the first instance of using stem cells to regenerate bone in a human.

Recycling cells



The bone was milled into chips about one-tenth of an inch long and placed in the missing areas of the skull before stem cells were added to them.

SOURCE: Journal of Cranio-Maxillofacial Surgery AP

Anti-terror bill gets 1st Russian OK

BY VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV
The Associated Press

MOSCOW — The lower house of the Russian parliament on Friday gave tentative approval to an anti-terrorism bill that would expand the government's powers and impose tight restrictions on media coverage of anti-terror efforts, which critics said would hurt freedom of speech.

The State Duma voted 385-47 with one abstention to approve the bill in the first of three required readings. It also needs to be endorsed by the upper house and signed by President Vladimir Putin to become law.

Putin has ordered that legislation be streamlined and punishment toughened for terrorism in response to a September school seizure and other recent terror attacks that killed more than 440 people.

The bill, written by members of the Kremlin-backed United Russia party that dominates the Duma, sets rules for anti-terror operations and determines the responsibilities of different government structures.

It allows the government to introduce special security regimes to combat terrorism that involve temporary bans on rallies and pickets, curfews and other restrictions.

The bill also imposes tight restrictions on media coverage of anti-terror operations, banning journalists from reporting details of the operations, as well as "facts or scenes of especially cruel violence." It forbids the media from gathering any information about anti-terror actions without official clearance.

Even the Russian Cabinet criticized the bill in a letter to the Duma. It said the bill's restrictions on the media contradict existing law, while its ban on rallies and pickets cannot be applied as broadly as written in the bill because of current law.

U.N. finds listening device

GENEVA — A secret listening device found at the Geneva offices of the United Nations was in a room adjoining a main conference hall, where it could have been used to eavesdrop on any private conversations, the global body said Friday.

Secretary of State Colin Powell and other foreign ministers of the U.N. Security Council discussed the postwar Iraq situation in the main hall last year. It was not immediately clear who used the smaller room.

The eavesdropping equipment could be Russian or East European in origin and was made three to four years ago, one expert told Swiss television.

Workers found the device during renovation work this fall on the room, known as the Salon Francais, or French Lounge, said Marie Heuze, spokeswoman for the U.N. office in Geneva.

Police find bombs on bus

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Indonesian police seized a cache of bombs on a bus Friday, days after foreign governments warned that terrorists were preparing to launch fresh attacks in the country, the police chief said.

Police arrested 15 passengers, including the driver of the public bus, which was stopped in the West Javanese town of Bandung.

Three of the those detained were being questioned "intensively," said West Java detective chief Col. Ahmad Abdi.

Media reports described the bombs as primitive homemade devices.

It appeared they were being transported in the bus and were not primed to go off.

From The Associated Press

Using the Net to mourn the dead

Shiite Muslims can now go online to view gravesites in Pakistan

BY ZARAR KHAN
The Associated Press

KARACHI, Pakistan — Sitting in her apartment, 70-year old widow Batool Jaffer puts her wrinkled hand on a computer mouse, clicks on a Web site, then raises her hands in a Muslim gesture of prayer for the departed soul of her husband.

On the screen in front of her is a photo of the grave at the Wadi-e-Hussain cemetery in Karachi where her husband, Jaffer Hussain, was interred last year — which she can visit anytime online thanks to a simple but novel Internet service used by hundreds of Shiite Muslims.

"I am too old to go to the graveyard. But I can see the graves of my husband and nephew anytime," said Batool Jaffer, who lives at least 90 minutes' drive from the cemetery on the outskirts of this congested Pakistani metropolis, home to 14 million people.

> *"I am too old to go to the graveyard. But I can see the graves of my husband and nephew anytime."*
>
> **Batool Jaffer**
> who lives 90 minutes' drive from graveyard

Wadi-e-Hussain, or the Valley of Hussaun, was set up in 1999, and started the computerized service in 2001. Named after a revered Muslim cleric and grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, it contains about 1,600 graves and plans to expand.

The graveyard is meticulously organized. Each grave is numbered and photographed, with a few personal details also uploaded onto the Web site immediately after burial. Mourners can easily trace a grave online by entering its number or the name of the dead person or the deceased's father.

The computer service has the approval of Islamic clerics, who say it offers a legitimate way to pay respects to the dead. Its success also reflects growing use of the Internet in this impoverished country — from just 1,000 computer boffins and businessmen in 1994 to about 4.8 million out of the 150 million population today.

"In Shariah [Islamic law], it is allowed that we can recite fateha [prayers] while looking over the Internet ... for the happiness of deceased's soul," said Shiite scholar Shabbar Hussain Zaidi.

Custodian of the graveyard, Syed Mohammed Alam Zaidi, said the Internet service was set up largely to cater for expatriate Pakistanis who often miss the funerals of relatives and have few opportunities to visit the graveside in person.

Kalbe Abbas, an electrical engineer, who returned two months ago from working in Canada, recounted missing his father's funeral when he died in 2003, but took solace from seeing his grave on a computer screen.

"Definitely there is a difference between paying a personal visit to a graveyard and seeing images of graves on computer, but this Web site was a blessing for me because I saw my father's grave the day he was buried," he said.

Bethlehem's Paradise Hotel reopens doors

Hotel welcomes guests for the first time since Palestinian uprising in 2000

AP

A huge inflatable Santa Claus decorates a gift shop near the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem on Wednesday. This Christmas, Bethlehem is getting more business and attention as attacks become less frequent.

BY RAMIT PLUSHNICK-MASTI
The Associated Press

BETHLEHEM, West Bank — The floors are polished, a Christmas tree glitters near the bar and the dining room is ready for hundreds of guests: The luxury Paradise Hotel is open for business for the first time since the latest Palestinian uprising erupted in 2000.

Bethlehem's flagship hotel, where Israeli and Palestinian dignitaries mingled at Christmas galas in the 1980s, mirrors the ups and downs of the conflict, from shaky coexistence to destruction and now the struggle to rebuild.

The $1 million restoration of the hotel, and a swell of Christmas cheer in Jesus' traditional birthplace, are another sign of the new sense of optimism that is pervading the Middle East after Yasser Arafat's death Nov. 11.

Throughout Bethlehem, most of the major hotels say occupancy is up 10 percent to 20 percent over last year, when violence was still raging. Room prices are reasonable, at about $40 a night including breakfast.

However, Bethlehem is still far from the glory days before the Palestinian uprising, when thousands of pilgrims celebrated in colorfully decorated Manger Square outside the Church of the Nativity, built on the grotto where tradition says Jesus was born.

Tourists are still relatively sparse and hotels have plenty of vacancies. The 25-foot-high concrete slabs that make up Israel's West Bank barrier have effectively cut Bethlehem in half, forcing thousands to take long detours to reach the center of town.

A year ago, the six-story Paradise was still a bleak concrete skeleton after it was hit by Israeli tank shells and caught fire during a battle between Palestinian gunmen and Israeli soldiers.

In recent months, the owners have renovated the ground level and the top floor, completing 75 rooms.

Honey-colored Jerusalem stone covers the facades, green window bars glimmer in the winter sun, and spotless automatic doors open to an airy, marble lobby. Wicker chairs covered with paisley cushions adorn the lobby.

Last month, the hotel hosted guests for the first time in four years. "It was like a dream. I never thought that we would have groups again," said co-owner George Abu Aita.

Thirty percent of the rooms are booked for Christmas, Abu Aita said, and reservations have also come in for next year, through October.

If the situation continues to improve, Abu Aita plans to invest an additional $300,000 to renovate the hotel's other four floors, where dust still covers beds stacked in the corridors and ruined mattresses are strewn across the broken tiles.

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Anderson in PETA ad for China

Risky PETA ad

BEIJING — A naked Pamela Anderson will beckon from Chinese billboards in a new anti-fur campaign — if the former "Baywatch" star can get past the censors.

The posters, featuring the slogan "Give fur the cold shoulder" in English, show the Canadian-born actress topless with her back to the camera and an arm partly hiding her right breast.

An image of falling snow appears above Chinese characters reading "cold shoulders are nothing compared to the pain they feel," and "please don't wear fur."

China's straight-laced media regulators have yet to give the posters a green light, said Jason Baker, a Hong Kong-based spokesman for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, or PETA, which is promoting the anti-fur campaign.

"We may end up having to crop [the photo] a bit," Baker said.

Fired for auctioning

LONDON — A Buckingham Palace worker was fired for trying to sell one of Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas puddings on the Internet auction site eBay, the palace said Friday.

The maintenance worker was asking $39 for the pudding — a gift the queen gives to all palace staff each year.

The 25-year-old man drew the ire of palace officials for using Buckingham Palace documents in the Internet ad for the pudding.

Dog saves child

MELBOURNE, Australia — A pet dog helped save a toddler from drowning in a rural reservoir, paramedics said Wednesday.

The 18-month-old toddler was pulled unconscious from the reservoir midday Tuesday after the family's border collie alerted the girl's mother to the emergency by running back and forth between the house and the reservoir barking, paramedic Greg Smith said.

The child's mother, whose name was not immediately released, resuscitated the girl while waiting for an ambulance to arrive.

The girl was recovering in a stable condition at a local hospital in Bendigo, 112 miles northwest of the southern city of Melbourne.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Keep Christmas in your heart

Recently, we celebrated Thanksgiving here in Iraq and in the States. It was a joyous time, a time for celebration. I look forward to next Thanksgiving, as it will be my first with my wife.

Although we are in Iraq, we must not forget both the celebration and the symbolism behind Christmas. Christmas is more than just a time kids go and see Santa Claus, or families come together and exchange gifts. It is a time we must remember the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a joyous time of celebration, it is a wonderful time.

Although we are at war, this is no reason to sideline Christmas. We must, as mentioned in Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," keep Christmas in our heart. I am here in Iraq serving my country. However, I will not forget Christmas. I will keep Christmas in my heart and share the wonder of this season with everyone.

In "A Christmas Carol," Tiny Tim said: "God bless us, every one." I, too, want to echo that thought to all who serve in Iraq, and the families who wait for us back home. Go in peace.

Spc. Michael Carl Tanner
Camp Victory, Iraq

Let women, not civilians, decide

I just read an article from The Washington Times from Dec. 9. Elaine Donnelly, who heads the Center for Military Readiness, is charging the Army with violating the ban on women in combat units.

I don't understand why civilians are so concerned with this issue. I have never heard fellow combat-support females complain about being assigned to a combat-arms unit. This is something that those of us in the military understand can happen.

With the war on terrorism, there are no front lines. We have women here who travel the roads every day, just like their combat-arms counterparts. If we don't put women in the new "units of action," then what is the Army going to do with the thousands of women who proudly serve their country?

Please let those of us filling the jobs that take us into combat decide our future, not civilians who have never even put on the uniform.

Staff Sgt. Crystal Thompson
Forward Operating Base Danger, Iraq

Tell us what you think

Stars and Stripes welcomes your comments on editorials and columns that are published in the newspaper, and values letters on topics of importance in the lives of our readers. All letters must be signed, and must include the writer's address or base and telephone number. Please limit all letters to 300 words. We reserve the right to edit letters for length, taste and clarity.

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Understand meaning of 'theory'

Once again, a letter is written calling evolution "just a theory" ("Evolution is still a theory," Dec. 9).

I have to wonder what these people were doing when the concept of a scientific theory was taught in their science classes.

Scientific theories such as the theory of gravity, cell theory, cancer theory and evolutionary theory are conclusions about phenomena based on rigorous and extensive bodies of research data.

Compare this to the childish conjectures of so-called "creation scientists." I recall attending a creationist seminar where the instructor claimed, with a straight face, that the Loch Ness Monster is proof that man and dinosaurs walked the earth together. I was almost surprised that unicorns, dragons and the tooth fairy did not receive mention.

Right now, there is a war being fought that makes the war in Iraq seem like a minor neighborhood spat. It is the war to protect us from the next pandemic and it is being fought by people in lab coats called evolutionary biologists against an enemy so small that trillions can fit on the head of a pin.

This enemy has the potential to wipe out hundreds of millions of people. These biologists know that this enemy is rapidly evolving and is now resistant to all but a few of the newest drugs. Knowing that these viruses reproduce within minutes and mutate (evolve) very quickly forms the basis for the research and development needed to stay ahead of this menace.

I challenge my creationist brethren to reject all of these new medications if they cannot accept the scientific theory behind their development.

John McDowell
Sembach Air Base, Germany

Creationism is a belief

"Evolution is still a theory" (letter, Dec. 9) incorrectly equates a theory with an opinion or a belief.

It's true that no theory is a fact (by definition); a theory is used in science to explain facts. Its usefulness is defined by how well it accounts for the facts it attempts to explain.

In this regard, evolution theory has parsimony, subtlety and great predictive power. A theory must also be verifiable and falsifiable — that is, you must be able to prove it right or prove it wrong.

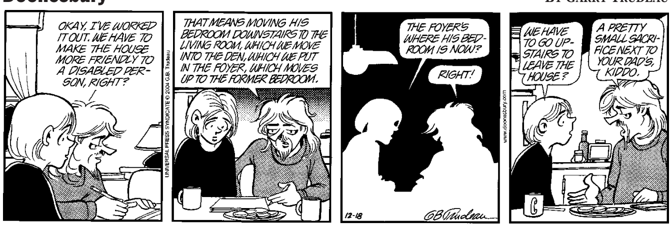
Creationism, which the letter writer refers to as "another theory," does not qualify as a scientific theory on this basis because it can never be disproven. In short, creationism is a belief, and has no business being discussed as, or equated with, a theory.

Evolution theory is one of the great ideas of modern civilization. I commend Stars and Stripes for reporting on the continued contributions of this magnificent theory to our understanding of human nature.

Jeffrey Card
Bamberg, Germany

Doonesbury

BY GARRY TRUDEAU



Mallard Fillmore

BY BRUCE TINSLEY

Looking at the news

A weekly sampling of U.S. editorial cartoons

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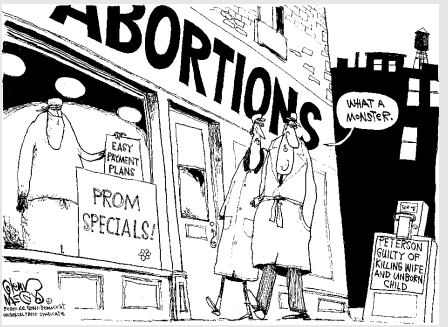


GLENN MCCOY/Universal Press Syndicate

CHARLIE DANIEL/Scripps Howard

IN THE STATES

Bush signs intelligence bill

BY NEDRA PICKLER
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Bush on Friday signed into law the largest overhaul of U.S. intelligence gathering in 50 years, hoping to improve the spy network that failed to prevent the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

"Our vast intelligence enterprise will become more unified, coordinated and effective," Bush said. "It will enable us to better do our duty, which is to protect the American people."

The 563-page bill, which endured a thorny path to congressional passage, also aims to tighten borders and aviation security. It creates a federal counterterrorism center and a new intelligence director, but Bush did not announce a candidate for that post at Friday's ceremony.

"A key lesson of Sept. 11 is that America's intelligence agencies must work together as a single, unified enterprise," Bush said.

The Sept. 11 Commission, in its July report, said disharmony among the intelligence agencies contributed to the inability of government officials to prevent the attacks. The government failed to recognize the danger posed by al-Qaida and was ill-prepared to respond to the terrorist threat, the report concluded.

Bush was joined at the signing ceremony by CIA Director Porter Goss, FBI Director Robert Mueller, members of Congress, leaders of the Sept. 11 commission and relatives of people killed on that terrorist attack.

The new position of national intelligence director was one of the bill's most controversial aspects. Although the legislation gives the new director strong budget authority, its language is complex enough that there could be continued debate over the exact extent of the director's power.But Bush attempted to leave no doubt about the sweeping nature of the intelligence director's budgetary authority.

Some names that have been mentioned for the post include CIA Director Porter Goss; Lt. Gen. Michael Hayden, the head of the National Security Agency; Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage; and White House homeland security adviser Fran Townsend.

President seeks spending cuts

WASHINGTON — President Bush is considering asking Congress to freeze domestic spending next year or cut it slightly, even as he prods lawmakers to allow younger workers to divert some of their Social Security taxes into personal investment accounts.

The two plans, which promise to be dominant issues next year, share a common thread: massive federal deficits that have set consecutive records, peaking at $413 billion last year. The shortfalls have prompted Bush to seek savings from non-defense, non-domestic security programs, and have limited his options for shoring up Social Security for the looming retirement of baby boomers.

"This is an issue on which I campaigned and I'm still standing," Bush said of revamping Social Security at a White House economic conference, words he hoped would prompt support from lawmakers loathe to meddle with the giant retirement system.

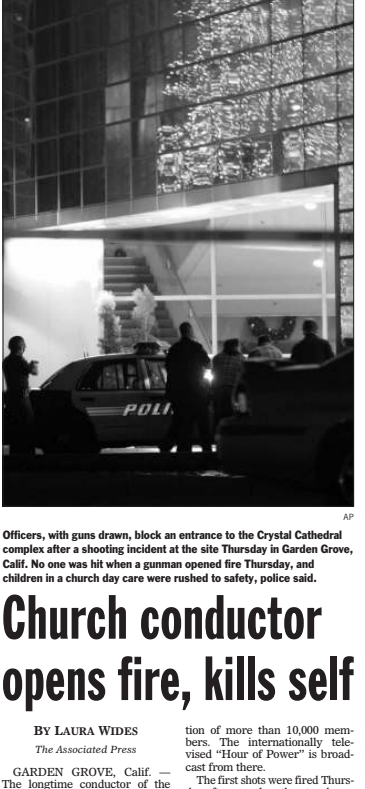
Bush wants to let younger workers take part of the Social Security taxes they now pay and invest the money in private accounts. Democrats say the proposal would enrich Wall Street bankers while further weakening the solvency of Social Security.

In 2018, Social Security will start paying out more in benefits than it collects in payroll taxes. In 2042, the system will be able to cover 73 percent of promised benefits, according to Social Security's trustees.

Bush said the country can't afford to wait any longer to fix the problem.

"The crisis is now," the president told the economic forum.

— The Washington Post



AP

Officers, with guns drawn, block an entrance to the Crystal Cathedral complex after a shooting incident at the site Thursday in Garden Grove, Calif. No one was hit when a gunman opened fire Thursday, and children in a church day care were rushed to safety, police said.

More details of WTC memorial unveiled

BY KAREN MATTHEWS
The Associated Press

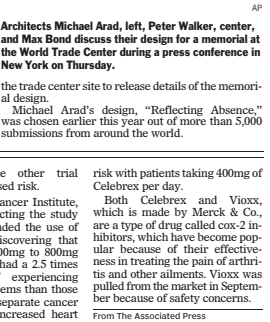
NEW YORK — The memorial honoring World Trade Center victims will include a forest of oak trees with a clearing for Sept. 11 gatherings and a Memorial Hall between the twin reflecting pools that will mark the footprints of the lost towers, officials announced Thursday.

Among the new elements of the site released Thursday were the Memorial Hall, a 1.5-acre clearing at ground level for public gatherings, and the exposed stumps of columns that supported the twin towers.

John Whitehead, chairman of the Lower Manhattan Development Corp., the agency overseeing rebuilding, called Memorial Hall a new public space where visitors will be able to "review a directory of the names, locating their loved ones among the souls that are there."

Gov. George Pataki, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, victims' family members and designers of the site also attended a news conference a few blocks from the trade center site to release details of the memorial design.

Michael Arad's design, "Reflecting Absence," was chosen earlier this year out of more than 5,000 submissions from around the world.



AP

Architects Michael Arad, left, Peter Walker, center, and Max Bond discuss their design for a memorial at the World Trade Center during a press conference in New York on Thursday.

Celebrex heart risk

NEW YORK — Pfizer Inc. said it has found an increased risk of heart attacks with patients taking its top-selling painkiller Celebrex, a drug that is in the same class as Vioxx, but has no plans to remove it from the market.

Pfizer announced Friday that it found the increased risk in one of two long-term cancer prevention trials, while the other trial showed no increased risk.

The National Cancer Institute, which was conducting the study for Pfizer, suspended the use of Celebrex after discovering that patients taking 400mg to 800mg of the drug daily had a 2.5 times greater risk of experiencing major heart problems than those who were not. A separate cancer study found no increased heart risk with patients taking 400mg of Celebrex per day.

Both Celebrex and Vioxx, which is made by Merck & Co., are a type of drug called cox-2 inhibitors, which have become popular because of their effectiveness in treating the pain of arthritis and other ailments. Vioxx was pulled from the market in September because of safety concerns.

From The Associated Press

Church conductor opens fire, kills self

BY LAURA WIDES
The Associated Press

GARDEN GROVE, Calif. — The longtime conductor of the Crystal Cathedral's orchestra shot himself to death Friday at the southern California landmark church after a nine-hour standoff that began when he opened fire as congregants prepared for a Christmas pageant.

Johnnie Carl, 57, had barricaded himself in a bathroom and shot himself early Friday morning as police officers tried to talk to him. Carl, who also had made records with Celine Dion, the London Symphony and others, had grappled with depression, authorities said.

He had fired about four shots in his office, and it did not appear he was trying to hit anybody, police said. Children in a day care center were rushed to safety. No one else was injured in the incident.

The cathedral, a huge, sprawling structure of glass and steel not far from Disneyland, is home to the Rev. Robert Schuller's international Crystal Cathedral Ministries and claims a congregation of more than 10,000 members. The internationally televised "Hour of Power" is broadcast from there.

The first shots were fired Thursday afternoon, less than two hours before the scheduled start of the cathedral's annual "Glory of Christmas" holiday show, for which Carl had arranged the prerecorded music. The two Thursday shows were canceled.

The 78-year-old Schuller, who was at home when the shooting happened, taped a message for Carl, who had been conductor for 29 years. But police did not have a chance to play it or another message from Carl's wife. They did play one from a friend who had helped Carl in the past, police said.

In a statement, Schuller hailed his friend as "a creative genius whose beautiful arrangements and superb conducting set new levels of excellence for sacred music. His music brought joy to the millions of viewers around the world who watch the Crystal Cathedral's 'Hour of Power' television program each week."

Carl is survived by his wife, Linda, and three children.

Bush has history of taking on embattled U.N. leaders

BY BARRY SCHWEID
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration, cool to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan as he copes with calls for his resignation, has a track record of trying to oust heads of U.N. agencies.

This week, the administration called on Mohamed ElBaradei, the Egyptian diplomat who heads the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency, to step down after completing a second term next summer.

And two years ago, the administration was instrumental in the dismissal of Jose Mauricio Bustani, a Brazilian who was head of the U.N. chemical weapons regulatory body.

The International Labor Organization ruled last year Bustani was wrongly dismissed. The administration had accused him of mismanagement, but his supporters said he was targeted because he opposed the war with Iraq.

In Annan's case, it is a matter of the administration keeping its distance while investigators look into charges of corruption in the Iraqi oil-for-food program. It permitted Iraq under Saddam Hussein to sell oil — despite an economic embargo — provided that the proceeds were used for food and medicine for the hard-pressed Iraqi people.

Sen. Norm Coleman, R-Minn., last month called Annan's resignation "inevitable," especially in light of revelations that his son, Kojo Annan, received $30,000 a year for more than five years from a Swiss-based company under investigation in connection with the U.N. program.

Five House Republicans have called for Annan to resign. One of them, Rep. Scott Garrett of New Jersey, said beyond that, "the question is whether he should be in jail."

Annan, who was in Washington on Thursday to speak to the Council on Foreign Relations, met with Secretary of State Colin Powell and his designated successor, Condoleezza Rice, mostly about scheduled elections next month in Iraq.

However, the controversy swirling about the U.N. program was never far from the surface.

Annan's speech was largely about updating the United Nations, including how it might respond to terror and disease.

But he began it with a calm pledge to support his appointed investigators, headed by former U.S. Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker.

"We must get to the bottom of these allegations," Annan said, adding that all U.N. staff have been directed to cooperate or face disciplinary measures, including dismissal.

Asked earlier at a news conference how he felt about Bush not seeing him, Annan said, "I don't feel snubbed." He added, "The president and I have met on many occasions, and we also do talk on the phone."

Still, Bush last week declined an opportunity to endorse Annan at a news conference.

Powell, meanwhile, did not spring to Annan's defense Thursday, saying carefully, "We want to get the truth out, and we want to see these investigations come to a conclusion so responsibility and accountability can be assigned. And the world wants to see the results of these investigations as soon as possible, as well."

Ivo Daalder, senior fellow for policy studies at the Brookings Institution, said the Bush administration has established a pattern of disdain for the United Nations and other international institutions and is "not afraid to use its muscle to remove people not to our liking."

Daalder said in an interview that the administration got rid of Bustani, the director general of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and is trying to oust ElBaradei as head of the International Atomic Energy Agency because "he had the temerity to disagree with the United States on Iraq — and worse, was proved right."

AP

Customers leave a grocery story holding a flu shot clinic in Seattle on Dec. 7.

More people may get access to flu vaccine

BY CHARLES PILLER
Los Angeles Times

Federal health authorities are considering broadening the range of people who can receive a flu shot because of an unexpected quantity of unused vaccine.

The stocks exist because only about one-third of those who were encouraged to get a shot — a high risk group that includes the elderly, people with chronic medical conditions and health care workers who interact with patients — have been vaccinated.

During last year's flu season, 54 percent of high-risk people were vaccinated.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that its Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices will meet Friday to consider providing the shots to more people.

Much of the U.S. flu vaccine supply was lost when contamination was discovered in August at the Chiron Corp. production plant in Liverpool, England.

"If there isn't very much flu, a lot of people think it wasn't going to be a problem. … It's human nature," he said. "The critical message here is that it's not too late."

If the CDC expands the list of who should be vaccinated, it would follow moves adopted earlier this week by the California Department of Health Services and L.A. County.

Projected supplies would permit 65 million people to be vaccinated — still below what is considered ideal.

Above: "Ice Man" was taken in April 2003 outside of al-Kut, in southeast Iraq. This man was a manager of a ice factory and actually lived in his store after the invasion began. Right: "Gathered In Holy Cloth" was taken in May 2003 near Badrah, 75 miles east of Baghdad. The bones were exhumed from a mass grave.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BENJAMIN B. BUSCH

Marine's war photos go on display at Md. school

BY LEO SHANE III
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Even though thousands of pictures have been taken during the U.S. occupation in Iraq, Maj. Benjamin Busch doesn't think many Americans have really seen the country.

The Marine took hundreds of photos of his own during his 13-month tour following the invasion of Iraq, and will be displaying 100 of them at University of Maryland University College in College Park, Md., next month. He thinks they show an unfiltered look at everyday Iraqis, and their reaction to the war.

"This exhibit does not insist that the war was a mistake or that it was necessary; those positions have lost their relevance," he said. "It simply states that it is a war and that we have a duty to understand our situation now that that distant country is a part of our lives."

Busch, 36, an actor who has performed in a number of television shows including "The West Wing" and "The Wire," has been an amateur photographer since graduating from college. He also served as the commanding officer of Delta Company, 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, which arrived in eastern Iraq in April 2003.

The pictures in the exhibit were all taken in the following six months, as his unit moved along the Iranian border.

"It was very difficult to take this series of photographs during my first deployment," he said. "I was the provisional military authority for a large piece of territory … I could not allow myself or my Marines to be considered vulnerable tourists.

"There are thousands of images that I had to walk or drive past simply because the moment had not been appropriate to pause."

What he did record is a series of faces and emotions of Iraqi citizens watching their country undergo dramatic changes. A number of his photos were put on display at Vassar College in New York earlier this year, and Busch was impressed with how well the audience could separate controversy surrounding the war from the pictures themselves.

"Intelligent viewers appreciated the messages in the exhibit for what they were," he said. "[The photos] were taken by a Marine with an unlikely combination of both a military and an artistic perspective in a combat zone."

Busch is scheduled to return to Iraq next month, shortly after his exhibit, "The Art of War," opens. He said he isn't sure what to expect on the return trip.

"When I took most of the photographs in this show, I was able to make and, to a certain extent, control the first impression that the Iraqi people had of American occupation," he said. "This time I will be operating in an area corrupted by our armed response to an increasingly popular insurgency.

"But I will bring my camera. I don't go there to take pictures, I take pictures because I am there."

E-mail Leo Shane at: shanel@stripes.osd.mil

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

A fatal test

ID OROFINO — A man has been charged with involuntary manslaughter for fatally shooting his friend through a protective vest on an apparent dare, police said.

Alexander Joseph Swandic, 20, died of a gunshot wound to the heart after donning a protective vest and asking David John Hueth, 30, to shoot him, police said.

Hueth initially told police that Swandic's wound was self-inflicted, but later admitted to the shooting. The two had apparently tested the vest by propping it against a dirt bank and shooting it twice, police said.

Hueth faces a preliminary hearing on Dec. 27. If convicted, he faces up to 10 years in prison.

PETA punishment

AK ANCHORAGE — An animal rights group is recommending that an Anchorage woman accused of neglecting more than 100 cats in her home get psychiatric help if convicted of animal cruelty.

PETA sent a letter to city prosecutor Nick Spiropoulos setting out what it thinks should happen in the case of Krystal Allen, a 52-year-old woman charged with two counts of animal cruelty for allegedly keeping animals in an inhumane manner by failing to provide adequate food, water, housing and care. A third count of animal cruelty stems from an incident in which Allen allegedly hit a cat so hard it hit a wall.

The charges are misdemeanors. Each is punishable by a maximum one year in jail and a $10,000 fine.

Fog collision

CA SACRAMENTO — Two tractor trailers and at least 10 cars collided in dense fog on a Northern California highway. No one was killed but several people were injured, officials said.

Visibility was about an eighth of a mile when the pileup occurred on Interstate 5 north of Sacramento, the California Highway Patrol said. A dump truck lay on its side and several cars were crushed in the pileup.

Officials could not immediately comment on the severity or number of injuries.

Snake slithers into mail

NJ CLIFTON — A Missouri family's pet snake, missing for a month, turned up alive and slithering in a box they had sent to New Jersey, about 1,000 miles away.

The box contained a DVD player that was being sent for repairs.

The family believes Paco the python crawled into the box before they sealed it and sent it to the factory via UPS.

Sheila Himmerick said her family had been looking for the snake when she received a call from Samsung's New Jersey repair shop, CVE Inc., wondering if the snake in the box belonged to her and whether it was her way of expressing customer dissatisfaction.

Paco will be shipped back home to Missouri, this time in temperature-controlled comfort.

Man bites dog

FL GAINESVILLE — A man has been charged with animal cruelty for allegedly biting his Jack Russell terrier as punishment, and police say he used a 200-pound bull mastiff in an attempt to keep back officers who arrived to arrest him.

The mother of Mount Lee Lacy's girlfriend called police because she was concerned about an argument between him and her daughter about Lacy's unusual discipline method for his dog Lady.

Officers kicked down the apartment door when they heard an argument and a barking dog. Lacy was holding the mastiff named Breaker on a taut leash 6 feet inside the door. The officers drew their guns but didn't fire.

Lacy, 21, was handcuffed and jailed on one count each of felony animal cruelty and resisting arrest without violence.

House built under bridge

IL CHICAGO — For three or four years, a homeless man achieved the impossible: He found a cheap place to live on pricey Lake Shore Drive.

Actually, Richard Dorsay lived under Lake Shore Drive, in a wooden shack built into the beams and girders of the drawbridge that crosses the Chicago River.

Dorsay was recently evicted after another man arrested in suburban Streamwood told police about the home under the bridge.

When authorities went inside, they found an elaborate setup that tapped into the bridge's electricity to power a television, microwave, space heater and PlayStation video game system. There, Dorsay could relax, turn on a Chicago Bears game, invite friends over and pop open some beers.

The home had it quirks. Whenever Dorsay heard the bells that signal the arms of the bridge would soon rise to let boats through, he held on as the bridge slowly pitched him forward.

Keeping balance

Thomas Thale, dressed as a toy soldier and on stilts, gathers his streamers and bag as he attempts to climb the stairs outside KSDK plaza in St. Louis.

Founder statue planned

TX HOUSTON — A 60-foot statue of Texas founding father Stephen F. Austin is planned for an Angleton park near one of his early settlements.

The concrete statue, scheduled for completion in May, will tower over a 10-acre park. Promoters said they believed it was time to honor Austin.

Being created by Houston sculptor David Adickes at his Houston warehouse studio, the statue will show Austin in fringed buckskin with a 52-foot rifle at his side. It will be just a few feet shorter than "Big Sam," Adickes' gargantuan concrete-and-steel image of statesman Sam Houston erected near Huntsville in 1994.

Austin is hailed as the "Father of Texas" for his role in bringing thousands of Anglo settlers to Texas when it was controlled by Mexico, and his namesake is the state's capital.

Nude lamp debate

VT MONTPELIER — A group preparing to celebrate the life of a Vermont-born sculptor is petitioning Gov. James Douglas to leave a replica of Hiram Powers' most famous work — which portrays a nude chained woman — on his Statehouse desk.

The petitioners, who include the wife of U.S. Sen. James Jeffords, say "The Greek Slave" is one of the most important pieces of art ever created by a Vermont native.

The governor wants the lamp that incorporates the replica removed from his office desk during the upcoming legislative session. Douglas spokesman Jason Gibbs said the governor was concerned the statue could be broken, but he also said there was concern that school children would see the nude.

Gibbs said the lamp would remain on display at the Statehouse while the Legislature is in session, but not on the governor's desk.

Twins deliver twins

GA ATLANTA — Two twin sisters are seeing double — or make that quadruple — after delivering two sets of twin boys.

Twenty-one-year-olds Ashlee Spinks of Indianapolis and Andrea Springer of Conyers, Georgia, delivered their boys by scheduled Caesarean sections about an hour apart at Northside Hospital.

The two couples said twins run in the families of all four parents, and that they did not use fertility drugs to conceive the babies.

All I want is sleep

A Santa-in-training lets Gavin Eshleman, 4 months, take a little rest during a visit to Park City Mall in Lancaster, Pa.

Practice makes perfect

Anna Kicas, a senior at Traverse City West Senior High School in Traverse City, Mich., practices with other members of TC West's orchestra. The group was preparing for their upcoming performance at the Michigan Music Educators Conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Making repairs

Alexandra Rum paints a statue of a shepard from a manger scene at St. Mary's Church in Fishkill, N.Y.

If the snow won't come to you ...

Janina Richmond-Reck, 4, makes an angel in a bunch of leaves in Independence, Kan.

A tasteful gift

Nonja, 52, the oldest orangutan in the United States, opens a holiday gift filled with bananas, raisins, and popcorn at Miami Metrozoo in Miami. Throughout the month of December, animals in the zoo receive wrapped gifts filled with their favorite treats as part of an annual celebration.

Standing tall

Snow lies on the statue "Lincoln Walks at Midnight" in front of the West Virginia state capitol in Charleston, W.Va.

Moving time

Matt Lippiatt of Anderson, S.C., carries the boxspring of a mattress set to a delivery truck outside Hampton Furniture in Anderson, S.C.

Drug deal busted

ID NEZ PERCE — A man picked the wrong location for an alleged drug deal. Telling an eyewitness to mind his own business also was not a good idea.

It was in front of the home of Lewis County's sheriff-elect, who was sitting on his front porch.

"They really picked the wrong house to be in front of," said Phil Steen, who will be sworn into office next month.

Steen had only lived in the home about three weeks when he decided to enjoy the evening air. But some suspicious activity on the street impaired his view.

Instead of looking elsewhere, Steen ran the suspects' license plates. It led to a search of two houses and a vehicle, then the arrest of James MacArthur, 46.

MacArthur is charged with possession of marijuana with intent to deliver, unlawful possession of a firearm and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Let it $now

PA DORMONT — Forget all that stuff about a white Christmas. Jeweler Barry Landay's customers are hoping for a white New Year's Day.

That's because, for the fourth straight year, Landay's Style Jewelry in this Pittsburgh suburb is offering a full refund to anyone who buys jewelry between now and Christmas Eve if at least six inches of snow fall at Pittsburgh International Airport on New Year's Day.

Landay hasn't had to pay up in past years. But he's not crazy — he's insured by a policy covering the promotion.

The sign in the window of Landay's store reads "Let it $now, Let it $now, Let it $now" and features another big word: Free.

Giant seaplane found

ID HONOLULU — Researchers cataloging underwater debris around Pearl Harbor have made a giant discovery — the wreckage of one of the largest aircraft ever built.

A Hawaii Undersea Research Laboratory submersible found the main body of the Marshall Mars, a Navy seaplane that had a 200-foot wingspan and sank following an engine fire in 1950.

The Mars aircraft series was built to move cargo, primarily between California and Hawaii. The Mars Marshall once carried more than 308 people aloft, a record at the time.

Pieces of the Mars Marshall were first found in August when the nose and keel were found, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said.

Rancher charged

UT LOGAN — A 69-year-old rancher who authorities allege habitually let his cattle run loose was arrested for manslaughter after a woman was killed in a collision with one of his cows, police said.

Darrell Kunzler of Benson was arrested, according to the Utah Highway Patrol. Kimberly Johnson of Auburn, Wash., a 40-year-old mother of six, was killed Nov. 27 when her vehicle collided with one of Kunzler's Black Angus steers on Utah Route 30.

According to an arrest warrant, Kunzler has a 30-year pattern of failing to properly contain his livestock, despite repeated requests by law enforcement.

Kunzler is charged with one count of criminal homicide-manslaughter and five misdemeanor counts of reckless endangerment.

Judge's robe disputed

AL MONTGOMERY — A judge refused to delay a trial when an attorney objected to his wearing a judicial robe with the Ten Commandments embroidered on the front in gold.

Circuit Judge Ashley McKathan showed up at his Covington County courtroom in southern Alabama wearing the robe. Attorneys who try cases at the courthouse said they had not seen him wearing it before. The commandments were described as being big enough to read by anyone near the judge.

Attorney Riley Powell, defending a client charged with DUI, filed a motion objecting to the robe and asking that the case be continued. He said McKathan denied both motions.

McKathan said that he believes the Ten Commandments represent the truth "and you can't divorce the law from the truth. ... The Ten Commandments can help a judge know the difference between right and wrong."

He said he doesn't believe the commandments on his robe would have an adverse effect on jurors.

Sloppy thieves

MO POPLAR BLUFF — To catch two suspects, police needed only to follow the trail of stolen goods — literally.

In their haste to make off with stolen items, the thieves dropped some of them along the way, creating a series of obvious clues for police to follow.

Police said the trail was about 100 yards long, and led from a burglarized store, DCC Enterprises, to a residence where the suspects were hiding with stolen merchandise.

Two juveniles were arrested on suspicion of second-degree burglary and stealing more than $500.

Police search for mother

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Police are asking the public to help find the mother of a dead infant found in the wastewater tank of a Greyhound bus.

The body of a third-trimester boy was found by a bus maintenance worker after the bus arrived in the city. Police are particularly interested in speaking to passengers who were on the bus.

"We don't know if the child ever breathed," police Lt. John Hennessey said. "We want to know if anybody saw anyone who was emotionally distressed or who may have given birth."

Governor to sell license

WY CHEYENNE — Gov. Dave Freudenthal has again offered his complimentary big-game hunting licenses for sale to benefit a variety of Wyoming wildlife-related projects, according to the governor's office. By statute, the governor can receive up to 20 complimentary big-game licenses each year. In 2003 and 2004, the governor's big game licenses raised $730,000 for wildlife-related projects.

Stories and photos from wire services

FACES

Johnson back in the black

Don Johnson can breathe easy again.

All the creditors listed on bankruptcy petitions involving the former "Miami Vice" and "Nash Bridges" star have been paid off, Denver lawyer **Lee Kutner** said Tuesday.

Johnson

Kutner said Johnson's companies should be emerging from bankruptcy soon.

"He has obtained new financing," Kutner said.

Los Angeles-based City National Bank sued Johnson in March, seeking to force an auction of his 17-acre ranch near Aspen, Colo., to recoup $930,000 it claimed he owed. The ranch was put up for sale for $21 million, but Johnson ended up paying the debt in time.

Other bills paid include Aspen Valley Hospital ($7,345), the Of Grape & Grain liquor store ($377), Aspen's Isberian Rug Co. ($1,228), Planted Earth in Carbondale ($764) and the Aspen law firm of Garfield & Hecht ($2,787).

"He paid his bill and he paid it in full," said Joan Boyles, owner of Carbondale Crystal River Valley Spas, which was owed $4,966.

Royal champagne falls flat at auction

The sale of a magnum of champagne from the 1981 wedding of **Princess Diana** and **Prince Charles** fizzled when auction bids failed to reach the reserve price.

Princess Diana

Bidding for the bubbly fell flat at $1,736, short of the $1,929 reserve price at an auction in Swindon, west of London, on Wednesday.

The 1961 vintage Dom Perignon — chosen for the year of Diana's birth — was one of 12 magnums bottled in a limited edition for the royal wedding.

Auction house spokesman **Dominic Winter** said he was disappointed the bottle hadn't sold.

"It just failed to perform. I guess people are not as willing as they used to be to spend their money on frivolous things," Winter said.

HIV-stricken singer in good health

Andy Bell, lead singer of synth-pop duo **Erasure**, said he was "feeling fine" six years after being diagnosed with HIV.

In a statement posted on Erasure's Web site, Bell, 40, said he had been diagnosed with the virus that causes AIDS in 1998 after falling ill with pneumonia on a trip to the Spanish island of Mallorca.

Bell

Bell, who recently had a double hip replacement, said he remained healthy and was "feeling fine — in fact, I have never felt better."

"Being HIV does not mean that you have AIDS. My life expectancy should be the same as anyone else's, so there is no need to panic," he said.

Bell and former Depeche Mode and Yazoo keyboardist **Vince Clarke** formed Erasure in 1985 and have had hits including "A Little Respect," "Sometimes" and "Ship of Fools."

Disney tapping India market

Walt Disney Co. will launch two new channels in English and regional languages in India — a market of 100 million preschool children — later this month.

The Disney Channel and the Toon Disney Channel will feature cartoons, animation movies, family dramas, live-action adventure stories and locally produced and hosted shows, **Rajat Jain**, managing director of the Indian arm of Walt Disney Television International, said Wednesday.

About 60 movies will be shown each month.

"India is a priority market for us," Jain told reporters.

"With more than 100 million children, it's the world's biggest preschool market."

India will be the first Asia-Pacific market to air Toon Disney, an animation channel with characters such as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, Jain said. The 24-hour channel will be available in English and Hindi in northern India, and in the Tamil and Telugu languages in the south.

Stories and photos from The Associated Press

Snoop's wild world

Gangsta rapper at home in all environments

BY GREG BRAXTON
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — The group of young boys shifted uneasily, eyes fixed on the gangly figure towering over them. They were an exclusive audience about to hear Snoop Dogg do his latest rap. But they didn't feel so lucky — they knew it was going to be a bad rap on them.

"You better go gangsta — they can't beat us, so they're tryin' to cheat us!" snarled Snoop Dogg, tearing into the Rowland Heights Raiders, a team of 8- to 10-year-olds — including one of his two sons — in the Orange County Junior All-American Football League. The Raiders were taking on the Norwalk-Santa Fe Springs Saints, and though the unbeaten Raiders were ahead by a touchdown at halftime, the Saints were breaking their spirit with rough-and-tumble play and crunching tackles.

The eyes of a few Raiders were wet with frustration and pain. The eyes of Snoop were narrow with rage.

"You better get your minds right, or you're gonna get beat," the Raider coach growled. "I don't care about nothin' else, 'cause if you lose, I'm out! You're better than this team! You better get your focus back now, knowwhatImsayin? Quit cryin' and do your job, get focused!" He gestured dismissively toward a cooler on the sidelines: "Now go get some oranges or something!"

Snoop ignored the nearby crowd of parents and fans in the stands of the Rowland Heights High School football stadium snapping pictures and shouting out to him. This was not show time.

For now, nothing else mattered: Not his chart-topping "Drop It Like It's Hot" single with sizzling producer Pharrell Williams that has again made him the champagne toast of the rap/pop music world. Not his just-dropped album "R&G (Rhythm & Gangsta): The Masterpiece," already a best seller. Not his star turns this year in films such as "Starsky & Hutch" and "Soul Plane" that endeared him to a cross-section of moviegoers. Not his growing status as a pitchman for corporate America.

At this moment, he was merely Coach Snoop, desperate for another notch in the win column. He says the quest for a championship trophy with his boys is more fulfilling than acting or music, his two "girlfriends." And the tirade worked — the Raiders trounced the Saints in the second half. Overjoyed, Snoop jumped and clowned around with the team in a victory celebration, then ran to a truck in the parking lot to award each player with a brand-new WRFF bike.

The scene united the conflicting sides of Snoop that have made him practically ubiquitous in today's pop culture — the streetwise former thug from Long Beach who can "throw down" when pushed against the wall; the showman who shines in the spotlight; and the playful, generous artist who can turn into a 6-foot, 3½-inch kid at a moment's notice. As the rapper juggles his various prospects, youth sports has provided him much needed balance amid the showbiz whirlwind enveloping him.

> *"All I know how to be is Snoop Dogg, and sometimes he is a little negative, and sometimes he is a little positive."*
> **Snoop Dogg**

More than 10 years after his lazy, distinctive drawls made him one of the top original gangsta rappers on the West Coast scene, and more than eight years after being acquitted of first- and second-degree murder charges in the shooting death of a Los Angeles gang member, Snoop Dogg (who was born Calvin Broadus) wants to turn Hollywood into — to quote one of his hits — "a Doggy Dogg world."

Playing off his dual images as a no-nonsense gangsta with Pied Piper appeal who can poke fun at himself, the 33-year-old is tackling a dizzying array of diverse projects designed to position him as a hip-hopper who can maneuver easily between the arenas of mainstream popular culture and hard-core rap. New ventures range from small independent films to clothing lines to video games to animated series.

Seemingly already unavoidable with his commercials, film appearances, TV guest shots and music videos, Snoop, along with the prestigious management company the Firm, is determined to further boost the profile of Snoop Inc.

"There's a definite strategy to what we're doing as far as shaping Snoop's future," said Constance Schwartz, the rapper's manager. "We don't want him everywhere, but we want him in all the right places. He's proven that he can do cameos in movies, and now he wants to prove he's a serious actor."

While rappers such as Will Smith, Ice Cube, Queen Latifah, Eve and Missy Elliott have crossed over, most have opted to soften the harsh edge that first established them in the hip-hop world. Not so Snoop Dogg; he's been able to make the leap without undermining his outlaw image.

References to drug use and violence peppered throughout "Drop It Like It's Hot" are overshadowed by a sing-song chorus and an infectious percussive beat that could feel at home on any schoolyard playground. He was able to jump back and forth between his "Doggy Fizzle Television" MTV comedy series and less savory projects such as his video "Doggystyle Vol. 1."

Recently, he presented a lifetime achievement award to his friend and mentor Dr. Dre. Snoop was in midtribute when Dre was attacked and a melee broke out in the audience. Though Snoop was not involved in the riot, he issued a warning onstage when the fracas calmed down: "If y'all want problems with me and my crew, we want problems, too. So leave Dre alone and come see us."

Remarked comedian Jimmy Kimmel on his ABC late-night show: "Snoop took the smoldering embers of hatred — and poured on some soothing gasoline."

Whether they're G-rated or X-rated, Snoop says, all his projects have a sincerity behind them that accounts for his wide appeal.

"All I know how to be is Snoop Dogg, and sometimes he is a little negative, and sometimes he is a little positive," he says. "But for the most part, he's going to do more right than wrong."

YOUR MONEY

Blockbuster to curb its late fees in 2005

Movie rental giant to offer grace period, then charge full purchasing price

BY DAVID KOENIG

The Associated Press

DALLAS — Blockbuster Inc., the nation's biggest movie rental company, says it will eliminate late fees on games and movies as of Jan. 1 — but if you keep them too long, you buy them.

The offer announced Tuesday suggests that Blockbuster is still struggling to blunt the competitive threat from NetFlix Inc. and cable.

The company had expected to earn $250 million to $300 million in operating profits next year from its unpopular late fees but believes it can make up for the lost income with increased volume — betting that customers, no longer worried about late fees, will rent more movies and games.

"We had to deal with late fees," said chairman and chief executive John Antioco. "It's the source of jokes on late-night TV. It's still anecdotally, and in some sense really, the biggest negative to Blockbuster. … There were customer transactions that never happened because of late fees."

Blockbuster shares rose 40 cents, or 4.6 percent, to close at $9.20 on the New York Stock Exchange. That is near the lower end of their 52-week trading range of $6.50 to $19.37.

Blockbuster faces new competition on several fronts — cheap DVDs in discount stores, mail-delivery service from Netflix, and movies on demand from cable TV operators — none of which come with late fees. Dallas-based Blockbuster said it tested dropping late fees in several cities over the past year and found that retail sales of movies increased.

Blockbuster customer Susan Murray, who raced to a Dallas store just before noon Tuesday to avoid a charge, welcomed the planned elimination of late fees. Murray said she gets dinged a late fee almost every time she rents — $11.50 for two movies last week alone — including occasions when she was sure she had beat the deadline.

"I was going to cancel [Blockbuster] and get Netflix," Murray said. "I decided a couple days ago that was it. Now I'll have to reconsider."

But rivals claimed that Blockbuster wasn't really eliminating late fees, only giving customers more time before incurring even larger payments.

Blockbuster said due dates at its 4,500 U.S. stores would remain one week for games and two days or one week for movies. The company said it would give customers a one-week grace period at no charge, starting on New Year's Day.

Renters who keep the movies or games beyond the grace period will be charged for purchasing the DVD or tape at Blockbuster's full retail price, minus the rental fee, the company said. If they return the movie or game in the next 30 days, they will get a refund for the purchase but will be charged a restocking fee of $1.25, the company said.

Reed Hastings, CEO of Los Gatos, Calif.-based Netflix, said Blockbuster had to do something to prevent losing store customers to Netflix and its own online movie-order service, which together have doubled their customers in the past year, to 3 million.

Reed Hastings, CEO of Los Gatos, Calif.-based Netflix, said Blockbuster's move would backfire because of the potential of being charged for purchasing a late DVD.

"Many consumers will be unhappy with the idea that their credit card is going to get charged" if they miss the grace period, he said.

But Chelsea Burns of Dallas, who dashed over from the office where she works as an underwriter to avoid a $4 late charge on her DVD, said Blockbuster's about-face on fees would prompt her to rent a few more movies.

Burns only rents from Blockbuster but said she racks up so many late charges — nearly weekly — that she considered signing up for a $17.49-a-month subscription that comes with no late fees.

"Now I'm glad I didn't sign up because avoiding late fees was the whole reason for doing that," she said.

Named in several class-action lawsuits over late charges, Blockbuster stopped disclosing how much it made from the fees several years ago. In 2000, the last full year for which figures are available, the fees amounted to 19 percent of the company's revenue. A trade publication recently estimated that late fees accounted for about 10 percent of Blockbuster's revenue, which was $5.82 billion last year.

Antioco declined to say how much revenue Blockbuster expected from late fees in 2005, but he said the lost operating profit will be offset by increasing other revenue and cutting costs.

Dennis B. McAlpine, an analyst at McAlpine Associates, said giving up $250 million to $300 million in operating profit didn't make sense.

"What's he getting, other than a warm fuzzy feeling in the bellies of his customers?" McAlpine said. "That's lost money. He's not going to get that back."

Marla Backer, an analyst with Soleil Securities, called Blockbuster's move a positive step that will improve the chain's image. Backer said she was still worried about the weak rental market, however.

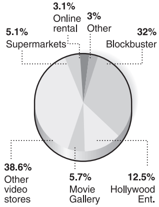
In August, Blockbuster launched an Internet-order, mail-delivery service like Netflix. Antioco said he expected to lose some subscriptions but still hit a goal of signing up 10 percent of its store customers by the end of next year.

Blockbuster, Netflix and Wal-Mart Stores Inc. are locked in a brutal price war that has raised questions about the profitability of online-ordering services.

Video rental market

Blockbuster announced Tuesday that it will eliminate late fees on in-store rentals as of Jan. 1. In 2003, Blockbuster controlled 32 percent of the video rental market.

2003 video rental market share



SOURCE: "The Future of Video Rental: A Strategic Analysis", Adams Media Research — AP

THURSDAY'S MARKET SUMMARY

INDEXES

52-week High	52-week Low	Name	Last	Net Chg	% Chg	YTD % Chg	52-wk % Chg
10,753.63	9,708.40	Dow Jones Industrials	10,705.64	+14.19	+.13	+2.41	+4.46
3,770.55	2,743.46	Dow Jones Transportation	3,733.23	-26.38	-.70	+24.15	+24.98
335.20	254.11	Dow Jones Utilities	328.26	+.29	+.09	+22.99	+25.96
7,161.96	6,171.85	NYSE Composite	7,131.98	-27.67	-.39	+10.74	+13.37
1,417.41	1,118.28	Amex Index	1,407.90	-7.88	-.56	+19.97	+23.19
2,171.27	1,750.82	Nasdaq Composite	2,146.15	-16.40	-.76	+7.13	+9.71
1,206.61	1,060.72	S&P 500	1,203.21	-2.51	-.21	+8.21	+10.47
655.90	548.29	S&P MidCap	651.88	-4.02	-.61	+13.17	+14.66
648.61	515.90	Russell 2000	642.23	-6.38	-.98	+15.32	+17.43
11,886.25	10,268.52	DJ Wilshire 5000	11,847.04	-36.05	-.30	+9.70	+11.95

NYSE

MOST ACTIVE ($1 OR MORE)

Name	Vol (00)	Last	Chg
Lucent	821001	3.73	+.13
Pfizer	518684	28.98	+.66
SprntFON	414823	24.52	+.50
Guidant	356847	71.70	-.35
Merck	304247	31.79	+1.31
JohnJn	276216	63.45	+2.55
NewsCpA n	263184	18.21	-.16
NortelN lf	261924	3.56	+.04
GenElec	220562	37.11	-.28
TimeWarn	220043	19.50	+.12

AMEX

MOST ACTIVE ($1 OR MORE)

Name	Vol (00)	Last	Chg
SPDR	492035	120.81	-.07
SemiHTr	248879	32.78	-.56
DJIA Diam	83465	107.16	+.31
iShRs2000	67627	128.33	-1.01
WheatR g	66527	3.24	-.09
iShJapan	46387	10.23	-.02
SP Fncl	32880	30.29	-.21
IvaxCp s	32328	15.80	-.19
PhmHTr	32140	73.61	+1.87
Ramp rs	28727	3.54	+.69

NASDAQ

MOST ACTIVE ($1 OR MORE)

Name	Vol (00)	Last	Chg
SiriusS	1264345	7.18	-.47
Symantec s	1111403	25.13	-2.25
Microsoft	871009	27.16	+.05
Cisco	858830	19.40	...
Nasd100Tr	827935	39.95	-.38
Veritas	798213	27.99	-.12
NextelC	636774	29.78	+1.08
Intel	633211	22.87	-.27
Oracle	529241	14.09	...
ApldMatl	358615	17.07	-.39

KEY DEFENSE STOCKS

Name	Div	PE	Last	Chg	YTD %Chg
Alliant Technosystem	...	16	65.51	-.60	+13.4
Armor Holdings	...	30	46.02	-1.53	+74.9
Boeing	1.00	15	52.08	-.32	+23.6
Computer Sciences	...	19	56.86	+.06	+28.6
Engineered Sup Sys	.04	21	57.95	-.58	+5.2
General Dynamics	1.44	18	105.36	-.64	+16.6
General Electric	.88	24	37.11	-.28	+19.8
Halliburton	.50	...	39.48	-.70	+51.8
Harris Corp.	.48	29	63.35	+.44	+66.9
Allied Signal	.83	21	35.61	-.40	+6.5
L-3 Communications	.40	22	74.71	+.21	+45.5
Lockheed Martin	1.00	21	59.26	-.12	+15.3
NorthrpG s	.92	21	57.75	+.73	+20.8
Raytheon	.80	44	39.00	-.08	+29.8
Rockwell Intl.	.66	22	47.37	-.41	+33.1
Sequa Corp.	...	37	60.75	-1.27	+24.0
Texas Instruments	.10	24	24.03	-.39	-18.2
Textron Inc.	1.40	32	72.84	-.86	+27.7
United Technologies	1.40	19	102.00	-.40	+7.6

KEY MUTUAL FUNDS

Name	NAV	Chg.	YTD %Ret.
Fidelity Invest: GroInc	38.47	-.07	+9.3
Fidelity Invest: GroCo	55.54	-.22	+10.9
Amer Century Inv: Ultra	29.10	-.24	+9.2
Fidelity Spartan: EqIdx	42.52	-.09	+9.8
Putnam Funds A: GrInA p	19.26	-.01	+10.2
Fidelity Invest: A Mgr	16.29	-.01	+4.9
Frank/Temp Frnk A: SMCpGrA	33.60	-.22	+11.2
AIM Investments A: Const p	22.58	-.14	+5.0
Fidelity Invest: USBI	11.19	-.04	+4.3
Fidelity Invest: Ovrsea	34.16	-.27	+9.6
Fidelity Advisor T: GrOppT	30.31	-.14	+6.1
Fidelity Advisor T: EqInT	28.52	-.08	+10.7
Scudder Funds S: GroIncS x	21.71	-.21	+8.9
Putnam Funds A: GlbEqty p	8.29	-.01	+11.1
AIM Investments A: WeingA p	12.90	-.08	+6.8
AIM Investments A: ChartA p	12.81	-.01	+7.7
Merrill Lynch I: BalCapI	28.22	-.08	+7.7
Scudder Funds S: Intl FdS	43.26	-.23	+12.7
Fidelity Advisor T: OvrseaT	17.14	-.14	+9.0
Lord Abbett A: DevGtA p	15.64	-.17	+4.3
Scudder Funds S: Income S	12.97	-.06	+5.0
Merrill Lynch I: USGvtMtg	10.32	-.02	+3.3
Scudder Funds S: Devel	19.26	-.05	+2.2
Putnam Funds A: GlGvA p	13.17	-.08	+8.5

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates

Euro costs	$1.3638
Dollar costs	€0.7332
British pound	$1.99
Japanese yen (Dec. 18)	102.00
South Korean won (Dec. 17)	1,030.00

Commercial rates

Bahrain (Dinar)	0.37698
British pound	$1.9309
Canada (Dollar)	1.2335
Denmark (Krone)	5.29
Egypt (Pound)	6.2251
Euro	$1.3249/0.7548
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7755
Hungary (Forint)	185.30
Iceland (Krona)	61.73
Israel (Shekel)	4.3234
Japan (Yen)	104.78
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.29468
Norway (Krone)	5.82
Philippines (Peso)	56.24
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.59
Singapore (Dollar)	1.6453
South Korea (Won)	1056.40
Switzerland (Franc)	1.09
Thailand (Baht)	39.23
Turkey (Lira)	1,421,000.00

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

PRECIOUS METALS

London close

Gold	$438.00
Silver	$6.67

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	5.25
Discount rate	3.25
Federal funds market rate	2.25
3-month bill	2.20
30-year bond	4.82

Sources: The Associated Press, Bank of America

Cents and Sensibility
Money tip of the day

Are you ready to retire?

CBS MarketWatch

NEW YORK — Baby boomers may not be as prepared for retirement as they think.

Only 42 percent of boomers have decided on an age to retire and have actively planned out how much they should save each month to achieve that goal, reports Allstate Insurance Company. The company found that 38 percent of workers have made very few, if any, preparations for retirement.

How do you fare? Answer these 10 questions to find out if you're ready to retire:

■ Have you and your spouse discussed retirement plans and goals?

■ Do you know what options are available for retirement savings?

■ Have you and your spouse decided at what ages you will retire?

■ Do you monitor your savings and investments with your retirement age in mind?

■ Have you estimated what your retirement income will be from Social Security, your employer-sponsored retirement plan and other savings?

■ Do you continue to search for new savings options to help you increase your retirement assets?

■ Have you estimated how much you will spend each year during retirement?

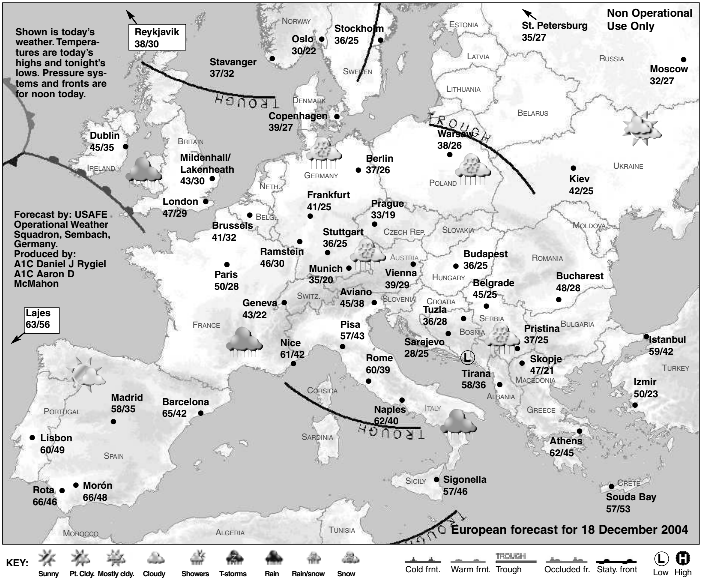
■ Do you have a plan to automatically divert money from your paycheck or bank account into retirement savings?

■ Have you prepared an emergency fund or otherwise financially prepared for unexpected life events such as illness or unemployment?

■ Do you periodically review your insurance coverage to ensure you are adequately covered?

If you answered yes to two or fewer questions, it's not too late to be financially fit, so start doing your homework now.

If you answered yes to three to six questions, you're off to a good start.



EUROPEAN FORECAST

Benelux: Mostly cloudy to cloudy skies with rainshowers. Highs in low 40s, Sunday lows in the upper 20s to low 30s.

Britain, Ireland: Partly cloudy to cloudy skies with isolated rainshowers. Highs in the 40s, Sunday lows in the upper 20s to mid 30s.

Croatia and Bosnia: Cloudy skies with morning fog and rain/snow. Highs in the upper 20s to upper 30s, Sunday lows in the 20s.

France: Partly cloudy to cloudy skies with rainshowers. Highs in the low 50s to low 60s, Sunday lows in the upper 20s to low 40s.

Northern Germany: Mostly cloudy to cloudy skies with isolated rain/snow showers. Highs in the upper 30s to low 40s, Sunday lows in the 20s.

Southern Germany: Mostly cloudy to cloudy skies with rain/snow showers. Highs in the mid 30s to upper 40s, Sunday lows in the low 20s to low 30s.

Hungary: Cloudy skies with rain/snow showers. Highs in the upper 30s, Sunday lows in the mid 20s.

Northern Italy: Mostly cloudy skies with morning fog. Highs in the mid 40s, Sunday lows in the upper 30s.

Southern Italy: Cloudy skies with rainshowers. Highs in the low 60s, Sunday lows in the 40s.

Kosovo: Cloudy skies with morning freezing rain and fog with afternoon snow. Highs in the 30s, Sunday lows in the 20s.

Norway: Cloudy skies with rain/snow showers. Highs in the 30s, Sunday lows in the low 20s to low 30s.

Portugal, Spain: Partly cloudy skies. Highs in the upper 50s to mid 60s, Sunday lows in the mid 30s to upper 40s.

Turkey: Partly cloudy skies. Highs in the upper 20s in the north to low 50s in the south, Sunday lows in the low teens in the northwestern regions to low 40s in the southeastern regions.

For current weather watches, warnings, and 5-day forecasts go to the USAFE Operational Weather Squadron home page at:
https://ows.sembach.af.mil
http://ows.public.sembach.af.mil

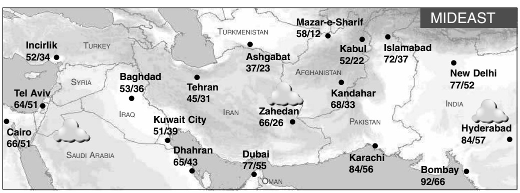
AFRICA

	HI	LO		HI	LO
Cape Town	75	60	Mogadishu	88	76
Dakar	82	71	Nairobi	80	58
Freetown	89	74	Rabat	66	48
Kinshasa	87	72	Tripoli	67	48

THE WORLD

	HI	LO		HI	LO
Amsterdam	42	33	Manila	89	73
Bahrain	63	41	Mexico City	65	43
Beijing	41	14	Montreal	30	19
Beirut	63	52	Riyadh	59	41
Bermuda	69	66	Rio de. Jan	88	75
Caracas	87	73	Seoul	46	19
Helsinki	37	27	Sofia	45	26
Hong Kong	77	64	Sydney	79	67
Lisbon	60	49	Tokyo	58	46

MIDEAST



SUN & MOON

	Today	Tomorrow
Sunrise (Baghdad)	7:01am	7:02am
Sunrise (Frankfurt)	8:20am	8:21am
Sunset (Baghdad)	4:59pm	4:59pm
Sunset (Frankfurt)	4:25pm	4:25pm

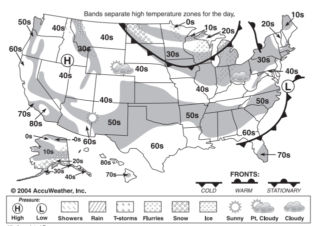
New moon	First qtr.	Full moon	Last qtr.
10 Jan	17 Jan	26 Dec	3 Jan

TODAY'S STATESIDE OUTLOOK

City	Hi	Lo	Otlk	City	Hi	Lo	Otlk	City	Hi	Lo	Otlk	City	Hi	Lo	Otlk	City	Hi	Lo	Otlk
				Cleveland	38	26	Cldy	Harrisburg	37	27	PCldy	Nashville	49	32	PCldy	San Antonio	65	38	Clr
Abilene,Tex.	59	31	PCldy	Colorado Springs	47	23	PCldy	Hartford Spgfld	31	25	PCldy	New Orleans	61	41	PCldy	San Diego	77	46	Clr
Akron,Ohio	36	26	Cldy	Columbia,S.C.	58	34	PCldy	Helena	46	26	PCldy	New York City	41	37	PCldy	San Francisco	63	47	Clr
Albany,N.Y.	29	24	Clr	Columbus,Ga.	58	37	PCldy	Honolulu	84	70	PCldy	Newark	40	35	PCldy	San Jose	66	45	Clr
Albuquerque	49	26	Clr	Columbus,Ohio	38	26	Cldy	Houston	66	39	Clr	Norfolk,Va.	50	35	PCldy	San Juan,P.R.	85	74	Rain
Allentown,Pa.	36	27	PCldy	Concord,N.H.	30	20	Clr	Huntsville	52	33	PCldy	North Platte	47	15	PCldy	Santa Fe	46	19	Clr
Amarillo	54	25	Clr	Corpus Christi	69	42	Clr	Indianapolis	39	19	Cldy	Oklahoma City	55	31	Cldy	St Ste Marie	27	-9	Snow
Anchorage	40	24	Snow	Dallas-Ft Worth	60	34	PCldy	Jackson,Miss.	54	37	PCldy	Orlando	70	47	Cldy	Savannah	61	37	PCldy
Asheville	49	30	PCldy	Dayton	36	23	Snow	Jacksonville	63	39	PCldy	Paducah	47	28	Cldy	Seattle	52	42	PCldy
Atlanta	53	35	PCldy	Daytona Beach	67	44	Cldy	Juneau	43	39	Rain	Pendleton	37	30	Cldy	Shreveport	62	38	PCldy
Atlantic City	45	32	PCldy	Denver	50	24	Clr	Kansas City	47	18	PCldy	Peoria	37	11	Cldy	Sioux City	43	6	Snow
Austin	64	36	Clr	Des Moines	37	7	Cldy	Key West	75	66	Cldy	Philadelphia	42	33	PCldy	Sioux Falls	36	2	Snow
Baltimore	45	29	PCldy	Detroit	34	18	Snow	Knoxville	48	32	PCldy	Phoenix	71	46	Clr	South Bend	34	19	Snow
Baton Rouge	61	38	PCldy	Duluth	27	-3	Snow	Lake Charles	61	41	PCldy	Pittsburgh	40	28	PCldy	Spokane	40	29	Cldy
Billings	46	30	PCldy	El Paso	54	29	Clr	Lansing	33	12	Snow	Pocatello	37	20	PCldy	Springfield,Ill.	38	14	Cldy
Birmingham	55	36	PCldy	Elkins	43	28	PCldy	Las Vegas	64	41	Clr	Portland,Maine	28	25	Clr	Springfield,Mo.	47	22	PCldy
Bismarck	28	0	Cldy	Erie	38	27	Cldy	Lexington	45	30	Cldy	Portland,Ore.	50	40	PCldy	Syracuse	34	28	PCldy
Boise	39	29	Cldy	Eugene	44	36	Cldy	Lincoln	42	14	PCldy	Providence	36	32	PCldy	Tallahassee	63	38	PCldy
Boston	33	35	PCldy	Evansville	46	28	Cldy	Little Rock	56	34	Cldy	Pueblo	53	17	PCldy	Tampa-St Ptrsbg	70	51	Cldy
Bridgeport	39	33	PCldy	Fairbanks	9	8	Snow	Los Angeles	80	49	Clr	Raleigh-Durham	50	34	PCldy	Toledo	34	20	Snow
Brownsville	72	46	PCldy	Fargo	9	8	Snow	Louisville	45	29	Cldy	Rapid City	48	20	Clr	Topeka	47	19	PCldy
Buffalo	34	26	Cldy	Flagstaff	48	20	Clr	Lubbock	58	27	Clr	Reno	50	23	Clr	Tucson	68	41	Clr
Burlington,Vt.	30	28	Clr	Flint	32	11	Snow	Macon	58	37	PCldy	Richmond	48	33	PCldy	Tulsa	53	29	Cldy
Caribou,Maine	19	5	Clr	Fort Smith	54	30	Cldy	Madison	30	6	Cldy	Roanoke	47	30	PCldy	Tupelo	53	33	PCldy
Casper	39	23	PCldy	Fort Wayne	35	17	Snow	Medford	48	32	Cldy	Rochester	35	28	PCldy	Waco	63	35	Clr
Charleston,S.C.	59	38	PCldy	Fresno	62	41	Cldy	Memphis	53	32	PCldy	Rockford	35	7	Cldy	Washington,D.C.	46	30	PCldy
Charleston,W.Va.	45	30	PCldy	Goodland	50	21	Clr	Miami Beach	76	60	Cldy	Sacramento	59	39	Clr	W.Palm Beach	73	59	Cldy
Charlotte,N.C.	52	34	PCldy	Grand Junction	44	20	Clr	Midland-Odessa	56	31	PCldy	St Louis	38	20	Cldy	Wichita	51	27	PCldy
Chattanooga	53	34	PCldy	Grand Rapids	34	12	Snow	Milwaukee	32	12	Cldy	St Thomas	85	75	Rain	Wichita Falls	58	31	PCldy
Cheyenne	44	28	Clr	Great Falls	50	34	PCldy	Mpls-St Paul	28	-2	PCldy	Salem,Ore.	45	35	Cldy	Wilkes-Barre	33	28	PCldy
Chicago	35	9	Cldy	Green Bay	30	7	Snow	Mobile	60	39	PCldy	Salt Lake City	42	24	PCldy	Wilmington,Del.	42	30	PCldy
Cincinnati	39	25	Cldy	Greensboro,N.C.	50	34	PCldy	Montgomery	57	36	PCldy	San Angelo	60	31	PCldy	Yakima	39	30	Cldy

THE UNITED STATES TODAY

As of noon, Eastern U.S. time



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Via Associated Press

Scheduled to ETS or PCS?

Check our Relocation Guide every Saturday to find Realtors at your new station.

STARS AND STRIPES
Your Hometown Newspaper

Horoscope

Holiday Mathis

There may be some seemingly aimless wandering around while the moon is void of course this morning, but the lunar transit into Aries this afternoon helps us get down to business and make up for lost time. Mercury is still retrograde, so if you're out doing your shopping, just make sure you leave the stores with everything you came in with.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (December 18). You're in excellent company this year — you surround yourself with people you admire and so will you raise yourself to the high standards they set. A windfall involves seizing your chance in the spotlight in January. You'll transition to a new home or job in March. Singles are extremely choosy, which is why love is such a thrill in the spring.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). You're making a major time investment into someone, and you want to feel emotionally protected for that investment. This is the day to lay claim to the relationship by telling the other person what you'd like it to be. If it's love, say so.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Indecision and spending time on the decision-making process are not the same thing. You'll deliberate the consequences of a potential action at length. This you do not because you're afraid or crafty, but because you are wise.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Friends call you wanting to vent, grieve, complain and kill time. This is an abuse of sorts — recognize it as such, and get off the phone. You're on a mission and simply can't afford to be an emotional dumping ground for others.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). You feel like you're at the mercy of someone who is really busy. But there's no reason you should feel honored by scraps of attention and stolen moments. Place your energies where you know you'll get something in return.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). On a surface level, you are what you think you are. But on a spiritual plane, even your own negative thoughts cannot diminish you. You'll automatically choose plenty of those, so choose some good thoughts to counteract.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Come on, we all have an inner madman. Yours has been under lock and key lately, but it's safe to let him out for good behavior this weekend. Loved ones find your unpredictability so attractive.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). You'll be around plenty of bright people this weekend, and the spirit of competition is high. Instead of struggling to keep up, struggle to be genuine. Success goes not to he who knows more but to he who knows better.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Clear (or burn) clutter, return phone calls, and deep-clean. By doing so, you plug up those little energetic leaks in your psyche — remember, little leaks sink big ships! Besides, getting organized is actually fun.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You'll be exercising your capacity to love unconditionally — that is, to give with no expectation of a return. As in any exercise, start small, and incrementally work your way up so as not to strain a muscle.

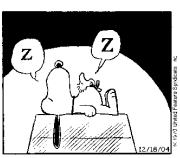
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Emotional balance is your aim. Stress and problems are a naturally occurring part of life, but you cope so gracefully that everything thrown your way seems rather minor — and so it is.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). You're tempted to waste the day away reading. News flash: It's not a waste! Mental exercises such as reading and meditation help you gain greater control over your thoughts, which leads to greater control over your life.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). You come to an intersection. Down one road, you see many hills and valleys and a glorious but very distant oasis at the end. The other road curves suddenly so that you can't see a thing. How adventurous do you feel?

Creators Syndicate

Peanuts



Calvin and Hobbes

Jump Start

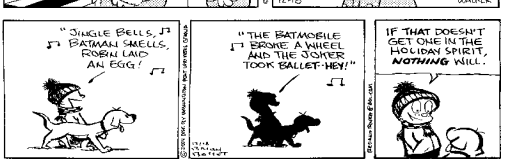
Zits

Cathy

Hi and Lois

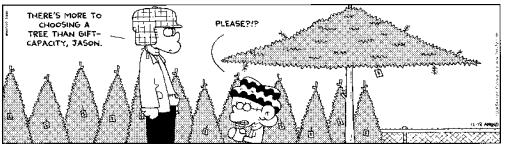
Beetle Bailey

Red and Rover

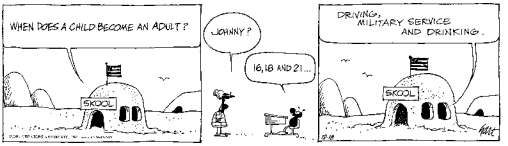


Better or Worse

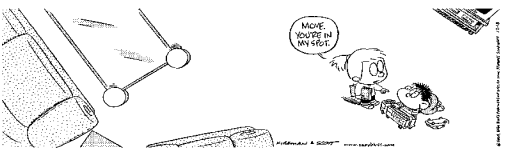
Foxtrot



B.C.



Baby Blues



Spider Man

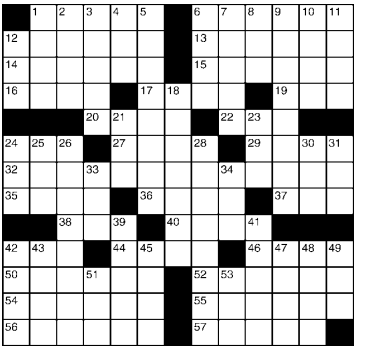
Blondie

Dilbert

Hagar

Garfield

Eugene Sheffer Crossword



Across

1 Moving smoothly
6 "Little Shop of Horrors" command
12 Plaster art
13 "Yes"
14 Nut with a toxic shell
15 Goalie's bailiwick
16 Just adorable
17 Staff member?
19 Dapper fellow
22 Streamlet
24 Bill
24 Abbr. after a surname
27 Concluding passage
29 Plumbum
32 Crude but effective
35 Country singer Jackson
36 Plummet
37 Pirouette pivot
38 Eucalyptus product
40 Urban area
42 Navy rank (Abbr.)
44 Sends out invitations
46 Send forth
50 Lebanon's capital
52 Overly decorated
54 Get there
55 Snitched (on)
56 Bore more
57 Tic

Down

1 Lady of the Haus
2 For fear that
3 "My Boo" singer
4 Lemieux milieu
5 Receive a file
6 Datum
7 Heron's cousin
8 Prior to
9 Recidivist reneger
10 Small plateau
11 Paradise
12 Stern disciplinarian?
18 Satan
21 Pronoun in a JFK quote
23 Pub potation
24 Historic period
25 Impresario Hurok
26 Precarious predicament
28 Staff, often
30 Fuss
31 Go blue
33 Wildebeest
34 On pens.
39 Strong purple
41 Meddler
42 In — way (ill)
43 "Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom- —"
45 British gun
47 Wrestling surfaces
48 Particular
49 Cartoonist Key
51 Wardrobe malfunction
53 Eminem's genre

Answer to Previous Puzzle

E	S	C		S	A	G	O		M	U	L	L
C	E	L		E	N	I	D		A	R	E	A
H	E	A	V	E	N	L	Y		G	N	A	W
O	P	P	O	S	E		S	K	I			
			T	I	X		S	A	C	R	E	D
A	S	P	E	N		H	E	Y		O	R	O
W	O	R	D		J	O	Y		R	E	N	T
E	L	O		D	E	W		E	A	S	E	S
D	I	V	I	N	E		O	U	R			
			G	A	P		C	R	E	C	H	E
B	O	W	L		E	T	H	E	R	E	A	L
O	H	I	O		R	E	E	K		D	I	S
G	O	T	O		S	E	R	A		E	R	A

12-18 CRYPTOQUIP

MV SRAXA'C CZEASRMOF LZY TZO'S IWOS EZSRAX SZ VMOT ZYS, TZ LZY CWL "EZE'C SRA IZXT"?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: TO CHEER UP A SAD PERSON ON VALENTINE'S DAY, I RECKON YOU HAVE TO SAY "TAKE HEART!"

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: E equals M

Work dodger should seek help

Dear Abby: I have a good job, a nice house, a great family and great friends — but I'm miserable.

I hate my job, but instead of quitting, I call in sick. It has put me in danger of getting fired. I lie to my husband about the work I miss, and since I handle the finances, he doesn't realize what an impact it has. I feel like a horrible person, but I'm afraid to quit and go somewhere else. I have no other skills, and I wouldn't be able to make the same money elsewhere.

I'm also afraid my husband will find out and be furious. I feel I'm putting my family in financial jeopardy and risking everything because I can't show up for work.

I'm not sure what's wrong with me. I just wake up some mornings and can't face going in, so I hide out in our house and pretend that I go to work. I feel lazy and worthless. I think I may be depressed, but some weeks or months I feel fine. What should I do?

— Going Crazy in Arizona

Dear Going: May I offer a couple of suggestions? Your mood swings may be chemical. Make an appointment with your physician, explain what's going on and get a referral to a psychotherapist. Once that's done, pick up the phone and find the nearest school that offers career counseling. You may have more marketable skills than you give yourself credit for.

Please don't put it off. Hiding from your husband will only make this worse. The longer you hide it, the more upset he will be when he learns what has been happening.

Dear Abby

Dear Abby: For years you have printed letters from grandparents complaining that they don't receive thank-you notes. Well, I have a question: Do these people send thank-you notes to their grandchildren for gifts they've received from them? I'm an active senior with 25 grandchildren. No matter how small the gift, I always write them a thank-you note.

Each child in a family gets his own. This year, I received a pencil, a hand-drawn picture, and some 99-cent earrings, among other things. They all merited a note.

The children love getting their own thank-you note.

And as soon as children can print "Thank you" they should be encouraged to send their own.

— Ohio Granny

Dear Granny: I commend you for setting such a wonderful example for your grandchildren. One of the secrets of writing an effective thank-you is to do it immediately after receiving the gift, while the reaction is spontaneous.

Letters for this column — with your name and phone number — should be addressed to Dear Abby, P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles CA 90069. Readers can write to Abby on the Internet at **http://www.uexpress.com/dearabby**

Universal Press Syndicate

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

MONDE

HOACC

SACULE

YERSIM

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www.jumble.com

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Answer here: " - "

(Answers Monday)

Yesterday's Jumbles: TAKEN POWER ANEMIA THEORY
Answer: What she accomplished at her full-time job — PART-TIME WORK

Husband is privately oppressive

Dear Annie: I have been married for two years to a man who appears to be the perfect gentleman. "Archie" is well liked in the community and seems to be a great husband and father, showering me and the children with attention and compliments — in public. The problem is, he is a completely different man at home. He yells at the children for trivial things, and has pushed my 6-year-old and knocked him over.

Archie monitors my phone calls, interrogating me and staying right by my side until the conversation is over. When he isn't home, he has caller ID units around the house to track incoming calls. He has hidden digital tape recorders in vehicles I drive and even hacks into my e-mail. I am not allowed to go outside and unwind with my neighbor after a day of taking care of a house and five children unless he is sitting right there, or harassing me every five seconds to come inside.

Annie's Mailbox

I insisted Archie go for counseling, but he is so smooth he tells the counselor what he wants to hear and then goes right back to the same old thing. We currently are separated, and I have a protective order against him for assault and battery.

I am concerned that so many people do not know about Archie's other side. I don't want to create trouble for him or smear him in the community, but I am tired of people thinking he is some kind of saint who is being unjustly accused. They have no idea what he is really like. What should I say to them?

— Dixie in D.C.

Dear Dixie: Nothing. It's none of their business, and more importantly, you may be putting yourself or your children in jeopardy if Archie finds out you are publicizing his abusive behavior. Even those folks who believe he is saintly have their private doubts. The truth eventually will surface. Don't rush it.

Dear Annie: "Potty-Peeved in El Paso" might feel better about her neighbor's lawn toilet if she maintains a good sense of humor.

Our town periodically rewards folks who have beautiful yards. When getting rid of an ugly green toilet, we took it to our daughter's yard, put plastic flowers in it, along with any other cheesy lawn ornament we could find, and attached a sign saying "Mayor's Beautification Award." Her elderly neighbor actually congratulated her.

— Royal Flush in Wisconsin

Dear Wisconsin: You must have great neighbors. Not everyone could handle a green toilet with flamingoes as a lawn decoration. Thanks for a good laugh.

Annie's Mailbox is written by Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar, longtime editors of the Ann Landers column. Please e-mail your questions to **anniesmailbox@comcast.net**, or write to: Annie's Mailbox, c/o Creators Syndicate, 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045.

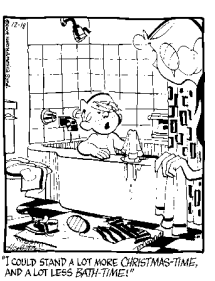
Creators Syndicate

Family Circus

"The wires behind the computer need untangling too, Daddy."

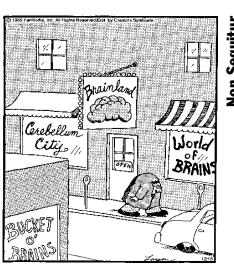
GRAFFITI

Dennis the Menace



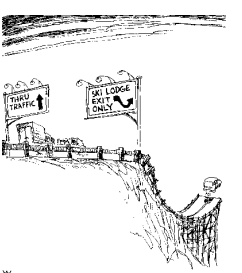
©Gary Larson

The Far Side



Igor goes shopping.

Non Sequitur



SCOREBOARD

AFN TV & Radio

Saturday

AFN-Sports, 9 a.m.-College football: NCAA Div. I-AA championship game, James Madison vs. Montana (dld).
AFN-Sports, 2 p.m.-NBA: Phoenix at Seattle (dld).
AFN-Pacific, 5 p.m.-College football: NCAA Division III championship game, Mary Hardin-Baylor vs. Linfield.
AFN-Sports, 6 p.m.-College basketball: Kentucky at Louisville.
AFN-Atlantic and Radio, 7:30 p.m.-NFL: Pittsburgh at N.Y. Giants.
AFN-Sports, 8 p.m.-College basketball: Texas at Wake Forest.
AFN-Pacific, 8 p.m.-College basketball: Arizona at Marquette.
AFN-Atlantic, 11 p.m.-College basketball: Oklahoma vs. Duke.
AFN-Sports, 11 p.m.-College baskketball: Michigan at UCLA.
AFN-Pacific and Radio, 11 p.m.-NFL: Washington at San Francisco.

Sunday

AFN-Pacific, 2 a.m.-College basketball: Mississippi St. at Xavier.
AFN-Sports and Radio, 2:30 a.m.-NFL: Carolina at Atlanta.
AFN-Sports, 6:30 a.m.-College basketball: Gonzaga vs. Georgia Tech.
AFN-Sports, 9:30 a.m.-Golf: PGA Tour Year-End Special (dld).
AFN-Sports, 10:30 a.m.-Golf: Three Tour Challenge (dld).
AFN-Atlantic, 1 p.m.-College basketball: Oklahoma St. at UNLV (dld).
AFN-Sports, 1:30 p.m.-NBA: Denver at Orlando (dld).
AFN-Atlantic, 7 p.m.-NFL: Minnesota at Detroit.
AFN-Pacific, 7 p.m.-NFL: Buffalo at Cincinnati.
AFN-Sports, 7 p.m.-NFL: Seattle at N.Y. Jets.
AFN-Radio, 7 p.m.-NFL: Denver at Kansas City.
AFN-Atlantic, 10 p.m.-NFL: New Orleans at Tampa Bay.
AFN-Pacific, 10 p.m.-NFL: Jacksonville at Green Bay.
AFN-Sports and Radio, 10 p.m.-NFL: St. Louis at Arizona.

All Times Central European Time; dld indicates delayed broadcast. All listings are subject to change. Visit **www.myafn.net** for more information.

Pro football

NFL

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

East	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
x-New England	12	1	0	.923	365	217
N.Y. Jets	9	4	0	.692	260	192
Buffalo	7	6	0	.538	297	231
Miami	2	11	0	.154	213	289
South						
x-Indianapolis	10	3	0	.769	454	277
Jacksonville	7	6	0	.538	220	228
Houston	5	8	0	.385	250	312
Tennessee	4	9	0	.308	269	343
North						
x-Pittsburgh	12	1	0	.923	290	190
Baltimore	8	5	0	.615	270	205
Cincinnati	6	7	0	.462	296	307
Cleveland	3	10	0	.231	247	345
West						
San Diego	10	3	0	.769	370	262
Denver	8	5	0	.615	294	229
Kansas City	5	8	0	.385	390	364
Oakland	4	9	0	.308	244	363

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

East	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
x-Philadelphia	12	1	0	.923	357	195
N.Y. Giants	5	8	0	.385	223	267
Dallas	5	8	0	.385	249	355
Washington	4	9	0	.308	183	218
South						
x-Atlanta	10	3	0	.769	267	252
Carolina	6	7	0	.462	269	264
Tampa Bay	5	8	0	.385	257	234
New Orleans	5	8	0	.385	280	357
North						
Green Bay	8	5	0	.615	334	307
Minnesota	7	6	0	.538	328	313
Detroit	5	8	0	.385	231	285
Chicago	5	8	0	.385	199	257
West						
Seattle	7	6	0	.538	305	289
St. Louis	6	7	0	.462	260	325
Arizona	4	9	0	.308	220	284
San Francisco	2	11	0	.154	229	364

x-clinched division

Saturday's games
Pittsburgh at N.Y. Giants
Washington at San Francisco
Carolina at Atlanta

Sunday's games
Houston at Chicago
Minnesota at Detroit
Seattle at N.Y. Jets
Denver at Kansas City
Buffalo at Cincinnati
Dallas at Philadelphia
San Diego at Cleveland
St. Louis at Arizona.
New Orleans at Tampa Bay
Jacksonville at Green Bay.
Tennessee at Oakland
Baltimore at Indianapolis

Monday's game
New England at Miami

Friday's games
Green Bay at Minnesota

Saturday, Dec. 25
Oakland at Kansas City
Denver at Tennessee

Sunday, Dec. 26
Chicago at Detroit
San Diego at Indianapolis
Baltimore at Pittsburgh
Houston at Jacksonville
Atlanta at New Orleans
N.Y. Giants at Cincinnati
Buffalo at San Francisco
New England at N.Y. Jets
Arizona at Seattle
Washington at Dallas
Carolina at Tampa Bay
Cleveland at Miami

Monday, Dec. 27
Philadelphia at St. Louis

College football

Division I-A playoffs

Championship
Friday, Dec. 17
At Finley Stadium/Davenport Field
Chattanooga, Tenn.
James Madison (12-2) vs. Montana (12-2)

Division III playoffs

Championship
Saturday, Dec. 18
Stagg Bowl
At Salem Stadium
Salem, Va.
Mary Hardin-Baylor (13-1) vs Linfield, Ore. (12-0)

NAIA playoffs

Championship
Saturday, Dec. 18
At Jim Carroll Stadium
Hardin County, Tenn.
St. Francis, Ind. (13-0) vs. Carroll, Mont. (11-2)

Bowl glance

Tuesday, Dec. 14
New Orleans Bowl
Payout: $750,000
Southern Mississippi 31, North Texas 10

Tuesday, Dec. 21
Champs Sports Bowl
At Orlando, Fla.
Payout: $850,000
Georgia Tech (6-5) vs. Syracuse (6-5)

Wednesday, Dec. 22
GMAC Bowl
Mobile, Ala.
Payout: $750,000
Memphis (8-3) vs. Bowling Green (8-3)

Thursday, Dec. 23
Fort Worth (Texas) Bowl
Payout: $750,000
Cincinnati (6-5) vs. Marshall (6-5)
Las Vegas Bowl
Payout: $575,000
Wyoming (6-5) vs. UCLA (6-5)

Friday, Dec. 24
Hawaii Bowl
At Honolulu
Payout: $750,000
UAB (7-4) vs. Hawaii (7-5)

Monday, Dec. 27
MPC Computers Bowl
At Boise, Idaho
Payout: $750,000
Fresno State (8-3) vs. Virginia (8-3)
Motor City Bowl
At Detroit
Payout: $750,000
Toledo (9-3) vs. Connecticut (7-4)

Tuesday, Dec. 28
Independence Bowl
At Shreveport, La.
Payout: $1.2 million
Iowa State (6-5) vs. Miami (Ohio) (8-4)
Insight Bowl
At Phoenix
Payout: $750,000
Oregon State (6-5) vs. Notre Dame (6-5)

Wednesday, Dec. 29
Houston Bowl
Payout: $1.1 million
Texas-El Paso (8-3) vs. Colorado (7-5)
Alamo Bowl
At San Antonio
Payout: $1.55 million
Ohio State (7-4) vs. Oklahoma State (7-4)

Thursday, Dec. 30
Continental Tire Bowl
At Charlotte, N.C.
Payout: $750,000
Boston College (8-3) vs. North Carolina (6-5)
Emerald Bowl
At San Francisco
Payout: $750,000
New Mexico (7-4) vs. Navy (9-2)
Holiday Bowl
At San Diego
Payout: $2 million
California (10-1) vs. Texas Tech (7-4)
Silicon Valley Classic
At San Jose, Calif.
Payout: $750,000
Troy (7-4) vs. Northern Illinois (8-3)

Friday, Dec. 31
Music City Bowl
At Nashville, Tenn.
Payout: $780,000
Alabama (6-5) vs. Minnesota (6-5)
Sun Bowl
At El Paso, Texas
Payout: $1.5 million
Purdue (7-4) vs. Arizona State (8-3)
Liberty Bowl
At Memphis, Tenn.
Payout: $1.35 million
Boise State (11-0) vs. Louisville (10-1)
Peach Bowl
At Atlanta
Payout: $2.2 million
Miami (8-3) vs. Florida (7-4)

Saturday, Jan. 1
Cotton Bowl
At Dallas
Payout: $3 million
Tennessee (9-3) vs. Texas A&M (7-4)
Outback Bowl
At Tampa, Fla.
Payout: $2.75 million
Wisconsin (9-2) vs. Georgia (9-2)
Gator Bowl
At Jacksonville, Fla.
Payout: $1.6 million
Florida State (8-3) vs. West Virginia (8-3)
Capital One Bowl
At Orlando, Fla.
Payout: $5.187 million
Iowa (9-2) vs. LSU (9-2)
Rose Bowl
At Pasadena, Calif.
Payout: $14.5 million
Michigan (9-2) vs. Texas (10-1)
Fiesta Bowl
At Tempe, Ariz.
Payout: $11-14 million
Utah (11-0) vs. Pittsburgh (8-3)

Monday, Jan. 3
Sugar Bowl
At New Orleans
Payout: $11-14 million
Auburn (12-0) vs. Virginia Tech (10-2)

Tuesday, Jan. 4
Orange Bowl
At Miami
Payout: $11-14 million
Southern Cal (12-0) vs. Oklahoma (12-0)

Saturday, Jan. 15
Gridiron Classic
At The Villages, Fla.
North vs. South
East-West Shrine Classic
At San Francisco
East vs. West

Saturday, Jan. 22
Hula Bowl
At Maui, Hawaii
Aina vs. Kai 7

Saturday, Jan. 29
Senior Bowl
At Mobile, Ala.
North vs. South

College basketball

AP Men's Top 25 schedule

Saturday's games
No. 2 Kansas vs. South Carolina
No. 3 Georgia Tech vs. No. 22 Gonzaga at the Thomas & Mack Center, Las Vegas
No. 4 Oklahoma State at UNLV
No. 6 Wake Forest vs. No. 14 Texas
No. 7 Duke vs. Oklahoma at Madison Square Garden
No. 8 Syracuse vs. Drexel
No. 9 Kentucky at No. 13 Louisville
No. 10 Pittsburgh vs. Coppin State
No. 15 Arizona at Marquette
No. 16 Iowa vs. Western Carolina
No. 17 Alabama vs. Tennessee State
No. 19 George Washington vs. Towson
No. 20 Mississippi State at Xavier
No. 21 Michigan State vs. Delaware State
No. 25 Cincinnati vs. Northwestern State

Sunday's games
No. 1 Illinois vs. Valparaiso
No. 5 North Carolina at Virginia Tech
No. 11 Connecticut vs. Rice
No. 12 North Carolina State at No. 18 Washington
No. 23 Maryland vs. Florida State

Thursday's men's scores

EAST
Catawba 81, Bluefield St. 67
Mount Vernon Nazarene 84, Roberts Wesleyan 73

SOUTH
Coll. of Charleston 59, N.C.-Wilmington 57
Delta St. 98, Bellarmine 84
Florida Southern 80, Florida Memorial 72
Florida St. 83, South Alabama 52
Limestone 77, S.C.-Upstate 74
McNeese St. 90, William Carey 55
Nicholls St. 82, Davenport 62
Tenn. Temple 78, Freed-Hardeman 76
UCF 90, Campbell 73
UNC-Greensboro 96, Guilford 65

MIDWEST
Augustana,S.D. 83, Dakota Weslyn 71
Columbia, Mo. 75, Maryville, Mo. 47
Dickinson St. 88, Minot St. 71
Findlay 83, Lake Erie 51
Simpson, Iowa 69, Graceland, Iowa 34
South Dakota 86, Morningside 78
Valparaiso 74, Northwestern St. 61

SOUTHWEST
Arkansas 96, Tennessee St. 68
Houston 78, New Orleans 65
Houston Baptist 92, SW Assemblies of God 86
Newman 64, Incarnate Word 58
North Texas 95, Southern U. 73
Ohio St. 77, Texas Tech 71
Rice 81, Lamar 75
SMU 77, Baylor 43
SW Oklahoma 59, Trinity, Texas 53
Texas Lutheran 88, Austin 46
Texas-Pan American 82, Texas-Permian Basin 45

FAR WEST
Portland St. 80, Bethune-Cookman 60

AP Women's Top 25 fared

Thursday
1. LSU (9-0) did not play. Next: at Southwest Missouri State, Saturday.
2. Stanford (7-0) did not play. Next: at Missouri, Saturday.
3. Duke (9-1) did not play. Next: vs. No. 20 Purdue at Indianapolis, Saturday.
4. Texas (5-2) beat North Texas 79-54. Next: vs. Texas-Arlington, Tuesday, Dec. 21.
5. North Carolina (8-1) did not play. Next: vs. Georgia State at Myrtle Beach, S.C., Sunday.
6. Baylor (8-1) did not play. beat Washington 74-58. Next: vs. Florida, Sunday.
7. Notre Dame (9-1) did not play. Next: at Marquette, Sunday.
8. Connecticut (4-1) did not play. Next: at No. 23 Arizona State, Tuesday, Dec. 21.
9. Tennessee (6-2) did not play. beat Louisiana Tech 70-59.
10. Ohio State (9-1) did not play. Next: at Oregon, Saturday.
11. Michigan State (8-1) did not play. Next: vs. Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, Sunday.
12. Texas Tech (5-1) did not play. Next: vs. Arkansas State at Las Vegas, Saturday.
13. Minnesota (8-2) did not play. Next: vs. Drake, Thursday, Dec. 23.
14. Boston College (7-1) did not play. Next: vs. Saint Joseph's, Wednesday, Dec. 22.
15. Georgia (7-3) did not play. Next: at Iona, Sunday.
16. UCLA (6-1) did not play. Next: at Illinois, Sunday.
17. Vanderbilt (7-1) did not play. Next: vs. BYU at Malibu, Calif., Monday, Dec. 20.
18. Maryland (7-1) did not play. Next: vs. Coppin State, Monday, Dec. 20.
19. Houston (9-0) beat Hawaii 66-55.
20. Purdue (6-2) did not play. Next: vs. No. 3 Duke at Indianapolis, Saturday.
21. DePaul (7-2) did not play. beat Northern Illinois 73-59.
22. Rutgers (5-2) did not play. lost to Temple 71-60. Next: vs. Clemson, Saturday.
23. Arizona State (7-1) did not play. Next: at New Mexico, Saturday.
24. Iowa (8-0) did not play. Next: at Drake, Saturday.
25. Kansas State (5-2) did not play. Next: vs. Alabama at Springfield, Mo., Saturday.

Thursday's women's scores

EAST
Bluefield St. 68, W. Virginia St. 53
Clemson 80, Wagner 50
Long Island U. 68, New Orleans 55

SOUTH
Anderson, S.C. 86, Francis Marion 59
Appalachian St. 65, Campbell 45
Coastal Carolina 73, Savannah St. 45
Fla. International 68, Northwestern 55
James Madison 75, Charleston Southern 66
Louisville 77, Alabama St. 46
Mississippi 106, Grambling St. 64
Mississippi St. 71, SE Louisiana 45
N.C. State 75, South Carolina 48
N.C.-Asheville 79, N. Carolina A&T 59
Nicholls St. 97, Davenport 65
Webber 67, Palm Beach Atlantic 59

MIDWEST
Augustana,S.D. 91, Dakota Weslyn 55
Dartmouth 74, Ill.-Chicago 71
Minot St. 60, Dickinson St. 58
Northwood, Mich. 65, St. Francis, Ind. 61
Oral Roberts 73, Wichita St. 57
Rockford 75, Dubuque 71
Washburn 73, Evangel 42
Wisconsin 104, Santa Clara 91

SOUTHWEST
Arkansas 82, Louisiana-Lafayette 68
Austin 67, Texas Lutheran 56
Houston Baptist 89, SW Assemblies of God 37
Lamar 69, Prairie View 50
Texas 79, North Texas 54
Texas-Pan American 92, Texas-Permian Basin 45

FAR WEST
Arizona 96, UC Santa Barbara 80
Houston 66, Hawaii 55
Texas A&M-Corpus Christi 75, Nevada 52

Baseball

Remaining free agents

NEW YORK (AP) — The 131 remaining free agents (a-offered arbitration and may negotiate with former team through Jan. 8; players have until Dec. 19 to accept offers):

AMERICAN LEAGUE
ANAHEIM (3) — Andres Galarraga, dh; Shane Halter, 3b; Aaron Sele, rhp.
BALTIMORE (4) — Marty Cordova, dh; Omar Daal, lhp; Buddy Groom, lhp; David Segui, dh.
BOSTON (13) — Terry Adams, rhp; a-Pedro Astacio, rhp; Ellis Burks, dh; a-Orlando Cabrera, ss; Ricky Gutierrez, 2b; Curtis Leskanic, rhp; a-Derek Lowe, rhp; a-Dave McCarty, 1b; Ramiro Mendoza, rhp; a-Mike Myers, lhp; a-Pokey Reese, 2b; a-Jason Varitek, c; Scott Williamson, rhp.
CHICAGO (3) — Roberto Alomar, 2b; Magglio Ordonez, of.; Jose Valentin, ss.
CLEVELAND (1) — Rick White, rhp.
DETROIT (1) — Alan Levine, rhp.
KANSAS CITY (3) — Juan Gonzalez, of; Joe Randa, 3b; Desi Relaford, 3b.
NEW YORK (9) — Miguel Cairo, 2b; Tony Clark, 1b; a-Orlando Hernandez, rhp; Travis Lee, 1b; Esteban Loaiza, rhp; C.J. Nitkowski, lhp; John Olerud, 1b; a-Ruben Sierra, dh; Enrique Wilson, 2b.
OAKLAND (3) — Chris Hammond, lhp; Jim Mecir, rhp; Mark McLemore, 2b.
SEATTLE (2)— Edgar Martinez, dh; a-Ron Villone, lhp.
TAMPA BAY (4) — Brook Fordyce, c; Tino Martinez, 1b; Todd Ritchie, rhp; Rey Sanchez, 2b.
TEXAS (9) — a-David Dellucci, of; Andy Fox, 3b; Brad Fullmer, dh; Rusty Greer, of; Brian Jordan, of; Jeff Nelson, rhp; Herbert Perry, dh; Jay Powell, rhp; Jeff Zimmerman, rhp.
TORONTO (5) — Dave Berg, of; Valerio De Los Santos, lhp; Carlos Delgado, 1b; Pat Hentgen, rhp; a-Gregg Zaun, c.

NATIONAL LEAGUE
ARIZONA (7) — Carlos Baerga, 1b; Danny Bautista, of; Greg Colbrunn, 1b; Mike Fetters, rhp; Shane Reynolds, rhp; Scott Service, rhp; Steve Sparks, rhp.
ATLANTA (3) — Antonio Alfonseca, rhp; J.D. Drew, of; a-Jaret Wright, rhp.
CHICAGO (9) — Moises Alou, of; Paul Bako, c; a-Matt Clement, rhp; Tom Goodwin, of; Ben Grieve, of; Mark Grudzielanek, 2b; a-Todd Hollandsworth, of; Ramon Martinez, ss; Kent Mercker, lhp.
CINCINNATI (4) — Darren Bragg, of; Barry Larkin, ss; Todd Van Poppel, rhp; Gabe White, lhp.
COLORADO (6) — Jeromy Burnitz, of; Shawn Estes, lhp; a-Todd Greene, c; Steve Reed, rhp; Mark Sweeney, of; a-Jamey Wright, rhp.
FLORIDA (5) — Chad Fox, rhp; Josias Manzanillo, rhp; Mike Mordecai, 3b; a-Carl Pavano, rhp; a-Ismael Valdez, rhp.
HOUSTON (3) — a-Carlos Beltran, of; Dan Miceli, rhp; Darren Oliver, lhp.
LOS ANGELES (10) — a-Wilson Alvarez, lhp; a-Adrian Beltre, 3b; Elmer Dessens, rhp; Todd Hundley, c; Jose Lima, rhp; a-Brent Mayne, c; Hideo Nomo, rhp; a-Odalis Perez, lhp; Paul Shuey, rhp; Robin Ventura, 1b.
MONTREAL (1) — Tony Batista, 3b.
NEW YORK (4) — Ricky Bottalico, rhp; John Franco, lhp; Mo Vaughn, 1b; Todd Zeile, 1b.
PHILADELPHIA (5) — a-Doug Glanville, of; Roberto Hernandez, rhp; Kevin Millwood, rhp; Eric Milton, lhp; a-Placido Polanco, 2b.
PITTSBURGH (1) — Brian Boehringer, rhp.
ST. LOUIS (4) — Steve Kline, lhp; Ray Lankford, of; a-Edgar Renteria, ss; a-Tony Womack, 2b.
SAN DIEGO (6) — Andy Ashby, rhp; Rich Aurilia, ss; Robert Fick, dh; Alex Gonzalez, ss; Dave Hansen, 1b; Antonio Osuna, rhp.
SAN FRANCISCO (3) — Dave Burba, rhp; a-Jason Christiansen, lhp; Robb Nen, rhp.

Deals

Thursday's transactions

BASEBALL
American League
ANAHEIM ANGELS—Added INF Kendry Morales to 40-man roster. Designated RHP Bobby Jenks for assignment.
BOSTON RED SOX—Named Jason McLeod director of amateur scouting, Amiel Sawdaye assistant scouting director, Dave Finley national crosschecker, Mike Rikard east coast crosschecker, Fred Peterson west coast crosschecker and Jon Lukens and Danny Watkins scouts.
CHICAGO WHITE SOX—Agreed to terms with INF Juan Uribe on a three-year contract.
KANSAS CITY ROYALS—Traded RHP Jorge Vasquez to Atlanta for OF Eli Marrero and cash. Traded C Benito Santiago and cash to Pittsburgh for RHP Leo Nunez and a player to be named or cash.
MINNESOTA TWINS—Agreed to terms with LHP Terry Mulholland on a minor-league contract.
OAKLAND ATHLETICS—Traded RHP Tim Hudson to Atlanta for LHP Dan Meyer, RHP Juan Cruz and OF Charles Thomas.
SEATTLE MARINERS—Designated INF Luis Ugueto for assignment.
TAMPA BAY DEVIL RAYS—Named Joe Szekely manager and R.C. Lichtenstein pitching coach of the Southwest Michigan Devil Rays of the Midwest league.
TORONTO BLUE JAYS—Agreed to terms with LHP Scott Downs on a minor league contract.

National League
ATLANTA BRAVES—Agreed to terms with RHP John Smoltz on a two-year contract.
NEW YORK METS—Named Answorth A. Allen team physician and Struan Coleman and Andrew Perle assistant team physicians.

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association
MILWAUKEE BUCKS—Placed G Erick Strickland on the injured list.
PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS—Waived G Geno Carlisle.
TORONTO RAPTORS—Waived G Roger Mason Jr.

Women's National Basketball Association
WNBA—Named Dee Kantner supervisor of officials.

COLLEGE
EAST CAROLINA—Named Greg Hudson defensive coordinator.
ELON—Named Darren Powell men's soccer coach.
FLORIDA—Named John Holliday to the football coaching staff.
GEORGE MASON—Named Scot Budde assistant swimming and diving coach.
HILBERT—Named Randy Cialone baseball coach.
MANHATTAN—Named Michael Swanick men's soccer coach and Sean Driscoll women's soccer coach.
MISSISSIPPI—Named Ed Orgeron football coach.
MORAVIAN—Named Scott Sullivan men's assistant lacrosse coach.
NORFOLK STATE—Fired Willie Gillus, football coach.
OHIO—Named Frank Solich football coach.
SOUTH CAROLINA—Named John Thompson defensive coordinator.
SOUTHERN CAL—Named Rick Majerus men's basketball coach, effective April 1.
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI—Announced basketball G Solomon Brown has taken an indefinite leave of absence.

TANK MCNAMARA

Union blasts owners' response to its salary rollback proposal

BY IRA PODELL
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The NHL players' association is taking its case public.

Annoyed and dismayed by financial figures they call "absolutely ridiculous," NHLPA officials sought to discredit projections that the NHL made when it rejected the union's proposal for a new collective bargaining agreement.

The NHL lockout reached its 93rd day Friday and has wiped out 430 regular-season games, plus the 2005 All-Star Game.

Negotiations broke off Tuesday after the NHL rejected a players' proposal that featured a 24-percent salary rollback. The league handed back a salary cap-structured counteroffer that also was turned down during the 3½-hour meeting in Toronto.

"They based their reaction to our significant proposal by saying they'd be right back where they were. Well, that's a bunch of hogwash," union head Bob Goodenow said. "They mixed up and diced up statistics in a blender and came out with what I think are absolutely ridiculous forecasts."

No new negotiations are scheduled, leaving the NHL perilously close to becoming the first North American sports league to lose a season to a labor dispute.

"It is a lockout that's going to extend for an awful long time if the parties aren't able to try to work together," Goodenow said.

Although no drop-dead date has been set, there figures to be about a month of negotiating time left to save the season. The lockout during the 1994-95 season ended on Jan. 11 and allowed for a 48-game regular season to be played.

The players' association already believed that the NHL's financial figures were off when they saw them in the counterproposal. After a few days of crunching numbers, the union made sure to let everyone know just how wrong it feels the amounts are.

> *"They mixed up and diced up statistics in a blender and came out with what I think are absolutely ridiculous forecasts."*
>
> **Bob Goodenow**
> NHLPA chief

Using a 3-year projection based on league numbers, the NHLPA said its offer would produce a $275.5 million profit for teams as opposed to a $568.5 million loss, as stated by the NHL.

"They were desperate to mischaracterize things and try to throw a high, hard one past a lot of people," Goodenow said. "That's why we've taken the time to go back and restate reality."

The NHL countered that projected league revenues would go up 3 percent annually over the next three seasons while player costs would rise by an average of 12.1 percent.

By its calculations, the league figured to lose $71.7 million in the 2004-05 season, $183.9 million the following season, and $312.9 in the third year.

Goodenow said the league took its own forecast of 2004-05 revenue and increased that amount by only 3 percent, a figure far below the NHL's self-reported number of 9.4 — the amount of average growth the NHL said it had the past 10 years.

"We stand behind the 3-percent average annual growth projection we used for our modeling, particularly for a business that will be coming out of an extended shutdown," Bill Daly, the NHL's chief legal officer, said Thursday. "We do not believe the union's public negotiation with the media warrants any further comment."

In plugging those numbers in, the NHLPA claimed its latest proposal would generate a profit of $58 million in the 2004-05 season, and $91.5 million and $126 million in subsequent years.

"We are not saying that revenues will grow by 9.4 percent or player costs by 12.1 percent in the next few years," Goodenow said. "We believe the numbers from the last five-year, post-expansion era have far greater relevance. According to the league's own numbers, over the last five years on a per team basis revenues have on average increased 7.8 percent while player costs have increased an average of 7.3 percent."

In using those figures, Goodenow said a $411.9 million profit would be produced instead of a $568.5 million loss — a difference of $980.4 million from the league's projections.

"All we're saying is you have to compare apples with apples," NHLPA senior director Ted Saskin said. "Don't take a plug number of 12.1 percent in player costs, which were experienced during a time of rapid revenue growth in the '90s, and then ignore the revenue number from that same time period."

Tracy Sloan expresses her feelings about the NHL lockout during a minor league game in Tampa, Fla., on Wednesday. Canadians view the stoppage much like Americans do.
AP

North of the border, more indifference

BY DAVID POLLAK
San Jose Mercury News

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — It was supposed to be different up here.

But three months into an NHL lockout poised to erase an entire season, Canada is not having an emotional meltdown. The Great White North is reacting much more like the United States than expected.

Oh, fans were angry in September when players and owners made it clear they were living on different economic planets and the league shut down.

But now?

"I thought it'd be rougher than it's turned out to be," said Tom O'Brien, 39.

"We miss it, but life goes on," said Jamie Palmer, 27, who still plays the game and, as a spectator, has found alternatives to the NHL's Canucks.

All of which is bad news for both sides in the labor dispute. Nor can either party be happy with the results of a Vancouver Province online survey 10 days ago that asked readers if it mattered whether the NHL salvages the rest of its season. Seventy-seven percent said no.

In Canada? Where TV ads for Molson's feature burly men singing the lyrics of Boy George — "Do you really want to hurt me? Do you really want to make me cry?" — in a lockout lament.

Where are the withdrawal symptoms? Where is the rage?

"We're holding up surprisingly well," said Dan Russell, a CKNW sports talk radio host whose Vancouver-based program is aired throughout British Columbia. "I'm surprised at how few irate callers we get."

It's not as if the media isn't playing every angle. It was front-page news Dec. 3 when players invited owners to resume negotiations. Sportswriters have toured Europe, tracking NHL skaters in exile. Columnists have called for heads to roll.

Polls in Canada show more support for owners, though the margin has been shifting.

"The first two months of the lockout, 80 to 90 percent of the callers were on the owners' side," said Russell, whose program is marking its 20th anniversary, "but I sense the pendulum has moved back toward the middle."

His audience wasn't optimistic that the players' offer last week to take a 24-percent pay cut would lead to a settlement. So it took Commissioner Gary Bettman's rejection of it Tuesday in stride.

The mood may vary from province to province — "People in B.C. aren't nervous about losing hockey long term, but I think it's on their minds in Alberta," Russell said — but he indicated the lack of hysteria appears to be nationwide.

Still, locked-out players say they can get an earful when they're back home in Canada. And, Sharks forward Alyn McCauley said, it's not surprising, considering people grew up playing hockey and harbored dreams of stardom.

"Up here, a lot of people feel, 'If I just made that pass in peewee, I'd be in the NHL today,' " said McCauley, who has spent the past few months at his Gananoque, Ontario, home. "There is that mentality that they could be out there doing the same thing we do."

Russell has his theories why Canadians are handling this lockout better than the one in 1994. The Red Sox's run to the World Series captivated the country's sports fans through October. In November, Toronto and Vancouver played for the Canadian Football League title, keeping interest alive in two of the nation's three biggest cities.

"People are also savvy enough to know the economic circumstances of the lockout," Russell said. "People realize it's a tough nut to crack."

Soon enough, the big picture comes into focus: Canadians are surviving the lockout because there's still plenty of hockey north of the 49th Parallel. The game hasn't vanished — just the 30 franchises with the priciest tickets.

"We've got our own hockey to play," said Palmer, who skates in a men's league that got a good laugh one night this fall when Sharks defenseman Scott Hannan, looking to stay active, showed up to play.

"And," he added, "we've got this ..."

Palmer is at a Vancouver Giants game. Like many fans, he has turned his attention to the major junior hockey leagues whose 56 teams from coast-to-coast are the NHL's primary feeder system.

Competing in the Western Hockey League, the Giants' season-ticket base grew from 2,600 to 4,500 this season. The team has been averaging crowds of 7,473 — about a 68 percent increase over last season. And the electric billboard outside the Pacific Coliseum, home of the NHL's Canucks until 1995, drives home the contrast between the two teams: Game on, guaranteed.

Miller fourth in World Cup super-G

The Associated Press

VAL GARDENA, Italy — Bode Miller finished fourth in a World Cup super giant slalom Friday in which Michael Walchhofer led a 1-2-3 Austrian sweep.

Sports briefs

Miller has won six of 11 races this season and holds a commanding lead in the overall standings.

Walchhofer captured a World Cup super-G for the first time, covering the 1.5-mile course in 1 minute, 31.17 seconds. Defending overall champion Hermann Maier was second, 0.12 seconds behind, and Benjamin Raich finished third, 0.47 seconds back. Miller was 0.86 seconds off Walchhofer's pace.

This was the first speed event this season in which Maier has finished ahead of Miller, shaving 30 points off the American's overall lead. Miller leads Maier 780-419.

Two-time defending champion Antoine Deneriaz of France finished 15th.

Walchhofer was second in the downhill on this course in each of the past three seasons. This was the third World Cup victory of his career following a combined in Kitzbuehel during the 2002-03 season and a downhill in Lake Louise, Alberta.

AP

Bode Miller, has won six of 11 races and leads the overall World Cup standings by 361 points.

Montgomerie, who made the winning putt in Europe's victory over the United States in September at Oakland Hills, said Friday he's withdrawing as a candidate to captain the team in 2006 at the K Club in Ireland.

The 41-year-old Scot said he's been told by "everybody" that he should keep playing.

"After hearing it I possibly have to agree," he said. "I think I can play in Ireland and possibly the next couple."

Germany's Bernhard Langer captained the team which beat the Americans by a record margin of 18½-9½. Montgomerie, who has a Ryder Cup record of 19-8-5, backs Langer to continue as captain.

Monty rules himself out for Euro captaincy

LONDON — Colin Montgomerie is no longer interested in becoming Europe's Ryder Cup captain.

Bryant, Lakers humble Kings at Arco Arena

By Greg Beacham
The Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Kobe Bryant discussed it with assistant coach Frank Hamblen in the closing minutes. Not even the two longest-tenured people on the Lakers' bench could remember ever beating the Sacramento Kings with such force and flair.

Bryant had 31 points and 12 assists, Lamar Odom scored 22 points and Los Angeles added more fuel to its biggest rivalry by handing Sacramento its worst home loss in nearly seven years, 115-99 on Thursday night.

Brian Cook hit four of the Lakers' 12 three-pointers in a building where Bryant and Shaquille O'Neal enjoyed some of their greatest playoff triumphs during the last six seasons. With Shaq gone to Miami, the Lakers still handed Sacramento its worst loss at Arco Arena since a 116-95 defeat to San Antonio on March 2, 1998.

The Lakers ran away in the second half, outscoring Sacramento 37-22 in the third quarter with 16 points from Bryant. They kept up their up-tempo assault until the final minutes, when Kings coach Rick Adelman furiously pulled his starters with nearly 5 minutes left.

"We really just jumped on them," Bryant said. "It's big. We have yet to beat such a top opponent like Sacramento. We've been in position to win these types of ballgames, and we just haven't closed them out. This is a good step for us."

Chris Webber and Bobby Jackson scored 20 points apiece for the Kings, whose starters left the game in embarrassed indignation. It was just Sacramento's third loss in 17 games — but few defeats in recent years have stung more.

"We weren't doing anything that was going to get us into the game," Adelman said. "They're a team that gives us problems because of matchups, but they're not that good. This was hopefully a wakeup call, because they handled us."

Sacramento's deficiencies in defensive tenacity and offensive patience were exposed in just its second home loss of the season.

Brad Miller scored only six points in 38 minutes, and Peja Stojakovic was ineffective despite getting 16 points.

"It was a great team win, probably a milestone for us," Lakers coach Rudy Tomjanovich said. "Now we've got something we talk about — winning on the road — and we have something to look back on."

From the cultural poles of California, Los Angeles and Sacramento battled atop the Pacific Division standings for the better part of a decade, trading verbal jabs and actual punches along with baskets in countless memorable games and playoff series.

But after the Lakers were rebuilt in the offseason to defuse the growing feud between Shaq and Kobe, Webber pronounced one of the NBA's better rivalries dead — even though Vlade Divac, perhaps the most beloved player in Sacramento's renaissance, defected back to Los Angeles for a $4.9 million contract.

Webber's prediction seems a bit premature. Sacramento pulled out an entertaining 109-106 victory at Staples Center last month — and in the rematch, the Lakers handed the Kings their most humbling home defeat during Adelman's seven seasons.

Bryant was greeted with his usual showers of boos, and the Kings went after him with double-teams. He still showed brilliance: a two-handed reverse dunk, an awkward scoop shot while being fouled and a four-point play in the third quarter, hitting a three-pointer while Doug Christie clipped his elbow.

The Lakers exploited the biggest flaws in the Kings' defense: poor rotation to open shooters and an inability to stop dribble penetration. Odom blew by Webber atop the key on several possessions, while Tierre Brown, Chucky Atkins and the rest of the Lakers' guards drove the lane almost at will. Brown scored 13 points in the fourth.

AP

Los Angeles Lakers' Kobe Bryant, left, goes in for a layup against Sacramento Kings' Doug Christie during the first quarter in Sacramento, Calif., on Thursday. Bryant had 31 points and 12 assists in the Lakers' 115-99 victory.

Pistons shut down James, Cavs

The Associated Press

AUBURN HILLS, Mich. — Richard Hamilton scored 21 points and the Detroit Pistons held Cleveland to a six-point third quarter and almost held LeBron James scoreless in the second half in an 81-69 victory Thursday night.

It looked like it might not be James' night when he shot two airballs on one possession in the first quarter. He finished with 11 points on 4-for-21 shooting, eight rebounds and seven assists.

After making a fadeaway jumper over Ben Wallace at the end of the first half, James didn't score again until there was 2:12 left in the game. James scored a career-high 43 points the last time he faced the Pistons, a 92-76 victory on Nov. 28 in Cleveland.

NBA roundup

Chauncey Billups scored 16, Rasheed Wallace had 13 and Ben Wallace added 10 points and 15 rebounds for the Pistons.

Cleveland's Drew Gooden scored 18 points, Jeff McInnis had 14 and Zydrunas Ilgauskas finished with 12 after an eight-point first quarter.

The Central Division-leading Cavaliers are 9-1 at home, but just 5-8 on the road.

The Pistons erased a 10-point halftime deficit during the third quarter, with Lindsey Hunter's two free throws with 4:09 left giving them the lead for the first time since the opening minutes of the game.

Bulls 85, Bucks 77: At Chicago, Kirk Hinrich scored 28 points, and the Bulls won two in a row for the first time this season.

Eddy Curry added 18 points for the Bulls, who won for the fourth time in six games.

Michael Redd had 22 points for Milwaukee, which lost its third straight game and 13th of 16 overall. The Bucks are 1-9 on the road.

Shaq, Yao lead early All-Star voting

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Shaquille O'Neal leads his new conference in early All-Star Game voting, while Yao Ming is No. 1 overall in the NBA.

O'Neal, traded from the Los Angeles Lakers to the Miami Heat in the offseason, tops the Eastern Conference with 854,930 votes as of Thursday. Yao, the center for the Western Conference's Houston Rockets, is the only player with more votes (881,223).

Fans can vote through Jan. 23, and All-Star starters will be announced Feb. 3. The game is Feb. 20 in Denver.

Minnesota's Kevin Garnett, the reigning league MVP, is third overall, leading West forwards with 751,586 votes, followed by San Antonio's Tim Duncan with 570,090.

Yao's teammate Tracy McGrady (680,373) is the top guard in the West, trailed by the Los Angeles Lakers' Kobe Bryant (673,665).

Briefs

In the East, Toronto's Vince Carter (619,959) and Orlando's Grant Hill (552,328) lead the forwards, while Cleveland's LeBron James (557,538) and Philadelphia's Allen Iverson (521,245) top the guards.

Snow sent away from Cavaliers' bench

AUBURN HILLS, Mich. — Cleveland point guard Eric Snow was sent to the locker room after getting in an argument on the bench with Cavaliers coach Paul Silas in the second quarter against Detroit on Thursday night.

Snow returned to the bench after halftime, but did not play in the second half.

Silas was upset with Snow because the Cavaliers turned the ball over on an eight-second violation.

"Nobody was open," Snow shouted back at Silas.

Silas then took Snow out of the game and after a heated conversation, he gestured to Snow to get off the bench. Snow walked off the court with teammate Scott Williams and Robert Traylor.

"I am not going to discuss that," Silas said after the game.

Snow also declined comment.

The Cavaliers suspended forward Ira Newble last season for one game because of a profanity-laced argument with Silas.

Bucks put Strickland on injured list

MILWAUKEE — Milwaukee Bucks guard Erick Strickland will miss at least two weeks after being placed on the injured list Thursday with a torn lateral meniscus in his right knee.

Strickland has appeared in 16 games for the Bucks and is averaging 4.3 points, two rebounds and 2.2 assists.

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	11	11	.500	—
Boston	9	12	.429	1½
Philadelphia	9	12	.429	1½
New Jersey	7	14	.333	3½
Toronto	8	16	.333	4

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	17	7	.708	—
Washington	12	8	.600	3
Orlando	13	9	.591	3
Charlotte	5	14	.263	9½
Atlanta	4	18	.182	12

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	14	9	.609	—
Detroit	12	10	.545	1½
Indiana	11	10	.524	2
Milwaukee	6	14	.300	6½
Chicago	6	15	.286	7

Western Conference

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
San Antonio	18	5	.783	—
Dallas	15	9	.625	3½
Houston	10	12	.455	7½
Memphis	6	15	.375	9½
New Orleans	2	19	.095	15

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Seattle	14	4	.818	—
Minnesota	14	8	.636	4
Denver	13	9	.591	5
Portland	10	11	.476	7½
Utah	10	13	.435	8½

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Phoenix	19	3	.864	—
Sacramento	15	7	.682	4
L.A. Lakers	13	9	.591	6
L.A. Clippers	11	10	.524	7½
Golden State	7	15	.318	12

Thursday's games

Detroit 81, Cleveland 69
Chicago 85, Milwaukee 77
L.A. Lakers 115, Sacramento 99

Friday's games

Toronto at Indiana
New York at Philadelphia
Utah at Boston
Denver at Atlanta
Denver at Miami
New Jersey at Memphis
San Antonio at New Orleans
L.A. Clippers at Minnesota
Golden State at Houston
Phoenix at Seattle
Washington at L.A. Lakers

Saturday's games

Denver at Orlando
Houston at Charlotte
Boston at Cleveland
Portland at Detroit
Indiana at Chicago
Philadelphia at Milwaukee
Atlanta at Dallas
Golden State at San Antonio
Washington at Phoenix

Sunday's games

New Jersey at Toronto
Utah at New York
Orlando at Miami
New Orleans at Sacramento
Memphis at L.A. Clippers

Thursday
Pistons 81, Cavaliers 69

CLEVELAND — Gooden 9-14 0-0 18, James 4-21 3-5 11, Ilgauskas 4-9 4-4 12, Newble 1-6 0-0 2, McInnis 5-13 2-2 14, Williams 1-2 0-0 2, Varejao 2-3 2-4 6, Snow 0-0 0-0 0, Harris 0-4 2-2 2, Hoip 1-2 0-0 2, Wagner 0-5 0-0 0. Totals 27-78 13-17 69.

DETROIT — Prince 2-8 3-4 7, R.Wallace 6-10 0-1 13, B.Wallace 4-11 2-4 10, Billups 6-15 2-2 16, Hamilton 7-17 7-7 21, Dupree 0-0 0-0 0, McDyess 3-4 4-4 10, L.Hunter 1-6 2-2 4, Ham 0-0 0-0 0, Jenkins 0-0 0-0 0, Milicic 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 29-71 20-24 81.

Cleveland	**23**	**18**	**6**	**22—69**
Detroit	**19**	**12**	**25**	**25—81**

Three-Point Goals—Cleveland 2-10 (McInnis 2-3, Gooden 0-1, Harris 0-1, James 0-2, Wagner 0-3), Detroit 3-7 (Billups 2-3, R.Wallace 1-2, Prince 0-1, L.Hunter 0-1). Fouled out—None. Rebounds—Cleveland 50 (Gooden 10), Detroit 51 (B.Wallace 15). Assists—Cleveland 12 (James 7), Detroit 16 (Billups 6). Total fouls—Cleveland 21, Detroit 17. A—22,076 (22,076).

Bulls 85, Bucks 77

MILWAUKEE — J.Smith 6-11 0-0 12, Mason 5-13 5-8 15, Gadzuric 1-3 0-0 2, Redd 10-22 1-3 22, M.Williams 3-11 0-0 6, Pachulia 1-4 3-3 5, James 3-6 0-0 7, Fizer 1-7 0-0 2, Gill 3-8 0-0 6. Totals 33-85 9-14 77.

CHICAGO — Deng 4-8 1-2 9, Davis 3-4 0-0 6, Curry 8-15 2-2 18, Hinrich 10-22 6-8 28, Duhon 2-5 0-0 4, Gordon 3-7 1-2 8, Chandler 1-2 4-8 6, Nocioni 3-5 0-0 6, Griffin 0-0 0-0 0, Piatkowski 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 34-69 14-22 85.

Milwaukee	**24**	**17**	**16**	**20—77**
Chicago	**27**	**23**	**19**	**16—85**

Three-Point Goals—Milwaukee 2-5 (James 1-1, Redd 1-4, Gill 0-1), Chicago 3-15 (Hinrich 2-8, Gordon 1-2, Curry 0-1, Nocioni 0-1, Deng 0-1, Duhon 0-1, Piatkowski 0-1). Fouled out—None. Rebounds—Milwaukee 46 (J.Smith 11), Chicago 54 (Chandler 10). Assists—Milwaukee 18 (M.Williams 5), Chicago 19 (Hinrich 8). Total fouls—Milwaukee 22, Chicago 18. Technicals—Chicago Defensive Three Second. A—14,403 (21,711).

Lakers 115, Kings 99

L.A. LAKERS — Butler 3-7 2-2 8, Odom 11-16 0-0 22, Mihm 4-6 0-0 8, Bryant 10-17 8-10 31, Atkins 5-9 0-0 11, Divac 0-1 0-0 0, Brown 6-9 1-2 15, Jones 3-5 0-0 8, Cook 4-10 0-0 12, Walton 0-0 0-0 0, Medvedenko 0-3 0-0 0, Vujacic 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 46-83 11-14 115.

SACRAMENTO — Stojakovic 6-14 2-2 16, Webber 10-18 0-0 20, Miller 3-8 0-0 6, Christie 3-10 0-1 6, Bibby 7-15 2-3 17, Songaila 2-6 2-4 6, Jackson 6-14 2-2 20, Ostertag 0-0 0-0 0, Barnes 1-3 0-0 2, Evans 0-0 3-4 3, Daniels 1-2 0-0 2, Martin 0-0 1-2 1. Totals 41-90 12-18 99.

L.A. Lakers	**27**	**28**	**37**	**23—115**
Sacramento	**25**	**24**	**22**	**28— 99**

Three-Point Goals—L.A. Lakers 12-26 (Cook 4-7, Bryant 3-8, Jones 2-3, Brown 2-3, Atkins 1-4, Odom 0-1), Sacramento 5-17 (Jackson 2-4, Stojakovic 2-7, Bibby 1-4, Christie 0-2). Fouled out—None. Rebounds—L.A. Lakers 45 (Mihm 8), Sacramento 50 (Songaila 10). Assists—L.A. Lakers 26 (Bryant 12), Sacramento 24 (Christie 7). Total fouls—L.A. Lakers 19, Sacramento 17. A—17,317 (17,317).

NBA calendar

Jan. 5 — 10-day contracts may be signed.
Jan. 10 — All player contracts guaranteed for rest of the season.
Feb. 18-20 — All-Star weekend, Denver.
Feb. 24 — Trading deadline, 3 p.m. EST.
April 20 — Regular season ends.
April 23 — Playoffs begin.
June 7-10 — NBA predraft camp, Chicago.
June 9 — Earliest possible NBA Finals start date.
June 21 — Early entry draft withdrawal deadline.
June 23 — Latest possible NBA Finals end date.
June 28 — NBA Draft, New York.

Pats' Vinatieri all but automatic

New England kicker has won two Super Bowls, made 21 straight field goal attempts

BY HOWARD ULMAN
The Associated Press

FOXBORO, Mass. — The only way to stop Adam Vinatieri from making field goals might be to keep him from kicking them.

And that approach doesn't work either because the New England Patriots score touchdowns instead.

The kicker whose field goals won two Super Bowls has failed just once in 29 attempts this season and that came from 47 yards. He hasn't tried one in the last two games, but the Patriots won both — 42-15 in Cleveland and 35-28 against Cincinnati.

"It's nice to be on the field as often as possible," Vinatieri said Thursday, "And if they're all extra points, I'm happy with that, as long as we're winning."

It's just not as exciting as when the cool Vinatieri lines up — in bright sun or snow-filled gloom, under a roof or a cloudless sky — and drives field goals between the uprights in the biggest games.

"He's a guy that we count on for a lot of stuff no matter what the temperature is, what the field condition is," offensive tackle Matt Light said.

"It's ridiculous the stuff this guy kicks in and he's unfazed by it."

In the AFC divisional playoffs against the Oakland Raiders on Jan. 19, 2002, Vinatieri kicked a 45-yard field goal through falling flakes to force overtime and a 23-yarder to win 16-13. Two weeks later, in the Superdome in New Orleans, his 48-yarder on the last play gave the Patriots a 20-17 Super Bowl victory over the St. Louis Rams.

AP

New England Patriots' Adam Vinatieri, right, celebrates his game-winning field goal with teammates Ken Walter (13) and Christian Fauria (88) in the final seconds of Super Bowl XXXVIII at Reliant Stadium in Houston, on this Feb. 1, 2004. The Patriots beat the Panthers 32-29. Vinatieri also made the game-winning kick in Super Bowl XXXVI.

In last season's playoffs, he went 5-for-5 in a 24-14 victory over Indianapolis, then broke a tie against Tennessee with 4:06 left with a 46-yarder that gave the Patriots a 17-14 win. In the Super Bowl, his 41-yard kick with 4 seconds left gave New England a 32-29 victory over Carolina.

"He's come up with some dandies," Light said. "It doesn't matter really where we are on the field. If they're sending him out there, I feel confident."

Now the nine-year veteran, whose kickoffs also have improved, feels much better physically after dealing with back problems last season when he went 25-for-34 and 7-for-10 in the postseason.

The difference "is night and day," he said. "The body feels great and I've been having a fairly decent year because of it."

How about fairly amazing? Vinatieri made his first seven field-goal attempts before missing on his second kick of the game on Oct. 19 in a 24-10 victory over Miami, where New England plays on Monday night.

Since then, he's made 21 straight — four short of the team record he set in 1996-97 — although none have been game-winners because the Patriots (12-1) have been so dominant. He hasn't tried a field goal since he went 3-for-3 on a rainy Oct. 28 in a 24-3 win over Baltimore but he still leads the NFL in scoring.

"He has made some tough kicks," New England coach Bill Belichick said. "The Baltimore game was a pretty tough kicking situation. We have seen him make them in the past."

He could start making them again Monday night if the offense stalls. One of them actually might win a game, a feat he's accomplished nine times the past three seasons. Four of them came in the Patriots' six playoff games.

"The Dolphins play real good defense, so you never know," Vinatieri said. "You might be on the field kicking a lot of field goals. So you always have to be prepared. You never know when your time will be called."

Mike Vanderjagt of Indianapolis went 37-for-37 last season, the best single-season performance in NFL history. Olindo Mare, who will kick for Miami on Monday night, holds the league record of 39 total field goals in a season.

Vinatieri needs a big finish to challenge that.

"He's one of the best kickers in the league," Patriots tight end Christian Fauria said. "Our ideal is not to have him out there that much anyway. We like to score touchdowns."

But if the Patriots fall short, Vinatieri probably won't.

"The confidence level has been pretty good," he said. "Some years you get five or six game-winners and other times you go a whole year without maybe any. But we still have three games left and the postseason."

William & Mary quarterback Campbell wins Payton Award

The Associated Press

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — William & Mary quarterback Lang Campbell won the Walter Payton Award on Thursday night as the top offensive player in Division I-AA.

Campbell received 40 first-place votes and 315 points from a panel of Division I-AA sports information directors and media.

Sam Houston State quarterback Dustin Long finished second with 17 first-place votes and 185 points. Appalachian State wide receiver DaVon Powlkes finished third with eight first-place votes and 151 points.

Campbell, the Atlantic 10 offensive player of the year, threw for 3,037 yards and 21 touchdowns, with just one interception, during the regular season. He also ran for 201 yards and seven touchdowns.

He led William & Mary to a share of the Atlantic 10 title with a 9-2 regular season record, but the Tribe lost to James Madison in the semifinals of the Division I-AA tournament.

James Madison plays Montana for the Division I-AA championship Friday in Chattanooga.

Meanwhile, Southern Illinois coach Jerry Kill won the Eddie Robinson Award as the I-AA coach of the year. In his fourth season, Kill led the Salukis to a 10-2 record and a Gateway Conference championship, posting a perfect 7-0 league mark.

College football briefs

Cal Poly linebacker Jordan Beck won the Buck Buchanan Award as the top defensive player in I-AA. The 6-foot-2, 231-pound senior finished the season with 135 tackles, 18.5 tackles for loss, 5.5 sacks and six forced fumbles.

Former Nebraska coach Solich hired by Ohio University

ATHENS, Ohio — Former Nebraska coach Frank Solich was introduced as Ohio's new football coach Thursday, returning to the state where he grew up and promising to rebuild a program that has gone 11-35 over the past four seasons.

"It's great to be back in the game, and it's great to be back in the game at Ohio University," said Solich, who has been out of football since being fired at Nebraska a year ago after going 58-19 over six seasons.

Solich signed a multiyear deal with a base salary of $240,000.

Solich had replaced Tom Osborne, who retired from Nebraska in 1997 after winning three national championships in four seasons.

Osborne, now a U.S. congressman, was 49-2 in those final four seasons, leaving Solich with an almost impossible task of maintaining that success.

AP

William & Mary quarterback Lang Campbell, who was recognized as the top offensive player in Division I-AA on Thursday night, threw for 3,037 yards and 21 touchdowns, with just one interception, during the regular season. He also ran for 201 yards and seven touchdowns.

Solich, an assistant under Osborne from 1979-97, led the Cornhuskers to the national championship game in the 2002 Rose Bowl, where they lost 37-14 to Miami.

Nebraska was only 7-7 the next year, the school's first non-winning season since 1961. Solich was dismissed the next season despite going 9-3. Assistant Bo Pelini then coached the Cornhuskers to a 17-3 win over Michigan State in the Alamo Bowl.

Solich's name has been mentioned for openings at more well-known schools, but he cited the enthusiasm by university officials, his familiarity with Ohio and the success of the Mid-American Conference as reasons why he accepted the job.

"It's obvious to me ... that the MAC conference produces some great football teams and great football players," he said.

Solich takes over a program that went including 4-7 this year under coach Brian Knorr, who was fired Nov. 18. The Bobcats have had only two winning seasons since 1982.

Mississippi State extends Croom's contract through '08

STARKVILLE, Miss. — Sylvester Croom is under contract with Mississippi State through 2008.

Croom, the first black head football coach in Southeastern Conference history, agreed to a one-year extension, the school announced Wednesday.

Croom signed a four-year deal when he was hired last December.

The Bulldogs finished 3-8 this season, 2-6 in the SEC. An upset of then-nationally ranked Florida was the high point of Croom's first season.

A year ago, Croom inherited a Mississippi State program in the midst of an NCAA investigation for recruiting violations between 1998 and 2002.

The NCAA placed the Bulldogs' program on probation for four years, stripped it of eight scholarships over two years and banned Mississippi State from this postseason.

Athletic director Larry Templeton said that for every year the program is under sanctions, Croom will receive an extra year on top of the state-maximum four-year contract he signed 12 months ago.

That verbal agreement would keep him under contract through the 2011 season.

No charges filed against Cal receiver David Gray

SAN FRANCISCO — The San Francisco Police Department decided to drop weapons charges against California receiver David Gray, who was arrested last week after a fight outside a nightclub.

"We're pleased that when the police looked further into the incident, they chose to discharge David's case," Golden Bears coach Jeff Tedford said Thursday. "From what we knew of the circumstances, that's the outcome we always had expected. Hopefully now, David and the team can put this unpleasant experience behind us."

On second thought ...

Giants mortgaged the future to get Manning while letting Steelers steal Roethlisberger

BY TOM CANAVAN
The Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Some eight months ago, the New York Giants were patting themselves on the back after engineering a draft-day trade to get Eli Manning.

No one seemed to care that the Giants had mortgaged the franchise in the deal with San Diego for the No. 1 overall pick.

"I think it's a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get somebody you feel that strongly about," general manager Ernie Accorsi said after sending the rights to quarterback Philip Rivers (the fourth pick overall), a first-round pick next year and two other draft choices to the Chargers for the rights to Manning.

It was a deal everyone liked. New coach Tom Coughlin and the Giants supposedly got a great quarterback for the future. Manning also got his wish, which was not to play for the Chargers.

The other offshoot was that it left Ben Roethlisberger on the board and allowed the Pittsburgh Steelers to take him with the 11th choice overall.

With the NFL regular season winding down, the deal of the century isn't looking very good, especially with Manning and the Giants (5-8) preparing to meet Roethlisberger and the Steelers (12-1) at Giants Stadium on Saturday afternoon.

The Giants have lost six games in a row and seven of eight in seeing their once promising playoff hopes take a nosedive. They could be eliminated this weekend with a loss and victories by two of three teams (Minnesota, Carolina, St. Louis).

Manning, who replaced two-time MVP Kurt Warner at quarterback after the ninth game of the season, is winless in four starts. His last two starts have been pathetic. The brother of NFL co-MVP Peyton Manning of Indianapolis has hit 16 of 43 passes for 140 yards with two interceptions. He has led New York to one touchdown in 44 offensive series since becoming a starter.

The story is much more positive in Pittsburgh and San Diego.

Roethlisberger has not lost a game since becoming the starter on Sept. 26 against Miami.

Pittsburgh's current 11-game winning streak is one shy of a team record. A 13-1 record would be the Steelers' best. It would also move Bill Cowher's team closer to a first-round playoff bye.

The Chargers (10-3) have been one of the NFL's biggest surprises.

With Manning not waiting in the wings, San Diego quarterback Drew Brees has responded with 23 touchdown passes and a 102.7 quarterback rating, which is second in the AFC behind Peyton Manning and just ahead of Roethlisberger's 97.6.

Roethlisberger, who many thought would be taken by the Giants on draft day, has had the benefit of playing for a team that has an outstanding offensive line, two strong running backs, three good receivers and one of the league's top-ranked defenses.

Manning has played behind a weak offensive line, with banged-up receivers, an underutilized weapon in tight end Jeremy Shockey and an overused halfback in Tiki Barber. The combination helps explain his 33.8 quarterback rating, the lowest among passers with 100 attempts.

In 20/20 hindsight, it might be worth asking: Did the Giants make the wrong move eight months ago? Coughlin said his opinion of Manning has not changed one iota.

Roethlisberger gave a cryptic answer when asked if the draft order of quarterbacks might be different now.

"I don't know," said Roethlisberger, who is 164-for-248 for 2,084 yards and 14 touchdowns, with eight interceptions. "You'd have to ask Eli if he'd go to San Diego or not."

Manning is smart enough not to second-guess himself, or his family, which is headed by former New Orleans Saints quarterback Archie Manning. They advised him to spurn San Diego.

The younger Manning knows winning is what determines the value of a quarterback. Roethlisberger is doing that now, and Manning isn't.

AP

New York Giants rookie quarterback Eli Manning is flattened during a loss to Philadelphia.

"You have to try to take care of yourself, and right now, I am just trying to get better and trying to improve this offense and make plays when they are there," Manning said. "That is my concern right now and that is what I am trying to deal with."

Manning's recent problems have been compounded playing against three of the league's top defenses, Philadelphia, Washington and Baltimore. Going against the Steelers will be the latest test in his professional education.

"I think Eli is going to be a very good quarterback in this league from what I see," Steelers coach Bill Cowher said. "I think that if you give the kid time and give him some experience, I don't think there's any question that he is going to have success in this league."

Redskins, 49ers are teams on the slide

BY GREG BEACHAM
The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — A few days ago, coach Dennis Erickson honestly didn't know whether he would be on the San Francisco 49ers' sideline this weekend.

Usually, he spends game days only wishing he was someplace else.

It's hard to say how Erickson's flirtation with Mississippi affected the 49ers in their preparations for Saturday's game against the Washington Redskins, but Erickson must have figured it couldn't make their 2-11 season much worse.

San Francisco's undermanned roster has been beset by injuries and infighting, and Erickson's interview with Ole Miss on Tuesday night was just the latest in a long list of distractions for players and coaches.

"I just felt that it (Mississippi) wasn't the right situation for me," Erickson said. "I feel like I want to finish this thing, if we have that opportunity. I would like to see what we decide we're going to do when it is all over with at the end of the season."

The 49ers need at least one victory in their final three games to avoid matching the worst record in franchise history. That might be difficult to get, even against the low-scoring Redskins (4-9), whose season has been nearly as disappointing.

There are plenty of similarities in the clubs' struggles this season: bad offenses, poor discipline, injuries and rosters somewhat ill-fitted to the coaching staffs' desires.

There's also one big difference: With owner Dan Snyder and coach Joe Gibbs in charge in Washington, at least the Redskins have the deep pockets and savvy leadership on the field to give their fans some hope — unless you believe Gibbs' own assessment of his first year back in charge.

"I have no clue. I don't have an idea," Gibbs said when asked if he could restore the Redskins' glory days. "I'd like to do something good for the franchise and help the franchise get back to winning football games, but there are no givens in this sport. I might go through a lot of lumps and a lot of adversity."

Further polishing his Lou Holtz impersonation, Gibbs also said of the woeful 49ers: "I watch them on film, and I think they are certainly a team that can easily, easily beat us."

It's safe to say Washington fans have more confidence in their leadership team than the West Coast faithful watching the Niners' steady decline under the stewardship of owner John York, who now seems to be searching for a cost-effective way to make Erickson into the fall guy for the underachieving team.

Carolina looks to turn tide vs. Atlanta

BY CHARLES ODUM
The Associated Press

ATLANTA — For a team still below .500 this season and woefully below .500 in its series with division rival Atlanta, the Carolina Panthers bring substantial momentum and confidence to the Georgia Dome for Saturday night's game.

The Falcons have won 11 of the last 13 games in the series and hold an overall 13-6 lead in the series, including a 27-10 victory in Charlotte on Oct. 3. The Falcons are looking for their fifth sweep in seven years.

"Every team has somebody that they struggle with," Carolina defensive coordinator Mike Trgovac said. "Until we put this Atlanta thing to rest, everyone is going to talk about that to us."

The Panthers are painfully aware they have only one victory in nine visits to Atlanta, but they are bolstered by a five-game winning streak. At 6-7, they are back in the NFC wild-card race.

Carolina coach John Fox found one way to put a positive spin on the team's poor history at the Georgia Dome.

"I know we're undefeated there on Saturday night," Fox said.

The Falcons (10-3) clinched the NFC South title with last week's 35-10 victory over Oakland, but coach Jim Mora refused to concede Craolina has more at stake.

"No, heck no, we've got a ton riding on this game," Mora said. "They're trying to get in the playoffs. We're trying to get a first-round bye. We're both fighting and kicking and scratching. This game is very important to both teams, and we both realize that.

"If you said that both teams were 3-10, it would still be a battle out there. It's two teams that I think really enjoy playing against each other. There's a little something to it, and it's a national TV game. Night games are always a little bit different."

The Falcons will look different on offense. They will be without starting fullback Justin Griffith the rest of the season and without backup tailback T.J. Duckett for at least one week.

Duckett had arthroscopic knee surgery Tuesday after scoring a team-record four TDs against Oakland. Griffith broke an ankle in the game.

The Falcons signed veteran Fred McCrary as the backup to new starting fullback Stanley Pritchett, who already had one start in a fill-in role this year. Rookie tailback Jason White was promoted from the practice squad to play behind starter Warrick Dunn.

With all the focus on the Falcons' running backs this week, it has not escaped Carolina's attention that quarterback Michael Vick is Atlanta's leading rusher.

"Their running game, even though they're going to miss one big part of it, they still have two major parts of it who can get it done," Carolina defensive tackle Brentson Buckner said. "It's a three-headed monster they have. Even though Duckett plays a big part of what they like to do and they'll miss him, you can't take nothing away from Dunn. Even though he's small in stature, he can still pound it up in there and he's got the speed to take it the distance."

Vick has 821 yards rushing. Dunn has 788 and seven touchdowns.

Carolina defensive end Mike Rucker said momentum generated by the Panthers' winning streak will overshadow the lack of success against the Falcons.

"Different times, different teams, different situations," Rucker said. "This is a unique situation where we're going and the way they are. It's going to be a great challenge. ... They're a good football team and we're going down there with some confidence."

While Vick gives Atlanta a quarterback with unusual skills, Mora says he worries about Carolina's 6-foot-6, 283-pound defensive end Julius Peppers lining up at wide receiver.

"He's so unique because he's so tall and so strong and so athletic," Mora said. "I'm just hoping they don't put him out there. But if they do, we've got a plan and we try to get a bigger guy out there who's athletic."

KRT

New York Jets running back Curtis Martin (28) ranks second in the AFC in rushing with 1,377 yards. He has also scored 12 touchdowns.

Jets tagged with label of bullying weaklings

BY DAVE GOLDBERG
The Associated Press

If the New York Jets were in the NFC, they probably would have clinched a playoff berth.

Instead, they still have a fight on their hands as they host Seattle, which has won two fewer games, but leads the NFC West.

As befitting the difference between the conferences, the Jets are favored by six points even though Chad Pennington is playing with an injured throwing shoulder. It showed last week in Pittsburgh, where he threw three interceptions in what might have been his worst game since he became a starter.

The Jets are 9-4 and lead the wild-card chase in the AFC. But they've lost to the best teams they've played: New England, Baltimore and Pittsburgh, as well as to streaking Buffalo.

"Against good teams we don't do anything," running back LaMont Jordan said. "People around here might not like me saying that, but that's just the truth. Against good teams, against winning teams, against good defenses we haven't done a thing."

Is Seattle good?

Its defense is certainly spotty, although Michael Boulware intercepted a pass in the end zone to help seal a 27-23 win in Minnesota last week. The Seahawks got lucky on that one — the pass was thrown by wide receiver Randy Moss, not quarterback Daunte Culpepper.

They could get lucky again. Giants Stadium is usually windy this time of year, which could accentuate Pennington's shoulder problems.

On conference difference … **JETS, 24-20.**

Baltimore (plus 8) at Indianapolis: Tony Dungy wants Peyton Manning to get the TD pass record out of the way so the Colts can concentrate on the playoffs. Not that easy against the Ravens. … **COLTS, 27-23.**

Carolina (plus 3½) at Atlanta (Saturday): The Panthers, have won five straight to put themselves in position for an NFC wild-card spot. They are 1-8 at the Georgia Dome, but streaks end. … **PANTHERS, 20-19.**

New England (minus 9½) at Miami (Monday): Only two of the Dolphins' 11 losses are by more than 10 points, one of them by 14 in Foxboro. Make it three. … **PATRIOTS, 20-7.**

Minnesota (minus 3) at Detroit: The only thing predictable about the Vikings is that they lose late in the season. … **LIONS, 22-20.**

Jacksonville (plus 3½) at Green Bay: "We should feel good about this win, but we're not good enough to feel that good," Brett Favre said after the Packers edged Detroit last week. They're good enough for Jacksonville, though. … **PACKERS, 16-14.**

Pittsburgh (minus 10) at New York Giants (Saturday): The fans are all over the Giants for trading draft picks for Eli when Ben was available. … **STEELERS, 27-2.**

Dallas (plus 12½) at Philadelphia: The Eagles clinch home-field advantage in the NFC playoffs. … **EAGLES, 33-17.**

San Diego (minus 10) at Cleveland: The streak goes on. … **CHARGERS, 31-10.**

Buffalo (minus 1½) at Cincinnati: Jon Kitna is a more than capable stand-in for Carson Palmer. But the Bills are hot and can run. … **BILLS, 31-23.**

St. Louis (minus 3) at Arizona: Chris Chandler won't throw six interceptions, but … **CARDINALS, 20-17.**

Washington (minus 4) at San Francisco: The Redskins aren't the Cardinals. … **REDSKINS, 20-3.**

Denver (plus 1) at Kansas City: With the Chiefs' offense, one Jake Plummer mistake could kill Denver's playoff hopes. He'll make at least two. … **CHIEFS, 27-24.**

New Orleans (plus 7½) at Tampa Bay: Both teams should be out of the playoffs. But only the loser is. … **BUCS, 28-23.**

Houston (plus 1) at Chicago: The AFC factor again. … **TEXANS, 18-15.**

Tennessee (plus 2½) at Oakland: Billy Volek isn't bad. … **RAIDERS, 31-30.**

Last week: 5-11 (spread), 12-4 (straight up).

Season: 97-107-4 (spread), 137-71 (straight up).

E. Smith wants to keep running

Cardinals RB has 'no problem playing next year'

The Associated Press

TEMPE, Ariz. — Fifteen seasons may not be not enough for Emmitt Smith.

The NFL's most prolific ball carrier sounds as if he would like to come back for a 16th, either with the Arizona Cardinals or another team.

NFL briefs

"I don't have no problem playing next year," he said after Thursday's practice.

Smith stopped just short of saying he will definitely come back.

"I'm not totally happy with the I way I performed in terms of the success of the team and all," he said. "But I wanted to make a contribution, and I feel like I have made a contribution, and I think I've got a lot in me to make more contributions to this team or wherever it may be if I choose to continue on."

The 35-year-old running back has rushed for 732 yards on 202 carries, an average of 3.6 yards per carry, and has nine touchdowns. A sore big left toe kept him out of one game, and his carries have dwindled in the three others because Arizona fell behind early during a four-game losing streak.

He needs almost 100 yards in each of the next three games to reach 1,000.

Coach Dennis Green, who has said he thought this was Smith's final season, wanted nothing to do with the subject of the running back's future on Thursday.

"You know what? I haven't thought about anything except the Rams right now," said Green, whose 4-9 team plays St. Louis on Sunday. "We've got three games to go, and I'm focused on the first game."

Smith, the NFL's career rushing leader with 18,150 yards, is in the last year of a two-year, $7.5 million contract he signed with the Cardinals after leaving Dallas. Injuries shortened his 2003 season, then the Cardinals hired Green, who installed Smith as the starter.

"I've enjoyed my stay here with Dennis," Smith said. "He's given me an opportunity to get back on the football field and showcase my talent, whereas earlier this year there was a chance I was going to be a backup. He saw fit to give me a chance to come out here and do my job again and be the No. 1 guy. I can't be anything but grateful and thankful for a man to give me the opportunity to do that."

NFL injury update

Injuries to prominent NFL players, followed by team's prognosis.
Bills: OL Mike Williams (knee) probable.
Broncos: DL Luther Elliss (herniated disc) out for season.

Steelers WR Burress out; RB Staley doubtful

PITTSBURGH — Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver Plaxico Burress will sit out Saturday's game against the New York Giants, missing his fourth consecutive game because of a sore hamstring.

Burress, Pittsburgh's most reliable downfield receiver, ran patterns in practice this week and was optimistic about playing. But he was downgraded from questionable to out Thursday after talking with trainer John Norwig.

"It's just a couple of things," Burress said. "When I'm running full speed and make a little move, I still feel it a little bit. So he said to me it would probably be best for me to sit out the game."

Burress thinks missing one more game should allow him to play Dec. 26 against the Ravens.

The Steelers (12-1), trying for a club-record 12th consecutive victory, also might be without running back Duce Staley (hamstring), who missed practice Wednesday and Thursday. He's listed as doubtful, meaning there is only a 25-percent chance he will play.

Kansas City RB Johnson finally getting first start

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — It's been a long and often painful trek for Larry Johnson, Kansas City's controversial second-year running back.

But here he is, ready to make his first NFL start Sunday against the Denver Broncos. It's a promotion no one can say he hasn't earned.

Coming off the bench the past two games, Johnson had two 100-yard rushing outings. His touchdowns runs of 46 and 41 yards against Tennessee on Monday night marked the first time in Chiefs history a back scored on two runs of 40 yards or more in one game.

"I don't think starting has really hit me yet until I actually get there and be the first one out there," Johnson said Thursday.

Johnson's run-ins with coach Dick Vermeil are well known.

Earlier this year Vermeil said it was time for Johnson to "take the diapers off," then later apologized. Another time, Johnson lashed out at Vermeil, saying the coach didn't even want to draft him.

It was probably true — Vermeil had said he wanted to go for defensive help.

But now most of the problems seem to be in the past.

"He's got a smile on his face. He's getting the repetitions in practice and he's working hard," Vermeil said Thursday. "He's having fun. He feels good about himself. It's a great mood swing. It was going to happen sooner or later. He had to struggle going through the process and now maybe it's worthwhile."

Dallas QB Henson relegated to No. 3

BY JAIME ARON
The Associated Press

IRVING, Texas — Drew Henson lasted just two quarters as the starting quarterback of the Dallas Cowboys. Three weeks later, he's not even their top backup.

Henson was dropped to No. 3 this week, with Tony Romo moving up to No. 2. Romo has been with the team since the start of last season without taking a snap in a regular-season game.

Romo revealed the change Wednesday, soon after Parcells said he hadn't set the depth chart. During his daily news conference Thursday, Parcells insisted the new order was no big deal, saying he likes to flip-flop them every so often "to make sure they are staying in tune with what we're doing and preparing for the game like they're going to play in it."

Although Parcells said he "wouldn't make too much out of" this, he knows there are no minor issues when it comes to Dallas Cowboys quarterbacks.

Cowboys fans are always looking for someone to carry on the tradition of Don Meredith, Roger Staubach and Troy Aikman. Henson is supposed to be next in line and he seemed to be coming along well. He spent the first five games as the third-stringer, the next five games as the backup, then started the 11th game, albeit mainly because Vinny Testaverde was injured.

Parcells benched Henson at halftime of a tie game and went back to Testaverde. Henson remained the backup the past two games, but didn't throw a pass.

Now he's back where he began the season — and this time there are just three games left, which is why Parcells also is talking about sending him to NFL Europe for some game experience.

"It's not demotions or psychological warfare," Parcells said. "It really isn't."

Henson said he was disappointed to be "farther from being on the field," yet he remains hopeful he can get some snaps this season. Regardless, he considers his rookie year a good first step in his return to football after playing pro baseball the past three years.

"I know I've gotten better since the season started. I can feel that," he said. "As long as I'm making progress in my own mind, I take everything else for what it's worth and try not to read too much into it."

Before lifting the hopes of Cowboys fans, Henson was supposed to be the next great star for the New York Yankees. He endured his share of disappointments along the way to realizing it wasn't going to happen. Parcells is counting on that experience to help him deal with this — that is, if there's anything to be disappointed about.

Parcells said Romo hasn't necessarily passed Henson in the team's big-picture plans, he just wants to take a longer look at Romo, who made the team last year as an undrafted rookie from Division 1-AA Eastern Illinois.

The move gives Romo more work with the first-team offense during practices, in addition to being one injury away from playing in a game.

Temple coach Chaney has staying power

Heading into 1,000th game, he's still fiery after all these years

BY DAN GELSTON
The Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — John Chaney barely had time to savor one of his earliest games back in 1972 when an indignant fan abruptly remarked he wasn't too happy to have the rookie coach around.

"I told him, 'Well, I'm going to be here for a long time so you better get used to me,' " Chaney recalled with a laugh.

Sure enough, Chaney is still raising hell on the sidelines 32 years after his college coaching debut with Division II Cheyney State in suburban Philadelphia. Chaney eventually moved on to Temple, but not much else has changed for the Hall of Famer.

From threatening opposing coaches to giving a ref an earful in his loud, booming voice, to reaching out to another underprivileged kid, Chaney has remained steady as ever through 999 games.

Chaney still seems restless and cranky, and his nattily attire is usually in shambles after a game. As Chaney approaches his 1,000th career game, he knows his time on Temple sideline is nearing an end. But don't go planning that retirement party just yet.

"I would like to stay as long as I can, as long as my health is good and as long as the kids keep listening to me," said Chaney, who turns 73 in January.

When Chaney (711-288) coaches Temple against Princeton on Monday, he will become the 19th Division I coach to reach 1,000 games and the fifth active one, joining Lou Henson, Bob Knight, Eddie Sutton, Lute Olson and Mike Krzyzewski.

"I think it's a number that's really kind of inconceivable to me," said Saint Joseph's coach Phil Martelli, who is in his 10th season. "Like a lot of things about John Chaney, it's hard to put your hands around."

Chaney, whose deep, dark eyes seem fitting for a school whose mascot is an owl, was amazed he's lasted so long.

AP

After 999 games, Temple coach John Chaney has lost none of his competitive fire. Above, he shares some of that fire with Mardy Collins during a Dec. 11 game against Alabama.

"I've never given it any thought," Chaney said. "It surprised me when they told me I accomplished 700 wins."

Chaney said that, although the games tend to run together, it's the people, the experiences and the stories that stand out.

"I can't remember all of their names, but sooner or later it comes back to me," he said.

Soon, Chaney is off on another story, this one about cooking eggs for his players at Cheyney State because a flu epidemic had them quarantined. When Chaney tells how the eggs turned a Dr. Suess-like green, he bursts into a fit of uncontrollable cackling.

Chaney dabbled as player-coach toward the end of his career in the Eastern Basketball League, then started full time at Philadelphia's Sayre Junior High (1963-66) and Simon Gratz High (1966-72).

When Cheyney State came calling in 1972, Chaney was torn.

Chaney, though, was convinced he could affect more lives on the college level. Chaney had more concerns when he considered the Temple vacancy in 1982.

"I was very apprehensive," he said. "I was happy with where I was. I always believed that success comes when you're very happy with what you do."

Chaney had little to worry about after 10 season at Cheyney. He was 225-59 and won the NCAA Division II title in 1978 with the Wolves.

Chaney has experienced so much success that he has quite a list of prolific games to choose from for his most memorable.

His first game was a 68-58 loss to East Stroudsburg. His first victory came in the next game, on Dec. 5, 1972, an 82-67 defeat of Monmouth.

Chaney's favorite was Cheyney's 47-40 victory over Wisconsin-Green Bay in the 1978 Division II title game.

"Without question the national championship game at Cheyney in '78 stands out the most," he said. "And my first time here getting into the NCAAs stands out. How exciting it was for all the students."

After a losing record his first season at Temple, Chaney took the Owls to the NCAA tournament 17 times in 18 years. Before his arrival, the Owls had never played in consecutive tournaments.

The Owls have slipped the last three seasons, making the NIT.

This year's team is 3-5 and game No. 999 was a three-point loss against No. 6 Wake Forest. Though Temple still has non-conference games with Top 25 teams Maryland and Duke, Chaney believed the Owls can return to the tournament.

"If we continue to play like the way we have been playing against the top teams, if we get there, my team will be ready," he said.

No surprise there. Chaney considers himself a teacher first, educating his players on everything from the matchup zone to a history lesson on the greats of the game — all usually done in those famous 5:30 a.m. practices.

The ones who are willing to put up with the no-frills approach and a raspy trail of four-letter words have usually been rewarded.

Chaney has led the Owls 21 straight postseason appearances, including five appearances in the NCAA tournament regional finals (1988, 1991, 1993, 1999 and 2001).

Still, a Final Four berth remains the one void in his career.

"You only have to have lightning one time and I would like lightning one time," he said.

During practice, Chaney still takes the court, shouting tips and showing reminders of what made him the 1951 Philadelphia Public League player of the year.

"He's out there showing us how to make slides, how to protect the ball, how to guard him," guard Mardy Collins said. "He'll be dribbling and he'll tell someone to take the ball and usually he throws an elbow or something like that."

Chaney hears the grumbling gaining steam that he's too old to coach because the Owls have missed the tournament lately. But Chaney feels he still has something positive to offer.

And when he stops coaching?

"I need to find a way to play golf," he said. "I don't play golf. Maybe I'll learn how to play golf."

It's shooting troubles corrected, Oklahoma is OK

BY JIM O'CONNELL
The Associated Press

To say Oklahoma struggled with its shooting last season is an understatement. To say the Sooners have turned it around may be a bigger one.

Oklahoma shot 40.8 percent from the field in 2003-04, the Sooners' worst mark in 40 years.

Things have changed in a big way this season.

The Sooners (6-1) have shot better than 50 percent in six of their seven games, something they did only three times last season. They are shooting 51.4 percent for the season.

Coach Kelvin Sampson said there's no secret to the turnaround. All you need to do is look up front where Kevin Bookout has returned after missing the second half of last season following shoulder surgery and junior college star Taj Gray has emerged.

College notes

"Last season we were such an outside-outside team. You know teams are either inside-outside or outside-inside. Not us. We were freezing. We were outside the building," he said. "Having an inside attack helps everything. Basketball, and sports in general, is about balance. You have to have someone to draw the double-team and our shot selection has improved because we're getting better looks and our defense is better. You have to get some easy baskets and you get them from defense and offensive rebounds and we've improved in both areas."

Retired Bruins: UCLA is honoring Gail Goodrich at Pauley Pavilion this weekend by retiring his No. 25 jersey at halftime of the game against Michigan. The last time Wolverine fans saw Goodrich on a court, it wasn't a pleasant sight.

In the 1965 title game, the Bruins beat Michigan 91-80 and Goodrich scored 42 points, at the time a school and NCAA championship game record.

Security concerns: Jim Haney, the executive director of the National Association of Basketball Coaches, has sent a letter to about 1,000 college coaches urging them to review security plans at their arenas.

"Coming on the heels of the brawl in Detroit, we have to recognize that we're nearing the conference season where the intensity and emotions run higher," Haney said, referring to the melee in the stands involving members of the Indiana Pacers and Pistons fans.

"As a visitor, you've got to expect that you're going to be verbally assaulted, possibly have ice or other things thrown on you. How do you handle that? If a fight breaks out on court during a game, what will you do?"

Some situations cause more concern than others.

"I worry about my dad's protection more than I do our players," said Pat Knight, an assistant coach to his father, Bob, at Texas Tech. "Some of the things the people say who sit behind us are just unbelievable. I worry about him."

Bob Knight has a police escort in and out of the gym and on to the bus for every road game.

"He's so well known," Pat Knight said. "He's also known for his temperament. People try to get under his skin."

Empty seats: The year Arkansas opened Walton Arena, the fans turned out in record numbers with an average crowd of 20,134.

Since 1998, the average has dropped every season, falling to 14,792 in 2003-04. That was still enough to rank the Razorbacks 13th nationally, but it came in a season when the sellout streak ended after 334 games that stretched from 1977 to 2003 in both Barnhill Arena and Walton Arena.

The streak created a massive waiting list of people who wanted season tickets. When some became available last year, athletic director Frank Broyles said the school turned to the list, only to be disappointed.

"We had about 4,000 names on a waiting list, and some of them took (seats that had become available), but the rest decided they were going to wait until the team gets better," Broyles said.

Broyles says about 1,000 seats are unsold this year, all of them in the upper deck. There are still about 3,000 names on the waiting list, he said, with many waiting for lower-level seats to become available.

Broyles said he's optimistic that once play against Southeastern Conference teams starts, the arena will be sold out, "because this team's getting better and better."

Beltre, Mariners reach 5-year, $64M deal

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Prized free agent Adrian Beltre and the Seattle Mariners agreed to a $64 million, five-year deal Thursday, The Associated Press learned.

Beltre's contract is subject to him passing a physical, a person close to the third baseman said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The deal could be announced as early as Friday. Seattle did not comment on the agreement.

MLB briefs

A day earlier, the Mariners added another slugger by finalizing a $50 million, four-year contract with free-agent first baseman Richie Sexson.

Seattle finished a distant last in the AL West, going 63-99 for their worst record since 1983. The Mariners were last in the league with only 136 homers and 698 runs.

Beltre, 25, led the majors with 48 home runs for the Los Angeles Dodgers. He hit .334 with 121 RBIs, and finished second behind Barry Bonds in the NL MVP voting.

Beltre also improved on defense last season, committing only 10 errors.

The Dodgers wanted to keep Beltre and offered him salary arbitration. But Los Angeles recently gave itself some protection, signing free-agent Jeff Kent and saying that he could play third base, along with his usual spot at second.

"We're disappointed. It hurts," Dodgers General Manager Paul DePodesta said. "Obviously, we would have loved to have him back."

"I think all of us knew this certainly was a possibility. We feel like we stepped up and made a very competitive offer, actually tried to make it a compelling one by offering a sixth guaranteed year. Unfortunately for us, Adrian decided to go elsewhere."

Beltre made $5 million last season, and figured to cash in after a career year in which he led the Dodgers to the NL West division title and their first postseason spot since 1988.

AP

Adrian Beltre and the Seattle Mariners reportedly agreed to a $64 million, five-year deal on Thursday. Beltre must pass a physical first.

DePodesta said the Dodgers' six-year offer to Beltre and agent Scott Boras included an option for a seventh season.

When asked if the Dodgers were given a final say in the matter, DePodesta said: "Not in so many words. They didn't come back and say if you can do this, he's coming back."

"Scott did have a sense of urgency, we did try to step up to that. That really wasn't the forum. But then again, I'm not blaming Scott for that, either. Everything he did in this process was above board. There's no villain here," he said. "At the end of the day, Seattle stepped up and made a great offer. We had multiple meetings, face-to-face meetings."

Beltre became a free agent after the season, filing on the same day he had arthroscopic surgery to remove two large bone spurs from his left ankle.

Beltre made his major league debut in 1998 at 19. He had posted career highs of 23 home runs, 85 RBIs and a .290 batting average before breaking loose this season.

Ace Hudson traded to Braves

OAKLAND, Calif. — Tim Hudson was traded from the Oakland Athletics to Atlanta, a blockbuster deal Thursday that further bolstered the Braves' revamped rotation.

Los Angeles, Boston and the New York Yankees were rumored to be pursuing Hudson, but the Braves swooped in and got the Oakland ace for outfielder Charles Thomas and pitchers Juan Cruz and Dan Meyer.

With the A's facing yet another payroll crunch, general manager Billy Beane finally broke up his "Big Three" starting pitchers of Hudson, Mark Mulder and Barry Zito.

It was Atlanta's second big trade in a week. Last Saturday, the Braves acquired All-Star closer Dan Kolb from Milwaukee — a move that allowed them to move John Smoltz back into the rotation.

Moments after the trade was announced, the Braves unveiled another deal — they sent outfielder Eli Marrero and cash to Kansas City for pitcher Jorge Vasquez.

The Georgia-born Hudson joins a team that has won 13 straight division titles. The 29-year-old righty posted 81 wins from 2000-04, tied for the most in the AL over that span. He is 92-39 with a 3.30 ERA lifetime.

Hudson was 12-6 with a 3.53 ERA in 27 starts this season. He made the All-Star team for the second time, but did not pitch because of a strained left side that put him on the disabled list for a month.

Vasquez, 26, also made his major league debut last season, pitching in two games for Kansas City. He spent most of the year at Triple-A Wichita, going 4-5 with a 4.68 ERA and 18 saves.

Morales officially an Angel

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Highly touted Cuban prospect Kendry Morales is officially a member of the Anaheim Angels.

The Angels announced two weeks ago they had agreed to terms of a six-year contract with Morales, conditional upon the 21-year-old switch hitter receiving clearance from the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control.

That came Thursday, when Morales received a license from the OFAC, clearing him to work in the United States. He defected from Cuba in June, and now lives in the Dominican Republic.

The Angels added Morales to their 40-man roster and designated right-hander Bobby Jenks for assignment. Jenks, the Angels' fifth-round pick in 2000, only made three appearances for Triple-A Salt Lake last year before being shut down in June with elbow problems.

Morales plays first base, third base and the outfield. He was the first baseman and cleanup hitter for Cuba at the 2003 World Cup in Havana, and his grand slam helped the Cubans beat Taiwan 6-3 in the finals.

The Angels were able to sign Morales because a Cuban player who acquires residency in a third country is eligible for free agent status.

Santiago headed to Pittsburgh

PITTSBURGH — Benito Santiago was traded Thursday by the Kansas City Royals to the Pittsburgh Pirates, who have sought a veteran catcher since dealing Jason Kendall to Oakland last month.

The Royals get right-handed prospect Leo Nunez for Santiago, but also must pay about $1 million of Santiago's $2.15 million salary in the second season of his two-year contract.

The deal with Pittsburgh was first discussed during last weekend's winter meetings in Anaheim, Calif., but wasn't completed until Santiago took a physical in Pittsburgh this week.

Santiago, a five-time All-Star and three-time Gold Glove winner, hit .274 with six homers and 23 RBIs in 49 games in 2004, but didn't play after fracturing his left hand June 18 against Philadelphia.

The right-handed hitting Santiago is seventh in major league history with 1,911 games caught and will pass Al Lopez and Jim Sundberg if he catches at least 18 more games.

Martinez: 'I'm way over Schilling as a pitcher'

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Pedro Martinez says he told Red Sox management he didn't want to be in the shadow of fellow ace Curt Schilling. He also hopes his new team, the New York Mets, will sign his former Boston battery-mate, Jason Varitek.

In an interview with the Boston Herald, Martinez criticized the negotiating tactics of Red Sox officials, saying he repeatedly got mixed signals from team president Larry Lucchino, owner John Henry and General Manager Theo Epstein, whom he called "arrogant."

Martinez signed a four-year, $53 million contract with the Mets this week. He said he left the Red Sox after seven years partly because he didn't want to be second in the starting rotation behind Schilling, who was acquired last offseason and helped lead the team to its first World Series championship in 86 years.

Martinez

"I told [Henry], 'You want to sign me, get it done. Please force them to get it done. I'm willing to stay here. Negotiate with them. I just don't want to be under Schilling,' " Martinez said.

He also said he deserved a better deal than Schilling.

"Schilling is 38, I'm only 33," he said. "The fact that I had an off-year doesn't mean that I can be below Schilling. Still, with an off-year, I'm way over Schilling as a pitcher and I've pitched pretty much like Schilling the last few years, if you're going to talk about durability."

Red Sox officials did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

Asked what other free agents he thought Boston would sign, Martinez said "they'll be stupid not to do Varitek. Varitek is the next one gone. Theo's going to have the biggest problem with him."

Epstein has said signing Varitek is one of his offseason priorities. The catcher is reportedly seeking a five-year contract worth more than $50 million, with a no-trade clause.

"I hope he is gone," Martinez said of Varitek. "I hope 'Tek is on my team."

Asked whether that meant he wanted to get rid of current Mets catcher Mike Piazza, Martinez said, "I do want Piazza, too. Piazza is a good hitter. We can move him to first or somewhere. ... I want 'Tek. 'Tek is a good player, a good catcher."

He also said Epstein and Lucchino "weren't getting along in negotiations. Lucchino would say one thing and Theo would show up with another."

He said Epstein treated his agent, Fernando Cuza, poorly during negotiations.

"Theo got really arrogant on Fernando and I didn't appreciate it," Martinez said. "Theo believed that he had me and wasn't the nicest man communicating with Fernando."

He said Red Sox manager Terry Francona played little role in managing the team, taking his cues from the team's front office.

"Francona is subject to what they decide," Martinez said. "Francona had no say, like he didn't have any say in managing the team. He was manipulated from upstairs."

Asked for evidence to back that assertion, he said, "I was in the clubhouse, that's how I know."

SPORTS

Jets, Seahawks in need of win for shot at playoffs, Page 29

Big pitch for Big Unit

Yankees' deal would also involve Vazquez, Dodgers' Green

BY BEN WALKER
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — After so many missed tries, the New York Yankees might really have a trade for Randy Johnson.

The Arizona ace was on the verge of joining the Yankees in a three-team megadeal that also includes Shawn Green and Javier Vazquez, sources told The Associated Press on Thursday night.

Green would go from Los Angeles to Arizona, and Vazquez would move from the Yankees to the Dodgers in the trade that would put Johnson in Yankee pinstripes.

"It is going to happen," a source familiar with the negotiations said on the condition of anonymity. Another team source said the principals were in place for the trade to be completed.

There was no confirmation from any of the teams that a deal was finalized. And one source said it still could fall apart because so many players and clubs were involved.

Another element that could get in the way: With the Dodgers losing free agent Adrian Beltre to Seattle, they may not be so eager to trade away a power hitter.

Newsday and Fox Sports, which first reported the deal on their Web sites, said the other players were Dodgers pitchers Brad Penny and Yhency Brazoban, and Yankees top prospects Eric Duncan and Dioner Navarro.

"We're still in conversations with a lot of different clubs about a lot of different possibilities," Dodgers General Manager Paul DePodesta said earlier in the day. "We have talked about some three-way deals and some four-way deals. I don't know if it's going to happen or not."

Yankees owner George Steinbrenner has long coveted Johnson, still one of baseball's most dominating pitchers at 41. New York was not able to pry the Big Unit from the Diamondbacks last summer and called off trade talks with them two weeks ago, saying the price was too high.

But the Yankees and Arizona reopened discussions this week for the five-time Cy Young winner. Johnson has a no-trade clause, but had said he would accept a deal to the Yankees.

New York already has added free agent Carl Pavano to its rotation this offseason, aiming to improve a team that blew a 3-0 lead against Boston in the AL championship series. The Yankees also have reached a deal with Jaret Wright, while the Red Sox have signed David Wells but lost free agent Pedro Martinez.

Green also has a no-trade clause. The outfielder would go with Penny and Brazoban to Arizona while Navarro, a catcher, and Duncan, a third baseman, would go to the Dodgers.

Johnson had his best years with the Diamondbacks, winning the NL Cy Young Award his first four seasons with them. When Curt Schilling was traded to Arizona from Philadelphia, he and Johnson formed perhaps the most imposing righty-lefty combination the game has known.

Schilling and Johnson were co-MVPs of the 2001 World Series, when Arizona beat the Yankees in seven thrilling games.

Johnson underwent knee surgery during the 2003 season, but came back for what might have been his best year with the Diamondbacks in 2004.

On a team that lost 111 games, Johnson was second in the majors with a 2.60 ERA. He led the majors in strikeouts (290) for the ninth time and sixth time in the last seven years.

Johnson was 16-14, but 13-2 when the anemic Arizona offense scored more than two runs for him. Along the way, he pitched a perfect game against Atlanta.

Vazquez, 28, was 14-10 with a 4.91 ERA in his first season with the Yankees, and was picked for the American League All-Star team. He was 1-0 with a 9.53 ERA in three games in the postseason, and the Yankees always put a premium on October performances.

Green, 31, has a .282 career average, but dipped to .266 last season with 28 home and 86 RBIs.

Penny, 26, was traded from Florida to the Dodgers last July 30, but saw limited action for Los Angeles because of a problem in his right arm. He was 9-10 with a 3.15 ERA for both clubs.

Brazoban, 24, made his major league debut this season with Dodgers, going 6-2 with a 2.48 ERA.

Navarro also made his big league debut this year. He was considered, along with Duncan, among the top prospects in the Yankees' system.

Associated Press sports writers Bob Baum in Phoenix, Josh Dubow in San Francisco and John Nadel in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

Arizona Diamondbacks' Randy Johnson is reportedly the central figure in a three-team trade that would send him to the New York Yankees.

AP

The moves

- **Dodgers send outfielder Shawn Green, pitchers Brad Penny and Yhency Brazoban to Arizona Diamondbacks;**
- **Arizona would trade pitcher Randy Johnson to New York Yankees;**
- **New York Yankees would give pitcher Javier Vazquez, third baseman Eric Duncan, and catcher Dioner Navarro to L.A. Dodgers.**

Bryant, Lakers hand Kings worst home loss in nearly seven years

Page 26

Temple's Chaney not slowing down as he nears 1,000th Division I game

Page 30

NHL players association lashes out at league over latest rejection

Page 25