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STARS AND STRIPES®

Volume 72, No. 233A © SS 2014 MIDEAST EDITION SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 2014 stripes.com Free to Deployed Areas

Clampdown in Crimea

Ukraine says Russia tries to seize airports, base
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A man patrols in front of the airport Friday in Simferopol, Ukraine. Dozens of armed men in military uniforms with no markings were patrolling the area.
DARKO VOJINOVIC/AP

Senate stops Democrats' bill boosting veterans' benefits

BY ALAN FRAM
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A divided Senate on Thursday derailed Democratic legislation that would have provided $21 billion for medical, education and job-training benefits for the nation's veterans. The bill fell victim to election-year disputes over spending and fresh penalties against Iran.

Each party covets the allegiance of the country's 22 million veterans and their families, and each party blamed the other for turning the effort into a chess match aimed at forcing politically embarrassing votes.

Republicans used a procedural move to block the bill after Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., chided GOP lawmakers about their priorities.

"I personally, I have to say this honestly, have a hard time understanding how anyone could vote for tax breaks for billionaires, for millionaires, for large corporations and then say we don't have the resources to protect our veterans," said Sanders, the measure's chief author.

Democrats noted that more than two dozen veterans groups supported the legislation. But Republicans said they still favor helping veterans while also wanting to be prudent about federal spending.

"We're not going to be intimidated on this," said Sen. Jeff Sessions, of Alabama, top Republican on the Senate Budget Committee. "We're going to do the right things for the veterans of America."

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VA's time to resolve disability appeals increases dramatically
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QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I don't need a vacation. I don't need the relaxation. I just need the heat."

— Shannon Frauenholtz, of New Ulm, Minn., on this winter's colder-than-normal temperatures

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2. 'Scary' tattoo ban passed at popular beach for servicemembers in Japan
3. Lawmakers hold hearing on deadly 'Extortion 17' helicopter crash in Afghanistan
4. DOD voids some debts in LQA dispute
5. Navy civilian facing fraud charges for accepting Italy housing payments

COMING SOON

Lifestyle

Hard cider mounting a massive comeback

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WORLD

Ivan Sekretarev/AP

Soldiers sit atop a Russian armored personnel carrier near the town of Bakhchisarai, Ukraine, on Friday.

Ukraine: Russians seize airports, base

By Ivan Sekretarev
The Associated Press

SIMFEROPOL, Ukraine — Ukraine accused Russia of a "military invasion and occupation" on Friday, saying Russian troops have taken up positions around a coast guard base and two airports on its strategic Crimea peninsula.

Russia kept silent on those accusations but confirmed that armored vehicles from its Black Sea Fleet were moving around Crimea for "security" reasons as the crisis deepened between two of Europe's largest countries.

Any Russian military incursion in Crimea would dramatically raise the stakes in Ukraine's conflict, which saw pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych flee last weekend after three months of anti-government protests. Yanukovych vowed Friday at a news conference in Russia to "keep fighting for the future of Ukraine," though he called any military action "unacceptable."

> **'I can only describe this as a military invasion and occupation.'**
>
> **Arsen Avakov**
> Ukraine's newly named interior minister in a Facebook post

Moscow has vowed to protect Russian-speaking Ukrainians in Crimea, where it has a major naval base, and Ukraine and the West have warned Russia to stay away. Russia did not confirm its troops were involved in Friday's action in Crimea, which would be a major escalation.

In Kiev, Ukraine's parliament adopted a resolution demanding that Russia halt steps it says are aimed against Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and called for a U.N. Security Council meeting on the crisis.

"I can only describe this as a military invasion and occupation," Ukraine's newly named interior minister, Arsen Avakov, wrote in a Facebook post.

The chief of Ukraine's security council, Andriy Parubiy, seemed to strike a less strident tone later in the day, saying gunmen had tried to "seize" the airports in the Crimean cities of Simferopol and Sevastopol but insisting in comments to the Interfax news agency that "the airports are controlled by the law enforcement bodies of Ukraine."

Ukraine's State Border Guard Service also said about 30 Russian marines from Russia's Black Sea Fleet — which is based in Sevastopol — had taken up position outside the Ukrainian Coast Guard base in the area. It said the marines said they were there to prevent any weapons at the base from being seized by extremists.

AP journalists in Crimea spotted a convoy of nine Russian armored personnel carriers and a truck on a road between the port city of Sevastopol and the regional capital, Sinferopol. The Russian tricolor flags were painted on the vehicles, which were parked on the side of the road near the town of Bakhchisarai, apparently because one of them had mechanical problems.

Russia is supposed to notify Ukraine of any troop movements outside the naval base it maintains in Sevastopol under a lease agreement with Ukraine.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said movements of armored vehicles belonging to the Russian Black Sea Fleet were prompted by the need to ensure security of its base and didn't contradict the lease terms.

MIDEAST

Military leader says total pullout would mar Afghan security

By David S. Cloud
Tribune Washington Bureau

BRUSSELS — Security in Afghanistan would worsen steadily if all U.S. troops were withdrawn this year, a senior U.S. military official warned Thursday, two days after President Barack Obama ordered the Pentagon to begin contingency planning for such a pullout.

"I can't speculate what the outcome will be," the commander said in remarks to reporters traveling with Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel. "What I can tell you is Afghan forces aren't self-sustainable at the end of 2014, and over time, that obviously will have an impact in terms of the security environment."

He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was discussing military plans and assessments.

Hagel and European defense ministers wrapped up two days of meetings Thursday at NATO headquarters that focused on the pullout of all foreign forces at the end of this year if Afghanistan's government fails to sign agreements with the United States and NATO authorizing a foreign military presence after 2014.

Asked whether attacks could increase and the insurgency would gain strength next year without U.S. troops there, Hagel said: "Yes, one of the consequences could be an erosion of confidence. … Yes, there are always risks, there are always uncertainties."

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has refused to sign the bilateral security agreement that would allow U.S. troops to stay, but Obama said this week that Karzai's successor could do so. Afghanistan's presidential election is scheduled April 5.

Despite the international effort to build an Afghan army and police that could withstand the insurgency, the forces are plagued with illiteracy, drug use and desertions. They often fail to provide basic support to troops in the field, including pay, fuel and spare parts.

Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the top commander in Afghanistan, is proposing to keep about 10,000 U.S. troops, with 5,000 NATO and other international troops based in north and west of the country as part of a NATO mission, officials said.

Most of the troops would be assigned to train or advise Afghan units fighting a still-potent, Taliban-led insurgency, though some U.S. forces would conduct counterterrorism operations against al-Qaida and its affiliates. White House officials have explored leaving fewer U.S. troops, but no decisions have been made, officials said.

Current plans call for steadily withdrawing the 33,000 remaining U.S. troops after the April elections. Another 10,000 would rotate in by July. If Kabul agrees to let them stay, they would remain after Dec. 31. If not, they also would be withdrawn this year.

U.S. military officers in Kabul say the Afghan army, which has taken over responsibility for security in the vast majority of the country, has performed well. But the levels of insurgent attacks have stayed steady for the past two years, the senior military officer said, suggesting they could grow more intense if the U.S. withdraws.

The prospect of a complete U.S. pullout has raised concerns in the military and U.S. intelligence agencies that large parts of Afghanistan, especially in the south and east, once again could fall under Taliban control, increasing the likelihood that remnants of al-Qaida could again operate from its territory.

U.S. officials said last December that intelligence agencies had warned in a secret assessment that security would worsen sharply if the U.S. withdraws and that Kabul, the Afghan capital, could see sharply higher insurgent attacks within a year.

The intelligence agencies also warned that the U.S. ability to launch armed drones and other counterterrorism missions against al-Qaida and other extremist groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan could become more constrained as political opposition to such operations grows in both countries, officials said.

Charles Dharapak/AP

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Mich., listens in June to testimony on Capitol Hill in Washington by National Security Agency Gen. Keith B. Alexander.

Officials: Al-Qaida plots comeback in Afghanistan

By Kimberly Dozier
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Al-Qaida's Afghanistan leader is laying the groundwork to relaunch his war-shattered organization once the United States and international forces withdraw from the country, as they have warned they will do without a security agreement from the Afghan government, U.S. officials say.

Farouq al-Qahtani al-Qatari has been cementing local ties and bringing in small numbers of experienced militants to train a new generation of fighters, and U.S. military and intelligence officials say they have stepped up drone and jet missile strikes against him and his followers in the mountainous eastern provinces of Kunar and Nuristan. The objective is to keep him from restarting the large training camps that once drew hundreds of followers before the U.S.-led war began.

The officials say the counterterrorism campaign — a key reason the Obama administration agreed to keep any troops in Afghanistan after 2014 — could be jeopardized by the possibility of a total pullout.

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Rogers said the number of al-Qaida members in Afghanistan has risen but not much higher than as many as the several hundred or so the U.S. has identified in the past.

"I think most are waiting for the U.S. to fully pull out by 2014," he said.

The administration would like to leave up to 10,000 troops in Afghanistan after combat operations end on Dec. 31, to continue training Afghan forces and conduct counterterrorism missions. But without the agreement that would authorize international forces to stay in Afghanistan, President Barack Obama has threatened to pull all troops out, and NATO forces would follow suit. After talking to Afghan President Hamid Karzai this week, Obama ordered the Pentagon to begin planning for the so-called zero option.

U.S. military and intelligence officials say unless they can continue to fly drones and jets from at least one air base in Afghanistan — either Bagram in the north or Jalalabad in the east — al-Qahtani and his followers eventually could plan new attacks against U.S. targets, although experts do not consider him one of the most dangerous al-Qaida leaders.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss publicly the secret counterterrorism campaign or intelligence.

Administration officials have hoped that the U.S. eventually could wind down counterterrorism operations like drone strikes in the region after reducing the al-Qaida network, leaving local forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan to control the remnants.

But al-Qaida is not weakened enough yet, and U.S. officials have testified that the inexperienced Afghan forces aren't ready to take over the task unaided.

Pakistan party drops its blockade of NATO supply routes

By Tim Craig
The Washington Post

A major Pakistani political party announced Thursday that it was ending its blockade of NATO supply routes through the northern part of the country, capping a three-month protest over U.S. drone strikes on Pakistani soil.

In a statement, the Movement for Justice Party said it was halting the demonstration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province out of respect for the country's judiciary. On Tuesday, the Peshawar High Court ruled that the protest, which forced the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan to use safer transport routes, was unconstitutional.

The Movement for Justice Party, led by former cricket star Imran Khan, began the protest Nov. 24 after the United States conducted several drone strikes in northwest Pakistan.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif objected to the move, saying only the national government had the authority to block the routes. Last year, Pakistan's government signed an agreement with the United States allowing coalition forces to use Pakistani highways through 2015.

But Khan used his authority as the chief political figure in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to rally local opposition to U.S. drone policy. Movement for Justice Party workers established 24-hour checkpoints on highways that cross the province and searched for trucks carrying NATO supplies.

In early December, U.S. and coalition officials suspended use of those route because they feared for the safety of drivers who haul NATO supplies in and out of Afghanistan. The coalition instead diverted supplies through southern Pakistan or through northern Afghanistan into Uzbekistan.

In recent weeks, however, the protests had thinned considerably. And U.S. officials repeatedly have stressed that there was no major disruption to ongoing efforts to withdraw most remaining troops from Afghanistan by the end of this year.

But the protests helped Khan elevate his profile and sparked considerable debate inside Pakistan about U.S. drone strikes.

Early in February, The Washington Post reported that the Obama administration had agreed to severely limit the number of drone strikes inside Pakistan while Sharif's government attempted to reach a negotiated peace agreement with the Pakistani Taliban.

There has not been a U.S. drone strike inside Pakistan since December, which the Movement for Justice Party also cited as a factor in its decision to end its protest.

MILITARY

PHOTOS BY MATT ROURKE/AP

Sailors clean the deck aboard the USS Somerset on Thursday in Philadelphia.

Navy ship bears reminders of Sept. 11

BY MICHAEL RUBINKAM
The Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Reminders of Flight 93 are everywhere on the USS Somerset, the Navy's newest ship.

From a quilt bearing the names of the 40 passengers and crew to the many street signs from southwestern Pennsylvania's Somerset County, the ship is a floating tribute to those who stormed the cockpit of the hijacked airliner on Sept. 11, 2001, thwarting an attack on Washington, D.C. The plane crashed in a field, killing all aboard.

"Had it not been for their heroic actions, the terrorists would have reached their intended targets, and for sure, countless more lives would've been lost and perhaps even changed the outcome of history as we know it," said Capt. Thomas L. Dearborn, the ship's commanding officer.

The Somerset will be placed into service on Saturday during a commissioning ceremony in Philadelphia, where it's been docked for nearly a week. The Navy gave a tour of the ship on Thursday.

A sailor walks near display aboard the USS Somerset on Thursday.

Sailors who were teens and younger during the 2001 terror attack said it's a great honor to serve aboard the 684-foot Somerset, an amphibious transport dock designed to carry troops and equipment and launch helicopters, tilt-rotor aircraft and assault watercraft.

Sailors were getting the Somerset ready Thursday in advance of the commissioning ceremony, swabbing an already spotless upper deck in front of the bridge as a bitter wind howled. The Navy showed off the Somerset's capabilities, having an Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft and a SuperCobra attack helicopter land on the flight deck in the shadow of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge. Saturday's ceremony will feature the ship's sponsor giving the traditional order to "man our ship and bring her to life!" The Somerset will then sail to San Diego, its home port.

Employee at Fort Benning, Ga., hospital charged in military identity-theft scheme

BY REBECCA BURYLO
Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser

The identities of military members at Fort Benning, Ga., were stolen as part of a multimillion-dollar tax return scheme, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Tracy Mitchell, of Phenix City, Ala., who was an employee at the Fort Benning hospital, has been charged with eight counts each of wire fraud and aggravated identity theft. She had her initial court hearing Thursday, according to Todd Brown, the attorney prosecuting the case.

"She turned herself in once she found out there was an indictment issued against her," Brown said. The indictment was issued earlier this month by a federal grand jury.

According to the indictment, Mitchell knowingly used the names, birth dates and Social Security numbers of military personnel to file more than 1,000 false federal income tax returns that claimed more than $2.2 million in refunds.

According to Brown, Mitchell's position at the hospital gave her access to the identification data of soldiers, including those currently deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

When investigators searched her home, they found $329,242 stored inside a safe, Brown said.

George Beck, U.S. attorney for the Middle District of Alabama, worked with Georgia's Middle District to have the case prosecuted in Alabama.

"Identity theft is a horrible crime, but stealing identities from those who are serving our country is absolutely deplorable," Beck said. "While the defendant is presumed innocent, my office will vigorously prosecute those who prey on our military."

Study: On bases, cigarettes are cheap, plentiful

BY ALAN BAVLEY
The Kansas City Star

Soldiers, sailors or airmen looking for the cheapest smokes need go no further than the retail exchanges on their own bases.

A pack of Marlboro Reds averaged $5.49 at military retail exchanges last year — 84 cents less on average than what the Wal-Mart stores nearest to the bases were charging, a new national study finds.

True, base exchanges are the military's version of department stores and are expected to offer personnel and their families good deals on merchandise.

But their everyday low cigarette prices fly in the face of Department of Defense policies aimed at discouraging smoking and the Defense Department's own instructions dating to 2005 that base exchanges price their tobacco products no lower than 5 percent below the most competitive commercial price in the local community.

$5.49

The average price of a pack of Marlboro Reds at military retail exchanges last year, according to a study in the American Journal of Public Health.

MCT

The average exchange price, the study found, was 12.5 percent lower than what the Wal-Marts charged. Some bases undercut the local Wal-Marts by $2 or $3 or more per pack.

Cheap cigarettes are "a price leader," said Christopher Keith Haddock, a smoking researcher with the Institute for Biobehavioral Health Research, based in Leawood. "It can get people into the store."

Haddock's study appears this month in the American Journal of Public Health.

In recent years, the armed services have taken steps to curb smoking.

"The Defense Department is committed to helping servicemembers and their families live a healthy lifestyle," Defense Department spokeswoman Joy Crabaugh said. "Tobacco-free living is one aspect."

Crabaugh said she could not directly address any of the findings of Haddock's study, but added, "The military offers tobacco-cessation programs and has policies designed to discourage the use of tobacco."

The military has a social marketing program called "Quit Tobacco, Make Everyone Proud." It offers personnel free smoking-cessation medications and a 24/7 telephone hotline for counseling.

Despite his study's findings, Haddock said the military's tobacco-control initiatives are sincere; it has a vested interest in keeping soldiers from smoking.

Numerous studies have found that smoking reduces combat readiness, Haddock said. Smokers are less physically fit, have poorer night vision, are less mentally sharp and heal more slowly from wounds. Tobacco-related medical care and lost productivity cost the military about $1.6 billion annually.

"I think there are enough people at high ranks who want to see (smoking) conquered," Haddock said.

But Haddock, who served in the Air Force, said the military will be fighting against an ingrained culture of smoking in its ranks.

About 32 percent of active-duty military smoke, compared to about 20 percent of the civilian adult population. Nearly 45 percent of servicemembers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan have been smokers.

Haddock's own focus group research found many reasons why soldiers were attracted to smoking.

"Smoking breaks are one of the few reasons to take a break in the military," Haddock said.

The base "smoke pits," the designated smoking areas on bases, become places where people can gather informally to socialize.

But even more important than the camaraderie and breaks from routine as reasons to continue smoking, Haddock found, were the convenience and low prices of cigarettes at base exchanges.

"Pricing and convenience are always at the top of the list," he said.

MILITARY

Joshua Scott/Courtesy of the U.S. Navy

Helping with habitat

Sailors assigned to Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group 1 participate recently in a San Diego Habitat for Humanity volunteer project. Habitat for Humanity programs are focused on creating homes for ownership by veterans and low-income families in need.

Hmong set back in quest to be buried at US vets' cemeteries

By Richard Simon
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — For years, they have sought to heal what they call a lingering wound from the Vietnam War era.

Hmong veterans — who fought in the CIA-backed secret war in Laos in the 1960s and '70s — have tried to obtain the right to be buried in U.S. veterans' cemeteries. Such burials, they say, would be the appropriate way to recognize their wartime service.

But just when it appeared that former Hmong fighters might get their wish, election-year politics dealt them a setback. A veterans bill that would have advanced their cause was derailed in the Senate on Thursday in a partisan fight over unrelated issues.

"Oh, no!" said Philip Smith, Washington director of Lao Veterans of America, when he heard the news. "Each month that passes, more of the veterans are passing away without the benefit of being honored."

Col. Wangyee Vang, president of the Fresno, Calif.-based Lao Veteran Institute of America, vowed to continue the fight with visits to congressional offices when he comes to Washington in May for a wreath-laying ceremony at the Lao Veterans of America Monument at Arlington National Cemetery.

"Our veterans will continue to work on it," Vang said.

The legislation became a priority after the military denied permission for Gen. Vang Pao, a Hmong leader who died in California in 2011, to be buried at Arlington because he and the soldiers who fought under him did not directly serve in the American military. He was buried at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, Calif.

Legislation has been proposed to open national cemeteries to the estimated 6,200 to 8,200 Lao and Hmong who fought in the war and are U.S. citizens or legal residents. But it has languished.

So when the thick Senate veterans bill included a few lines to require the departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs to issue a report on "the extent to which Laotian military forces provided combat support to the Armed Forces of the United States between February 28, 1961, and May 15, 1975," the veterans saw it as a step forward.

While veterans legislation is usually popular, the bill was blocked on a largely party-line vote, with Republicans complaining that the Democratic-drafted measure cost too much and that they were denied a vote on new sanctions against Iran.

"It's a major setback," Smith said. "It's very sad that we're a casualty of the deadlock in Washington."

The effort to open the cemeteries to the former Hmong fighters, nonetheless, enjoys bipartisan support.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, a Republican from Alaska, where about 5,000 Hmong live, has championed the cause in the Senate. Large numbers of Hmong also reside in Minnesota and Wisconsin. In the House, Rep. Jim Costa, D-Calif., has introduced the "Hmong Veterans' Service Recognition Act." Many of the veterans live in California's Central Valley.

Smith, in testimony before a Senate committee last year, called the legislation "America's unfinished business."

In 2000, President Bill Clinton signed legislation easing U.S. citizenship requirements for Hmong immigrants who fought in the secret war.

VA taking more time to resolve denied claims

By Chris Adams
McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The average time for a denied claim to work its way through the cumbersome Department of Veterans Affairs appeals process shot up to more than 900 days last year, double the department's long-term target.

After hovering between 500 and 750 days for the past decade, what the VA refers to as its "appeals resolution time" hit 923 days in fiscal 2013. That was a 37 percent jump in one year, from 675 in fiscal 2012, according to a review of the department's annual performance report.

The department's long-term goal is to get that figure to 400 days, although the trend during the past decade has been in the other direction.

Asked about the slowdown during a conference call to discuss the VA's appeals system, the department said it has been reviewing the measure to see if it's the most meaningful one to convey to veterans how long the appeals process might take. The department also said it was continuing to look for ways to make the process more efficient.

Laura Eskenazi, the official who oversees the department's Board of Veterans' Appeals, cautioned that the long processing time "is not at all indicative of inactivity." She said the many layers built into the system prompt many of the delays.

The VA organized a conference call Thursday with reporters to explain its complicated, multilayered appeals process, which begins when a veteran's claim for disability benefits is denied in full or in part.

Disability benefits are awarded to veterans who suffer physical or mental injuries during their military service. They range from $131 per month to $2,858 per month for a single veteran.

The VA has been engaged in a very public battle to reduce its overall backlog — the number of claims awaiting an initial decision. By 2015, the department wants to get the backlog to zero. That would ensure that no claim is pending for more than 125 days. That's the goal that has gotten the most attention from Congress, the administration and veterans groups.

Veterans who appeal their decisions go into a separate system that can extend those waits far longer.

That appeals system has evolved in layers since it was adopted after World War I. It allows veterans, survivors or their representatives to trigger a fresh review of the entire appeal at any time by submitting new evidence or information, the VA said. The Board of Veterans' Appeals can grant, deny or — most commonly — remand the case to one of the VA's regional offices for additional review.

According to the most recent VA performance report, published in December, the VA's "strategic target" — essentially a long-term goal — for total appeals resolution time is 400 days; its short-term goal is 650 days.

It hasn't hit that 650 target in the past five years, although it got close in 2010, when the average appeals time was 656 days, records show.

Benefits: Bill falls 4 votes short of success

FROM FRONT PAGE

The fight over priorities demonstrated again the bitter divisions that have restrained the legislative process in recent years. Efforts to address immigration, a tax overhaul and job creation all seem likely to go nowhere this year.

Republicans criticized how most of Sanders' bill was paid for — with unspent money from the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and the winding down of American military involvement in Afghanistan. The GOP said those are not real savings because no one expected those dollars to be spent as those wars ended.

Republicans also objected to provisions making more veterans without service-connected injuries eligible for treatment at Department of Veterans Affairs facilities. They said that would swamp an already overburdened system.

The vote that sidetracked the bill was 56-41, with supporters falling four votes short of the 60 they needed to prevail. Sens. Jerry Moran of Kansas and Dean Heller of Nevada were the only Republicans voting to keep the legislation alive and the only lawmakers crossing party lines on the vote.

Veterans' groups complained about being caught in partisan crossfire.

"Veterans don't have time for this nonsense and veterans are tired of being used as political chew toys," said Paul Rieckhoff, founder and CEO of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, which supported the legislation.

Democrats wasted little time trying to cash in on the vote.

Within moments, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee unleashed an email headlined, "Mitch McConnell Votes Against Kentucky Veterans." McConnell is up for re-election this year.

Republicans said there would be no retribution from voters because the Democratic bill would have harmed veterans' services by flooding them with too many people. They also said this year's election campaigns will focus on other issues, such as President Barack Obama's health law.

"We're sort of fooling ourselves to believe that this drives the election issue list," said Sen. Richard Burr of North Carolina, top Republican on the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Thursday's showdown came after Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., refused to allow votes on a GOP amendment slicing the bill's size and adding the penalties against Iran for its nuclear program.

Obama opposes new penalties while international negotiations with Iran proceed.

Fifty-nine senators of both parties have sponsored a separate bill imposing the punishment if the talks fail, though Obama's effort has weakened Democratic calls for a quick Senate vote. A vote could put the administration and some Democrats who favor the proposal in an awkward spot.

The White House did not issue a public statement on whether it supported the veterans bill.

Sanders' legislation addressed everything from making more veterans eligible for in-state college tuition to providing fertility or adoption services for some wounded troops left unable to conceive.

The VA would have been given more tools to eat into its backlog of 390,000 benefit claims awaiting action for more than 125 days. The bill also would have bolstered programs for veterans who suffered sexual abuse, would have increased dental care and would have provided more alternative medicine, such as yoga for stress.

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NATION

Conservatives pushing to protect businesses that won't serve gays

By Juliet Eilperin
The Washington Post

Conservative activists said Thursday that they will continue to press for additional legal protections for private businesses that deny service to gay men and lesbians, saying that a defeat in Arizona this week is only a minor setback and that religious-liberty legislation is the best way to stave off a rapid shift in favor of gay rights.

Gov. Jan Brewer, a Republican, vetoed legislation on Wednesday that would have provided a wide variety of religious exemptions to Arizona businesses, after major business groups, prominent GOP figures and gay-rights advocates argued that it would amount to discrimination.

Many conservatives said they will continue working to convince voters and judges that opponents of same-sex marriage and abortion are motivated by faith rather than bigotry.

"The fight has to be over what the First Amendment is," said John Eastman, chairman of the National Organization for Marriage, adding that his side needs to convince the public that conservatives are not trying to deny the rights of other Americans. "This is not somebody adhering to old Jim Crow lunch-counter discrimination. This is a fundamental dispute about what marriage means, and why it's important for society."

Religious-freedom measures that could have implications for gay rights are pending in Kansas, Mississippi, Missouri and Oklahoma. The Supreme Court will hear arguments in a case next month in which two businesses argue that they should be allowed to refuse to give their employees contraception coverage mandated under the Affordable Care Act.

"There is a sense of alarm within the pro-family movement and among conservative Christians that there [are] growing threats to religious liberty, and many of those threats do relate to the agenda of the sexual revolutionaries," said Peter Sprigg, a senior fellow for policy studies at the Family Research Council.

Louise Melling, the deputy legal director for the American Civil Liberties Union, said the efforts are part of a misguided attempt to preserve an outdated social order. She noted that federal courts have repeatedly rejected biblical claims as a justification for discriminatory action. Cases rejected by the courts have included a Christian school that paid men more than women in the 1980s because men traditionally are the heads of their households, and a South Carolina barbecue chain that defended its refusal to serve black customers in the 1960s on religious grounds.

Troubled websites run by states get health law fix

By Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — States that have experienced technical problems running their own health care enrollment websites are getting some help from the Obama administration.

The administration quietly issued a health law fix Thursday to help those states. Several Democratic-led states, including Oregon, Maryland, Massachusetts and Hawaii, are still trying to solve website problems that have eclipsed those experienced earlier by the federal HealthCare.gov site, now largely repaired.

Although the new policy fix is available to any state, Republican governors basically defaulted to federal control of online sign-ups in their states. Those who stand to benefit the most are Democratic governors who plunged ahead and ran into problems. Some are facing sharp criticism at home, from both sides of the political aisle.

"Today's news means that many more Oregonians will be able to access better coverage at a more affordable cost," said Oregon Democratic Gov. John Kitzhaber, whose state is near the bottom on enrollments.

Kitzhaber announced the change after the federal Health and Human Services Department posted it on one of its websites without further elaboration.

HHS said state residents who were unable to sign up because of technical problems may still get federal tax credits if they bought private insurance outside of the new online insurance exchanges.

The federal policy change is significant because until now, the administration has stressed that the only place to get taxpayer-subsidized insurance under President Barack Obama's health law is through the new online markets, called exchanges.

The tax credits that subsidize coverage under the law can greatly reduce the cost of a policy. This year, virtually all Americans are required to have coverage or risk fines.

The administration's Republican critics are certain to question the move. Along with a delay in a key mandate that medium to large companies provide coverage or face fines, it's another example of the administration trying to find flexibility to smooth out rough patches in the law's implementation.

Brennan Linsley/AP

Weld County District Attorney Ken Buck, who is affiliated with the tea party movement, speaks to supporters during a campaign dinner event in January in Johnstown, Colo.

Tea party insists it's well

Primaries this election year to be crucial test for movement

By Donna Cassata
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The foot soldiers of the small-government, anti-tax tea party movement dismiss the chatter about its demise and stand ready to use their unbending political force against both President Barack Obama and the Republican establishment this election year.

The Tea Party Patriots, one of the major grass-roots groups, marked the fifth anniversary of the movement Thursday, attracting hundreds of members and plenty of speakers to a Washington celebration in which they directed their animosity at the Washington establishment.

Tea party supporters, who helped Republicans capture control of the House in 2010, made clear they don't like what the party establishment has done to their conservative agenda of limited government, free-market policies and what they consider fidelity to the Constitution. They signaled they will work hard to elect their uncompromising candidates no matter what the establishment does.

Keli Carender, national grass-roots coordinator, said the strength of the group was reflected in the $1.2 million and counting that it raised in 10 days.

Primaries this election year will be a crucial test for the movement as the Republican establishment has aggressively challenged tea party-backed candidates. Republicans blame the tea party for losses in winnable races in 2010 and 2012 that many believe cost the party a Senate majority.

J. Scott Applewhite/AP

Rep. Cory Gardner, R-Colo., holds up a letter he wrote to Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius asking that she consider waiving "Obamacare" for the 4th Congressional District of Colorado, as she testified on Capitol Hill in Washington in October.

Addressing the event, Rep. Tim Huelskamp, R-Kan., was interrupted by the crowd, which stood and cheered when he said, "It's high time we retire (House Speaker) John Boehner." When the applause died down, Huelskamp completed his sentence that it was "high time to retire John Boehner's biggest excuse that we only control one-third of the government."

Boehner, for his part, said Thursday that he has "great respect for the tea party and the energy they brought to the electoral process. My gripe is with some Washington organizations who feel like they've got to go raise money by beating on me and others."

If Boehner, R-Ohio, and other Republican leaders were drawing the movement's ire, Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, was collecting praise.

The Texas freshman and potential 2016 presidential candidate got a standing ovation and wild applause when he addressed the event, cheered for his fight last fall against Obama's health care law that precipitated the 16-day partial government shutdown. He offered no regrets and argued that the effort has proved successful in the long run, contributing to Obama's low approval ratings and the law's unpopularity.

Cruz drew a rousing response when he told the crowd he was "absolutely convinced we are going to repeal every single word" of the health care law.

Another tea party favorite and possible 2016 candidate, Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., told the group it needs to offer a happy message.

Support for the tea party has declined slightly since 2010, when members rallied around opposition to the health care law.

Just ahead of the 2010 elections, an Associated Press-GfK poll found that 30 percent of adults considered themselves supporters of the tea party movement. By October 2013, that figure had dipped to 17 percent, then rebounded to 27 percent last month.

While tea party supporters expressed frustration with the Republicans, they were fierce in their opposition to Obama.

Speakers described the president as an emperor, a radical and a socialist whose administration has abused its power.

NATION

Winter-weary Americans plead: Get me out of here

By Don Babwin
The Associated Press

CHICAGO — Shannon Frauenholtz has had it with winter. Barely able to stomach the television news with its images of snowbound cars, she heads to the tanning salon, closes her eyes and imagines she's back in Mexico, where she's already vacationed once this winter.

She's toyed with the idea of joining her mother in Hawaii or just driving to an indoor water park, figuring that while the palm trees might be plastic and the "beach" smells of chlorine, at least it's warm.

"I don't need a vacation. I don't need the relaxation," said Frauenholtz, of New Ulm, Minn. "I just need the heat."

All over the Midwest and the East Coast, travel agents are being inundated with a simple request: Get me out of here. And travelers fortunate enough to have escaped are begging hotels to let them stay a little longer.

Because they know how miserable people are, warm-weather destinations in California, Arizona and Florida have stepped up their enticements. Trains and billboards in Chicago have been plastered with ads showing beaches and pool scenes. In Philadelphia, one promoter put fiberglass mannequins dressed in flip flops, tank tops and shorts atop taxis with their arms outstretched — a whimsical inducement to "fly" south.

Reminding Americans that there are places where nose hairs don't freeze is an annual tradition. But those in the business of luring visitors to warmer climates say it's rarely been easier than this season, when "polar vortex" has entered the everyday vocabulary and "Chi-beria" has become popular enough to emblazon on T-shirts.

"This year we wanted to have a little more fun with it," said Susannah Costello of Visit Florida, the state's official marketing organization, which came up with the mannequin idea.

The ads showing children and bikini-clad women making snow angels in warm beach sand are more plentiful than in years past, acknowledged Erin Duggan, of Visit Sarasota County.

"We did that because we knew winter was shaping up to be brutal," she said.

Not that people needed much reminding of the harsh conditions.

"The winter is so bad, there is a certain amount of desperation," said Alex Kutin, an Indianapolis travel agent. "They come and say, 'I've got to get somewhere warm. Where do you recommend?'"

Kevin Tuttle, of Verona, Wis., was so intent on finding warmth that he decided against Florida out of fear that the polar vortex might reach down and find them there. Instead, he and his wife will take their 4-year-old son and 5-year-old daughter to Manzanillo, Mexico, a resort on the Pacific ocean.

"That's near the equator, right? It's got to be pretty warm," Tuttle said, adding that "a lot of sand castles are in my future."

Just how many more people are trying to get out of the ice box is unclear. Airlines do not release any route-specific data. And although the government tracks some of it, figures will not be released for six months.

But other travel statistics suggest there has been a jump, including figures from Visit Florida that show hotel bookings in Florida rose 3 percent in the four weeks ending Feb. 15 compared with the same period last year.

The jetsetter.com travel site found that the number of hotel bookings in warm-weather spots made by customers from Illinois, New York, Massachusetts and the Washington, D.C., area rose 7 percent in January compared with last year.

Travelers are also staying longer once they arrive.

Micah Hilgendorf said the thought of heading back to ice-covered Chicago, where he owns a couple of bars, prompted him to tack on three days in Florida before and after a cruise out of Miami. He also flew to Palm Springs, Calif., for four days.

"All of that is last-minute because of the weather," Hilgendorf said.

US winter misery

A new winter misery index confirms this has been one of the harshest winters in the states of our lifetimes.

WORST WINTERS TO DATE (WTD) RELATIVE TO LAST 64 YEARS

	WTD Rank	Snowfall		WTD Rank	Snowfall
Detroit	1	78.0"	New York	4	52.1"
Chicago	3	69.7"	Milwaukee	4	55.3"
Philadelphia	3	58.4"	Duluth, MN	4	82.4"
Indianapolis	3	52.0"	Minn./St. Paul	6	56.1"
Moline, IL	3	53.3"	Louisville	7	21.6"

SOURCE: NOAA AP

Big storm brings new worries to California

By Sue Manning and Robert Jablon
The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The first wave of a powerful Pacific storm spread rain and snow early Friday through much of California, where communities endangered by a wildfire just weeks ago now faced the threat of mud and debris flows.

The barren mountain slopes looming above neighborhoods in the foothills east of Los Angeles were still holding after the first bout of rain, said police Lt. Matt Williams. Mandatory evacuation orders were issued for about 1,000 homes in the area on Thursday.

"We are cautiously optimistic," Williams said.

Numerous traffic accidents occurred on slick or flooded roads across Southern California, and a 10-mile stretch of Pacific Coast Highway west of Malibu was closed as a precaution against possible rockslides from a fire-scarred section of the Santa Monica Mountains.

Rain also was falling in the central coast counties, in the San Francisco Bay region and in the Central Valley. Winter storm warnings were in effect in the Sierra Nevada for heavy snowfall.

Forecasts called for the storm to last through Saturday in California, bringing some relief amid a long-running drought, and to spread east into similarly parched neighboring states. Phoenix was expecting its first noticeable precipitation in two months.

Around San Francisco Bay, the storm led to an urban and small stream flood warning, as rain in excess of a half-inch per hour moved in, according to the National Weather Service. Wet roadways and crashes slowed the morning commute, and there were isolated power outages.

Some arriving flights at San Francisco International Airport were delayed by more than four hours, according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

The storm's full force was expected to be felt later Friday morning, with possible thunderstorms and rains up to an inch per hour, the National Weather Service said.

Reed Saxon/AP

Sandbags line a street considered especially at risk in Azusa, Calif., as residents make preparations Thursday for possible flooding. In advance of a powerful Pacific storm, mandatory evacuation orders have been issued for 1,000 homes in Glendora and Azusa, two of Los Angeles' eastern foothill suburbs.

Senator seeks review of child paralysis cases

By Kevin Freking
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A California senator asked the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday to initiate a formal investigation into what has caused polio-like paralysis in about 20 children in her state the past 18 months.

Sen. Barbara Boxer said "we need answers" in her letter to CDC Director Thomas Frieden. In particular, she wants the agency to look into whether the illness can be traced to a virus or environmental factors. She also wants to know whether the agency is aware of similar reports of paralysis nationwide.

"These questions must be answered because it is deeply disturbing to read reports of otherwise healthy children experiencing sudden paralysis," Boxer said in her letter.

In a statement emailed to The Associated Press, the CDC said Frieden had received the letter "and will be giving it careful consideration."

Doctors at Stanford University said earlier this week that they had found some instances of children suffering paralysis in one or more limbs. They also sought to temper concern, saying the cases were a rare phenomenon.

CDC officials amplified that point Thursday.

"At this time, CDC does not think the situation in California is a cause for public concern," Jamila H. Jones, a public health educator for the agency, said in an emailed statement before Boxer's letter became public. Her comments were not in direct response to the letter.

Jones said the CDC is concerned about the children who suffered what is described as acute flaccid paralysis, but the number of cases being investigated by California health officials fell within the expected rate within the overall population. She also said the CDC is monitoring the situation.

So far, state officials have not identified any common causes to suggest the cases are linked.

Earlier this week, Dr. Keith Van Haren at the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford University said the disease seen in the children resembles polio, but is not the same as polio. Most of the children seen so far have not recovered use of their arms or legs.

He warned that any child showing a sudden onset of weakness in their limbs should be immediately seen by a doctor.

NATION

Ky. Noah's Ark project revived

By Dylan Lovan
The Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — A Christian ministry's long-stalled plans to build Noah's Ark in the hills of Kentucky have been revived.

Creation Museum founder Ken Ham announced Thursday that a municipal bond offering has raised enough money to begin construction on the Ark Encounter project, estimated to cost about $73 million. Groundbreaking is planned for May and the ark is expected to be finished by the summer of 2016.

Ham said a high-profile evolution debate he had with "Science Guy" Bill Nye on Feb. 4 helped boost support for the project.

Nye said he was "heartbroken and sickened for the Commonwealth of Kentucky" after learning that the project would move forward. He said the ark would eventually draw more attention to the beliefs of Ham's ministry, which preaches that the Bible's creation story is a true account, and as a result, "voters and taxpayers in Kentucky will eventually see that this is not in their best interest."

Ham's Answers in Genesis ministry and the Creation Museum enjoyed an avalanche of news media attention during the debate, which focused on science and the Bible's explanations of the origins of the universe.

Answers in Genesis unveiled the proposal in 2010 for a $150 million theme park that would include the ark. But private donations to the project did not keep pace with the construction timeline, forcing its backers to delay the ark's construction and divide the park development into phases. The bonds were offered last year by the city of Williamstown, site of the planned ark about 40 miles south of Cincinnati.

AP

Ken Ham, founder of the nonprofit ministry Answers in Genesis, recently debated evolution with TV's "Science Guy" Bill Nye and says fundraising after the widely watched event helped to revive stalled plans to build a 510-foot replica of Noah's Ark.

Texas officers suspended for homeless sign contest

By Betsy Blaney
The Associated Press

MIDLAND, Texas — Two police officers in an oil-rich West Texas city spent weeks competing to see who could take the most cardboard signs away from homeless people, even though panhandling doesn't violate any city law.

Nearly two months after the Midland Police Department learned of the game, the two officers were suspended for three days without pay, according to findings of the internal affairs investigation obtained by The Associated Press through a public records request.

Advocate groups immediately blasted the department's handling, suggesting that the punishment wasn't harsh enough and that the probe should have been made public much earlier, before news organizations, including the AP, started asking about it.

"The fact that they are making sport out of collecting the personal property of homeless individuals could be seen as them targeting these individuals for discriminatory harassment," said Cassandra Champion, an attorney in the Odessa office of the Texas Civil Rights Project. "Simply holding a sign is absolutely a protected part of our free speech."

Police Chief Price Robinson said the actions were an isolated incident in a department of 186 officers and didn't deserve a harsher punishment. After the investigation all officers were reminded to respect individual rights and human dignity, he said.

"We want to respect people, no matter who they are — homeless, whatever," Robinson said. "That situation's been dealt with. Those officers understand."

The investigation found the two officers, Derek Hester and Daniel Zoelzer, violated the department's professional standards of conduct.

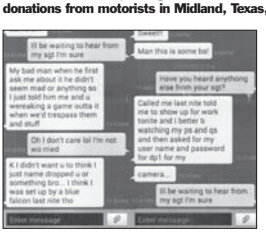
Evan Rogers, founder of Church Under the Bridge Midland's ministry, said the failure by police to disclose the officers' behavior once discovered made it appear the department was "pushing it under the carpet.

"I think that does give the public the wrong message," he said.

Asked Wednesday about why the investigation wasn't made public earlier, city spokeswoman Sara Higgins said it is not the department's standard protocol to announce when an internal affairs investigation is completed. She said the officers weren't suspended until January because of staffing issues and the winter holidays.

The two officers, who did not appeal their suspensions, have been with the department about two years. They both returned emails from the AP declining to be interviewed.

A homeless woman, who gave her name as only Katt, tries to get donations from motorists in Midland, Texas, on Feb. 24.



This screen shot provided by Midland, Texas, police shows messages between officers Derek Hester and Daniel Zoelzer, who were disciplined with a three-day suspension for having a contest to see who could confiscate the most signs from homeless people, shown above.

AP photos

Court sides with school on US flag shirt ban

By Paul Elias
The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — A Northern California high school's decision to order students wearing American flag T-shirts to turn the garments inside out during a celebration of the holiday Cinco de Mayo was appropriate, a federal appeals court ruled Thursday.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said the school officials' concerns of racial violence outweighed students' freedom of expression rights. Administrators feared the American-flag shirts would enflame the passions of Latino students celebrating the Mexican holiday. Live Oak High School, in the San Jose suburb of Morgan Hill, had a history of problems between white and Latino students on that day.

The unanimous three-judge panel said past problems gave school officials sufficient and justifiable reasons for their actions. The court said schools have wide latitude in curbing certain civil rights to ensure campus safety.

"Our role is not to second-guess the decision to have a Cinco de Mayo celebration or the precautions put in place to avoid violence," Judge M. Margaret McKeown wrote for the panel. The past events "made it reasonable for school officials to proceed as though the threat of a potentially violent disturbance was real," she wrote.

The case garnered national attention as many expressed outrage that students were barred from wearing patriotic clothing. The Ann Arbor, Mich.-based American Freedom Law Center, a politically conservative legal aid foundation, and other similar organizations took up the students' case and sued the high school and the school district.

William Becker, one of the lawyers representing the students, said he plans to ask a special 11-judge panel of the appeals court to rehear the case. Becker said he would appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court if he loses again.

Girl, 7, uses Heimlich maneuver to help choking classmate

The Brunswick News

BRUNSWICK, Ga. — The teachers and other pupils at Golden Isles Elementary School are calling Molli-Malone Wommack a hero.

Molli was eating lunch Wednesday in the school cafeteria when she noticed a classmate clutching her throat and her face turning purple.

While other children sitting at the table ran to get a teacher, the 7-year-old second-grader knew exactly what was happening and how to handle it.

"I saw her put her hand over her throat and thought, 'Oh, my God, she's choking,'" Molli said some six hours after performing the life-saving Heimlich maneuver.

"I stood up, went behind her, reached around her waist and pushed on her stomach and the food came out."

By the time teachers arrived, Molli said her classmate was a little shaken, but breathing normally and in good spirits.

"She kept saying I am an American hero," Molli said.

Molli was asked to go to the school nurse's office after the incident to explain what had happened. The school nurse is Kelli Wommack, Molli's mother and the person who taught her daughter the Heimlich maneuver two years ago.

"They said she just got up and did it," Kelli Wommack said. "She just responded. I was quite proud of her."

NATION

New food labels

The Food and Drug Administration is proposing changes to nutrition labels, the first major updates since the early 1990s.

Old label

Nutrition Facts
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
Servings Per Container about 2

Amount Per Serving	
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g	**18%**
Saturated Fat 3g	**15%**
Trans Fat 3g	
Cholesterol 30mg	**10%**
Sodium 470mg	**20%**
Total Carbohydrate 31g	**10%**
Dietary Fiber 0g	**0%**
Sugars 5g	
Proteins 6g	
Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%
Iron	4%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Saturated Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

One of the proposed labels

Nutrition Facts
8 servings per containe ❶
Serving size 2/3 cup (55g)

Amount per 2/3 cup
Calories ❷ **230**

% DV*	
12%	**Total Fat** 8g ❸
5%	**Saturated Fat** 8g
	Trans Fat 0g
0%	**Cholesterol** 0mg
7%	**Sodium** 160mg
12%	**Total Carbs** 37g
14%	**Dietary Fiber** 4g
	Sugars 1g
	Added Sugars 0g ❹
	Protein 3g
10%	**Vitamin D** 2mcg
20%	**Calcium** 260mg ❺
45%	**Iron** 8mg
5%	**Potassium** 235mg

* Footnote on Daily Values (DV) and calories reference to be inserted here.

❶ Serving portion more prominent

❷ Calories in large bold text

❸ Daily percentages placed first

❹ Added sugars shown

❺ Vitamins A, C removed; vitamin D, potassium added

Serving sizes adjusted

Single serving sizes will be more realistic to reflect how much people typically eat at one time.

1 pint

Current serving size **4 servings** **200 calories**

Proposed serving size **2 servings** **400 calories**

20 oz. 12 oz.

1 serving per bottle for either size

200 calories

SOURCE: U.S. Food and Drug Administration GRAPHIC: Melina Yingling MCT

New food labels meant to facilitate healthy shopping

By Mary Clare Jalonick and Darlene Superville
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ice cream lovers beware: The government knows you're unlikely to stop after half a cup.

New nutrition labels proposed Thursday for many popular foods, including ice cream, aim to more accurately reflect what people actually eat. And the proposal would make calorie counts on labels more prominent, too, reflecting that nutritionists now focus more on calories than fat.

For the first time, labels also would be required to list any sugars that are added by manufacturers.

In one example of the change, the estimated serving size for ice cream would jump from a half-cup to a cup, so the calorie listing on the label would double as well.

The idea behind the change, the first overhaul of the labels in two decades, isn't that the government thinks people should be eating twice as much; it's that they should understand how many calories are in what they already are eating. The Food and Drug Administration says that, by law, serving sizes must be based on actual consumption, not some ideal.

"Our guiding principle here is very simple, that you as a parent and a consumer should be able to walk into your local grocery store, pick up an item off the shelf and be able to tell whether it's good for your family," said first lady Michelle Obama, who joined the FDA in announcing the proposed changes at the White House.

Obama made the announcement as part of her Let's Move initiative to combat child obesity, which is marking its fourth anniversary. On Tuesday, she announced new Agriculture Department rules that would reduce marketing of less-healthful foods in schools.

The new labels would be less cluttered. FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg called them "a more user-friendly version."

But they are probably several years away. The FDA will take comments on the proposal for 90 days, and a final rule could take another year. Once it's final, the agency has proposed giving industry two years to comply.

GAO report: Airline pilot shortage? It's not clear

By Joan Lowy
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Regional airlines report difficulty over the past year in finding enough pilots to hire, according to a government watchdog report obtained by The Associated Press, but it isn't clear whether there is a shortage of pilots.

Researchers found "mixed evidence" of a shortage, said the Government Accountability Office. A key economic indicator supports the emergence of a shortage, but two other indicators suggest the opposite is true. Of three studies reviewed by the GAO that examine the issue, "two point to the large number of qualified pilots that exist, but may be working abroad, in the military, or in another occupation, as evidence that there is adequate supply," the report said.

The report, obtained late Thursday, was to be released Friday.

The U.S. airline industry will need to hire 1,900 to 4,500 new pilots annually during the next 10 years due to an expected surge in retirements of pilots reaching age 65 and increased demand for air travel, the report said.

Eleven out of 12 regional airlines failed to meet their hiring targets for entry-level pilots last year, the report said. However, no major airlines were experiencing problems finding pilots. Some airline officials did express concern that service to some cities might have to be cut back if their regional partners cannot hire enough pilots, the report said.

Major airlines generally pay significantly higher salaries than regional carriers. The average starting salary for first officers at regional airlines is $22,400, according to the Air Line Pilots Association.

"Data indicate that a large pool of qualified pilots exists relative to the projected demand, but whether such pilots are willing or available to work at wages being offered is unknown," the report said. And, the size of these pools of pilots has remained steady since 2000, the report said.

Vincent Yu/AP

Two pilots from Cathay Pacific walk in the Hong Kong International Airport in Hong Kong in 2011.

There are currently 66,000 pilots working for U.S. airlines, but there are 109,465 currently active pilots with first class medical certificates who are licensed to fly passengers, the report said. Plus, there are more than 100,000 other pilots with commercial licenses who might at some point choose to pursue airline careers, the report found.

The unemployment rate for professional pilots is very low, only 2.7 percent. That normally would indicate a shortage, but there are other reasons to believe that may not be the case, according to the report. Average professional pilot salaries went down 9.5 percent from 2000 to 2012, while the number of pilots employed went up 12 percent. Both trends are inconsistent with a shortage, the report said.

After 33 years on run, man back in prison

The Washington Post

Anthony Rackley, the fugitive from Maryland who turned himself in to authorities in Oklahoma City after 33 years on the run, has been returned to the Maryland prison system.

Rackley, 62, was picked up late last week by state police and corrections officers, according to Mark Vernarelli, a spokesman for Maryland's corrections department.

Rackley, who originally was incarcerated at age 18 for armed robbery and then was sent back to prison for a parole violation, slipped away from a pre-release program in Baltimore in 1980. He traveled around the country and eventually settled in Oklahoma, where he became a paid Lions Club fundraiser under the name Jack Watson.

In November, Rackley suddenly turned himself in, telling authorities that he was being extorted by another Lions Club member who knew he was a fugitive.

The allegations of extortion were investigated, but authorities declined to press charges. A prosecutor called the case a "he said, he said."

Rackley's story puzzled law enforcement officials, many of whom couldn't remember an escapee just offering himself up for apprehension after so long away.

Maryland prison officials have been scrambling to piece together Rackley's records, which predate current electronic systems.

Vernarelli said the Maryland Parole Commission would try to give Rackley a parole hearing within 90 days.

Professor to stand trial in 1995 slaying case

LOS ANGELES — A psychology professor accused of setting up the 1995 slaying of a man she said had raped her has been ordered to stand trial in Orange County.

Norma Patricia Esparza, who grew up in Santa Ana, Calif., and went on to become a respected professor in Europe, was arrested in the 19-year-old case in 2012 but had been free on bail and living in Europe, where she was teaching in Geneva, when a judge revoked the bail last year.

Esparza is accused of helping set up the slaying of a man she said raped her when she was a college sophomore. She was ordered to stand trial following a preliminary hearing Wednesday.

Two others, Gianni Anthony Van and Shannon Gries, also were accused and are expected to face trial later this year. A third suspect, Diane Tran, pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter in January and is expected to testify in both trials. Another suspect, Kody Tran, killed himself in a standoff with police in 2012.

Prosecutors say Esparza and the others went to a Santa Ana bar in April 1995 so that she could point out her alleged rapist.

Hours later, Gonzalo Ramirez was found beaten and hacked to death with a meat cleaver.

Esparza's case has mobilized the support of thousands say she is a rape victim who is being unfairly victimized for a murder she did not commit.

Esparza is set to be arraigned in Orange County Superior Court on March 11.

From McClatchy Tribune

WORLD

Iraq: Suicide bomber kills prominent sheik

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraqi police say a suicide bomber in western Iraq has killed a prominent pro-government tribal sheik as well as six of his militiamen.

The police chief of the town of Haditha, Col. Farouq al-Jughaifi, said Friday that the bomber rammed his explosives-laden car late Thursday into the guesthouse of Sheik Saeed Fleih al-Osman — a councilman and leader for the town's anti-al-Qaida Sunni tribal militias.

Al-Jughaifi added that five civilians also were wounded.

Haditha is located about 140 miles northwest of Baghdad in the largely Sunni province of Anbar.

The Awakening Councils, or Sahwa, were first formed and financed by the U.S. troops to help fighting extremist militant groups. They are the favorite targets for the insurgent groups who see them as traitors.

AP

This image made from video broadcast Tuesday on Egyptian State Television shows a device that the Egyptian army claims will detect and cure AIDS and hepatitis.

Egypt army AIDS, hepatitis detectors draw ridicule

BY MAGGIE MICHAEL
The Associated Press

CAIRO — Egypt's military leaders have come under ridicule after the chief army engineer unveiled what he described as a "miraculous" set of devices that detect and cure AIDS, hepatitis and other viruses.

The claim, dismissed by experts and called "shocking to scientists" by president's science adviser, strikes a blow to the army's carefully managed image as the savior of the nation. It also comes as military chief Field Marshal Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, who toppled Mohammed Morsi in July after the Islamist leader ignored mass protests calling for him to step down, is expected to announce he'll run for president.

The televised presentation — which was made to el-Sissi, interim President Adly Mansour and other senior officials — raised concerns that the military's offer of seemingly inconceivable future devices will draw Egypt back into the broken promises of authoritarian rule, when Hosni Mubarak frequently announced grand initiatives that failed to meet expectations.

"The men of the armed forces have achieved a scientific leap by inventing the detecting devices," military spokesman Col. Ahmed Mohammed Ali wrote later on his official Facebook page. Ali said a patent has been filed under the name of the Armed Forces Engineering Agency.

Well-known writer Hamdi Rizk noted that video clips of the presentation had gone viral on social media, with tweets and blogs saying the military had made a fool of itself and put its reputation in jeopardy.

"The marshal's camp has been dealt a deep moral defeat," he wrote in a column in Thursday's Al-Masry Al-Youm newspaper.

Professor Massimo Pinzani, a liver specialist and director of the Institute for Liver and Digestive Health at University College London, said he attended a demonstration of the C-Fast device during a visit to Egypt but "was not given convincing explanations about the technology" and wasn't allowed to try it for himself.

None of the research has been published in a reputable journal.

The furor started when Maj. Gen. Taher Abdullah, the head of the Engineering Agency in the Armed Forces, gave a widely televised presentation to el-Sissi and other senior officials on what he calls an "astonishing miraculous scientific invention."

Abdullah said two of the devices named C-Fast and I Fast used electromagnetism to detect AIDS, hepatitis and other viruses without taking blood samples while the third, named Complete Cure Device, acted as a dialysis unit to purify the blood. He also said the C-FAST, which looks an antenna affixed to the handle of a blender, detected patients infected with viruses that cause hepatitis and AIDS with a high success rate.

AHN YOUNG-JOON/AP

A soldier works on an armored vehicle Friday during a military exercise in Yeoncheon, South Korea, near the border with North Korea.

Seoul: N. Korea's launch of Scuds is first since '09

BY HYUNG-JIN KIM
The Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — The short-range Scud missiles North Korea fired into the sea Thursday were a type it hasn't launched since 2009, South Korea confirmed Friday, though analysts say the apparent protest over U.S.-South Korean military drills were likely not a prelude to higher tensions.

Four projectiles with a range of more than 125 miles landed off the North's eastern coast, and South Korean Defense Ministry spokesman Kim Min-seok told reporters that an analysis of their speed and trajectory showed they were Scud missiles.

Defense officials also confirmed reports that North Korea fired four other short-range KN-02 missiles with a range of about 62 miles one week ago.

Kim said South Korean officials didn't disclose last Friday's launches because North Korea frequently test-launches such short-range missiles. But Kim said Scud-series missiles, which are capable of hitting all of South Korea, are a security threat and Thursday's Scud launches were the first of that kind since 2009.

He said there are no signs that North Korea is preparing for additional missile launches.

Analysts said the launches were largely aimed at protesting the South Korea-U.S. military drills that began Monday and won't be a prelude to a spike in tension. Pyongyang calls the annual military exercises a rehearsal for invasion, though Washington and Seoul say they are defensive in nature.

"The launches were a test designed to improve its missile capability and also an armed protest against the drills," said analyst Cheong Seong-jang at the private Sejong Institute in South Korea. "But we already know (they have Scud missiles) … We also have such a level of missiles. The launches didn't have special meaning."

China, North Korea's major ally, offered a muted reaction. "We hope that all relevant parties should commit to moving the situation on the Korean Peninsula toward relaxation" of tensions, Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said during a regular briefing.

The U.S. State Department earlier said it was closely monitoring the situation and urged North Korea to exercise restraint and to take steps to improve relations with its neighbors.

Last year, North Korea furiously reacted to the same South Korean-U.S. military drills by issuing a torrent of fiery rhetoric and threats to launch nuclear missiles against Seoul and Washington. Last year's drills came after North Korea conducted its third nuclear test. The U.S. took the unusual step of sending nuclear-capable bombers in a show of its resolve to protect its ally.

North Korea hasn't issued harsh rhetoric against the current drills after their start. It recently has sought better ties with South Korea in what outside analysts say is an effort to win badly needed foreign investment and aid. The Koreas this month held their first reunions of Korean War-divided families in more than three years.

Pyongyang earlier threatened to scrap the arrangement for the family reunions in anger over the drills, but later allowed them to proceed after high-level talks with Seoul.

China busts major baby trafficking rings

The Associated Press

BEIJING — Chinese police have rescued 382 abducted babies and have arrested 1,094 suspects in a national operation that busted four major Internet-based baby trafficking rings, the Public Security Ministry said Friday.

The operation came after police in Beijing and the eastern province of Jiangsu last year found four websites selling babies under the cover of adoption, the ministry said, adding that Internet technologies have assisted baby traffickers by providing more secretive covers for their businesses.

Child abduction is a major problem in China despite punishments as harsh as the death sentence for traffickers, and national-level busts of trafficking rings have been frequent in recent years.

Strict laws that limit many families to one child, a traditional preference for boys, poverty and illicit profits drive a thriving market in babies and children.

To address the problem, China is considering tougher penalties for parents who sell their children, as well as for the buyers.

WORLD

Photos by Ramon Espinosa/AP

A participant in the competition for the longest ash is dizzied during the XVI Cuba Cigar festival in Havana on Thursday.

Competition goes up in smoke for longest-ash

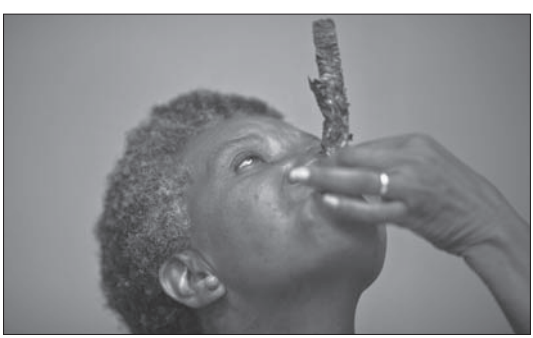
By Andrea Rodriguez
The Associated Press

HAVANA — Pungent smoke filled the room, obscuring the lights and leaving clothing and skin reeking. There were applause, shouts and laughter, and above all plenty of H. Upmann Sir Winstons — formidable 7-inch Cuban cigars.

More than 450 stogie aficionados took part in an unusual contest Thursday at Havana's annual marquee Cigar Festival: competing to see who could create the longest unbroken ash.

"I love it," Argentine sommelier Flavio Lanfredi said good-naturedly despite falling out of contention early on. "For me this is like going to Mecca, or a kid entering a toy store and they tell you to grab whatever you want, it's yours. It's really exciting."

In a cavernous room in Havana's Palace of Conventions, contestants exhaled clouds of smoke and handled their cigars gingerly to keep the gray ash intact as long as possible.



Olivia Terri smokes a cigar during the competition for the longest ash in Havana.

Many, like Lanfredi, lost their ashes before smoking even halfway through. Others managed to keep going until their cigars were little more than tiny stubs.

"It was a little bit stressful, and I'm somewhat dizzy," said Cuban restaurateur Andres Espinosa, one of the better finishers with a 6.2-inch ash.

Just over a half-hour in, only a handful of finalists remained. Judges milled about the room handing out rulers to measure the results.

The winner was to be announced Friday.

It would be hard to top Olivia Terri, also from Cuba, who smoked her Sir Winston down to a stub with an ash that grew to 6.6 inches before it crumbled.

The Sir Winston is a chubby cigar with a rich brown color and a hint of toasted gold. It's hand-rolled with a selection of tobacco leaves from the western province of Pinar del Rio, the cradle of Cuba's tobacco country.

The event was both a light-hearted competition and also an exhibition calculated to show off Cuba's premium tobacco, which is among the most coveted in the world. Some 1,500 smokers from 80 countries are attending the weeklong festival.

Oscar Pistorius seen shooting in gun range video

The Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG — Newly released video shows Oscar Pistorius, who faces a murder trial next week, firing weapons at a gun range before the double-amputee athlete fatally shot his girlfriend last year.

Sky News on Friday broadcast footage of Pistorius firing a shotgun and using a pistol to shoot a watermelon, which bursts on impact. Delighted screams and laughter from unidentified people are heard in the background.

Sky News also broadcast audio of a man it says "sounds very much" like Pistorius who comments on the shattered watermelon.

"It's a lot softer than brain but ... it's like a zombie stopper," the man said.

Pistorius' murder trial starts Monday. The prosecution says the Olympic runner had a fight with Reeva Steenkamp before killing her by firing shots through a door in the bathroom of his home on Feb. 14 last year. He says he shot the model and reality TV star after mistaking her for a dangerous intruder in the night.

Lost in translation

Hollywood movies bizarrely renamed for foreign market

By Aron Heller
The Associated Press

JERUSALEM — David O. Russell's crime drama "American Hustle" could be a big winner at Sunday's Academy Awards. But for the movie's many international fans, it may take a little longer to realize it. In their country, there is simply no word that captures the true essence of "Hustle."

So in Israel the film is known in Hebrew as "American Dream." In France, it's translated as "American Bluff." In Argentina, it's "American Scandal." In Portugal, it's "American Sting." In Quebec, it's "American Scam." In Spain, it's the "Great American Scam." And in Turkey, it's merely known as "Trickster."

Big Hollywood films have immediate name recognition in the Unites States. But in the rest of the world, moviegoers are long accustomed to their respective countries translating the titles with their own, often quirkier names.

Observers say there is often a need to reframe a linguistic expression or a cultural phenomenon that may be foreign to non-American ears. Sometimes the distributors orchestrate the name shift to create familiarity, stir a local buzz and attract more viewers. Other times, nonsensical translations simply defy logic.

Arie Barak, whose public relations company represents the studios of Fox, Disney and Sony in Israel, said that in this era of globalization the trend was to try to stick as much as possible to the original title, particularly with blockbusters and well-branded superheroes like Batman and Superman.

The bottom line is money, and if the name doesn't work locally, he said Hollywood studios are more than happy to adapt. That's how his firm came up with one of the strangest Hebrew translations in recent years, turning the animated comedy flick "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs" into an Israeli version called "It's Raining Falafel."

"Meatballs are not something Israelis relate to," Barak said, noting that falafel was a better equivalent of a local food staple. (In Turkey, the title apparently translated just fine and the film was renamed "Raining Kofte," a local version of the meatball.)

While the Hebrew film lacked any reference to fried balls of chick peas, Barak said the strategy paid off. Ditto for "Silver Linings Playbook," which he helped translate into "Optimism is the Name of the Game." In France, for example, the film was renamed "Happiness Therapy."

Sebastian Scheiner/AP

An ultra-Orthodox Jewish man walks past a poster for the movie "That Awkward Moment," translated to Hebrew as "The Date That Embarrassed Me," outside a cinema in Jerusalem on Feb. 27.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Ex-deputy sentenced in 'dirty DUI' case

CA SAN FRANCISCO — A former Bay Area sheriff's deputy will spend 15 months in federal prison for his role in a scheme to arrest men for drunken driving to help their ex-wives' divorce and custody cases.

An emotional Stephen Tanabe, 50, was sentenced Wednesday for multiple felonies including conspiracy and extortion.

The former Contra Costa County deputy was paid by private investigator Christopher Butler to arrest two men outside bars in elaborate stings known as "Dirty DUIs".

Authorities said Butler was hired to tarnish their images. Butler, who testified against Tanabe, is currently serving a prison sentence for drug dealing.

Butler was the center of a corruption scandal resulting in convictions of Bay Area police officers from four agencies, including the former head of a drug task force.

Parents upset after man picks up wrong kid

CT STERLING — Parents in a small eastern Connecticut town are demanding action by local officials after a man went to a school to pick up his great-grandson and took the wrong child home.

The 5-year-old boy's mother was among the parents who criticized school officials in Sterling during a board of education meeting Tuesday night.

The mother, Angela Stone, said it happened Feb. 21 at Sterling Community School. She said her son refused to get out of the man's car at his home, and the man's wife noticed the mistake. He then drove the boy back to the school.

Stone called school officials incompetent and said they should be disciplined.

School Superintendent Rena Klebart acknowledges mistakes were made and said officials are making changes to prevent it from happening again.

Roadside zoos object to proposed restrictions

MD ANNAPOLIS — Three Maryland roadside zoos are objecting to a bill in the General Assembly that could bar them from obtaining new big cats, bears and primates.

The zoos in Thurmont, Cumberland and Rising Sun say House Bill 1124 threatens their existence. They would be prohibited from replacing such animals if they have been cited in the past three years for certain Animal Welfare Act violations, or if they've had such animals escape or hurt someone.

Zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums would be exempt.

The Catoctin Wildlife Preserve and Zoo in Thurmont is seeking to also exempt zoos accredited by the smaller Zoological Association of America. Catoctin is accredited by that group. The other two zoos have neither trade group's accreditation.

THE CENSUS

$618K

The amount of income from kickbacks federal prosecutors say a U.S. contractor who worked in Iraq failed to failed to disclose on his income tax filing. Darrin Albert Searle pleaded guilty Tuesday in Memphis, Tenn., to filing a false tax return. He is scheduled to be sentenced May 29.

Christopher Millette, Erie (Pa.) Times-News/AP

Blinded by the white

Carrie Miller, 25, looks at her wrecked, overturned vehicle Thursday following a 25-vehicle, chain-reaction crash on Interstate 79 just north of Edinboro, Pa., in Franklin Township. Miller said white-out conditions caused by a heavy snow squall caused the accident.

DA says man posed as him in scam of elderly

PA PHILADELPHIA — The district attorney in Philadelphia says a rip-off artist pretending to be him scammed an elderly man out of $95,000.

District Attorney Seth Williams said Monday that the suspect began working for the World War II veteran back in 2011 by cutting his lawn, then concocted a story that he was in trouble for illegally dumping grass clippings and needed money for court costs.

The scam is suspected of escalating with Shelton Thomas, 47, eventually claiming to be Williams and using judges' names to persuade the 93-year-old victim into giving him more money.

Thomas is charged with robbery, theft, extortion and impersonating a public servant and was jailed on $750,000 bail.

The victim's family couldn't convince him he was being ripped off, but Williams personally told him about the scam last week.

School apologizes for soul food menu

IN INDIANAPOLIS — A private Indianapolis school is apologizing for a lunch menu toasting Black History Month that featured fried chicken, collard greens and a soul food bar.

Park Tudor School apologized in a statement Thursday for Wednesday's lunch menu that sparked a social media outcry over reinforcing negative stereotypes.

The private school and college preparatory academy served fried chicken, collard greens and other items along with a soul food bar on Wednesday for a lunch menu titled "Celebrate Black History Month."

The school said in its apology that the lunch menu "was an offensive and misguided attempt by our foodservice provider to celebrate Black History Month."

The school's statement said it recognizes "the distress and hurt feelings this has caused within our entire community."

Kennedy acquitted in drugged driving case

NY WHITE PLAINS— Kerry Kennedy was acquitted Friday of drugged driving after she accidentally took a sleeping pill and then sideswiped a truck in a wild highway drive she said she didn't remember.

Kennedy hugged and clasped hands with her lawyers as a six-person jury cleared her of driving while impaired, a misdemeanor. It had carried the potential for up to a year in jail, though that would be unlikely for a first-time offender.

A human-rights advocate, Kennedy is a scion of one political dynasty — a daughter of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and niece of President John F. Kennedy — and a onetime member of another, as the former wife of New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

'Road rage' rabbi pleads guilty to violation

NY WHITE PLAINS — A Westchester County rabbi accused of impersonating a police officer during road rage incidents has pleaded guilty to a violation.

Alfredo Borodowski pleaded guilty Thursday in Mamaroneck Village Court to second-degree harassment. He will get no jail time or probation if he stays out of trouble for a year.

He already had pleaded guilty under the same terms in Greenburgh, White Plains and Yonkers.

Authorities said slow drivers enraged Borodowski.

In the Mamaroneck incident, he confronted a woman driving in a school zone. Authorities said he acknowledged that he held up a fake badge while yelling.

The rabbi asked for forgiveness outside court.

He has received psychiatric treatment and said he wants to be a "voice" for people with mental illness.

Doughnut shop in YMCA won't sell doughnuts

MA QUINCY — A doughnut shop chain won't be selling doughnuts at a new Massachusetts location.

Quincy's licensing board this week approved a plan for Honey Dew Donuts to open a shop inside the city's new $30 million YMCA.

A spokeswoman for the Y said that because of the organization's emphasis on physical fitness, no doughnuts will be sold. The shop will sell coffee, low-fat muffins, salads, sandwiches, yogurt, fruit cups and smoothies. All menu items must be approved by the Y.

According to Honey Dew's website, its low-fat muffins contain more calories and sugar than many of its doughnuts.

From wire reports

NATION

Ragged glory

Civil War flag from 1863 battle discovered in basement of Lowell, Mass., auditorium

By Grant Welker
The (Lowell, Mass.) Sun

LOWELL, Mass.

Union troops were deep in enemy territory, outnumbered badly by Confederate forces on a battlefield in Clinton, La., near the Mississippi border. Among the Union troops in Louisiana were many from Lowell, Mass., who were recruited to fight in the far South by Gen. Benjamin Butler of Lowell, who had been appointed military governor of New Orleans in 1862.

Solon Perkins, a lieutenant in the 2nd Massachusetts Cavalry Regiment, was caught on the wrong side of the Clinton battle on June 3, 1863. Shot once in the arm, Perkins initially fought on.

"Now boys, let us show these scoundrels that we can fight," Perkins implored his comrades, before being hit again only minutes later.

He died about two hours later, suffering little or no pain, according to a Lowell minister who passed on details of Perkins' death later that summer based on information given to Perkins' mother.

Not until 151 years later has a piece of that battle been found — a tattered, faded and worn flag that Perkins had flying over him or maybe even worn at the time he was shot.

The flag was uncovered last month only when employees of Global Spectrum, which runs Lowell Memorial Auditorium, were in the basement of the building and saw it. They contacted their supervisor, who reached out to the Greater Lowell Veterans Council, which is planning to have the flag preserved and displayed in the auditorium's Hall of Flags.

"The thing, when you see it, it's incredible," said Robert Page, a veterans council commander. "It's absolutely incredible."

The council has a duty to have the flag restored, said Page, adding that no one knows exactly why the flag was put in basement storage.

"I couldn't believe it when I saw it," he said.

Piecing together the flag's history came together pretty quickly, thanks to an inscription on the thick wood framing around the flag: "Under this flag at Clinton, La. , on June 3, 1863, Solon A. Perkins was killed."

The council's historian, Richard Howe Jr., got to work, using his city politics and history blog to spread word of the finding, which also brought more information.

"I recognized the guy's name right away," said Howe, who leads tours of Lowell Cemetery. Howe's tour passes by Perkins' gravestone, which Howe said he plans to add to the tour.

The speculation is that so much is known about Perkins because he was from a wealthy family. Perkins, who was born in Lancaster, N.H., in 1836, went into international business after graduating from Lowell High School, working in Buenos Aires and in Mexico, becoming fluent in French and Spanish, according to Howe's research.

At 27, Perkins enlisted for the Civil War.

Eileen Loucraft, a board member at the Lowell Historical Society, said she thinks the guidon flag, which differs from a normal flag by the V-shape cut out of its right side, may have actually been worn like a sash by Perkins. That's because a trail of descriptions of the flag over the years make it clear it's the same item, with its elaborate and unique frame. In an 1894 story in the Lowell Daily Sun, the flag was described as a sash worn by Perkins when he was killed.

> **'The thing, when you see it, it's incredible. "It's absolutely incredible.'**
>
> **Robert Page**
> Commander of the Greater Lowell Veterans Council

The flag, Loucraft found in her research, appears to have been donated to Lowell Memorial Auditorium in 1929 by Mary Sawyer Knapp, a woman known to have a large collection of war relics.

It was installed in the auditorium, then must have been removed at some point during renovations, Howe said. It was found in the basement behind a piano.

The next tasks for the Greater Lowell Veterans Council are fundraising and getting the flag conserved.

One expert on textile conservation, Camille Myers Breeze, the founder and director of Museum Textile Services in Andover, said the flag appears to have been in the same rough condition now as when it was framed. It's in too poor shape to be restored, but it could be made to look "tidier and fresher," she said.

"Instead of seeing an ancient artifact, you could see what an amazing survivor it is," Breeze said, calling the amount of documentation on the flag "extraordinary."

A guidon flag had a more practical than ornamental purpose during the Civil War, experts said.

They would often be associated with cavalry, or those who fought on horseback, and were typically flown with a state and national flag, said Peter Drummey, the head librarian at the Massachusetts Historical Society. The head of a regiment would typically carry the guidon flag atop a pole to identify the regiment, Breeze said.

The flags were also used to signal to soldiers during battle where they stood in relation to the rest of their regiment and to individual units, Drummey said.

After the Civil War ended, he said, many of the flags were returned to the Statehouse to hang in the building's Hall of Flags. According to the Statehouse, flags from the Civil War and subsequent wars now hang in protected storage, with replicas hanging in their place.

Despite the flag's rough condition, such flags are valued by collectors, according to the website for antique flag collector Jeff R. Bridgman Antiques Inc.

"Military issue, Union Civil War battle colors are one of the 'Holy Grails' of the flag- collecting world," the company says. "They rarely surface in the marketplace, because so few survived in private hands."

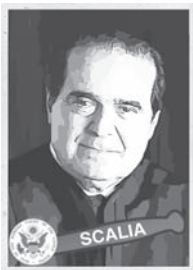
Above: Steve Purtell points to a portion of a Civil War Flag found in the basement of the Lowell Memorial Auditorium in Lowell, Mass. The tattered, faded and worn flag accompanied Union troops on a Louisiana battlefield in 1863.

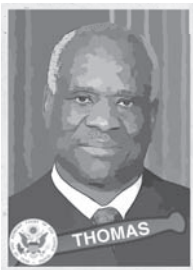
Bob Whitaker, Lowell Sun/AP

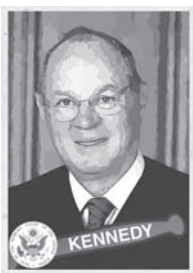
NATION

Fantasy SCOTUS

For the Supreme Court, a fantasy league of their own







ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRISTOPHER SIX/Stars and Stripes

BY JUAN A. LOZANO
The Associated Press

HOUSTON — In many ways, it's a fantasy league like any other, with players obsessing over mounds of data and minutia, teams sporting a variety of colorful names like "RISK It for the Biscuit" and projections that are bound to be way off.

But in this fantasy league, it's not the NFL's Calvin Johnson or Peyton Manning who are the stars but a group known for its skills not on the playing field but in the courtroom: the nine justices on the U.S. Supreme Court.

In FantasySCOTUS, participants try to predict how the justices will vote in each of the cases that come before the high court during its term, which runs from October to late June or early July.

Josh Blackman, a Houston law professor who started the online game more than four years ago, said the site is a fun way of understanding an institution that for many people remains mysterious and far removed from daily life.

"People want to know what are they doing, and this is just one way of kind of peeling back the curtain," said Blackman, who teaches at South Texas College of Law.

FantasySCOTUS started "almost like a joke," said the 29-year-old Blackman.

The idea came in 2009 when he kidded with a friend about what the betting odds would be in Las Vegas over the then pending ruling from the Supreme Court in the Citizens United case, which lifted many restrictions on corporate spending in political elections.

Blackman and another person built the site in a month and launched it in November 2009. Within 24 hours, 1,000 people had signed up. Today, the site has more than 20,000 participants.

While most players tend to be lawyers or law students, the site also has political scientists and engineers as well as other professions.

Blackman said the site's best players are 75 to 80 percent accurate.

A correct guess on a justice's vote to either affirm or reverse a case earns 10 points. Correctly guessing how all nine justices vote earns a 100 point bonus. The high court votes on about 80 cases per year.

The winner each season of FantasySCOTUS earns the title of "chief justice" and a golden gavel with their name inscribed on it. While there are no cash prizes, there are "lots of bragging rights," Blackman said.

Jacob Berlove, 30, of New York City, has been the holder of those bragging rights for three years running.

What makes Berlove's accomplishment more impressive is that he never went to law school. Berlove, who has also never played fantasy football, currently works in medical billing. But he has been interested in the high court since elementary school.

"I'm certainly never going to sit on the Supreme Court. The best I can do is show that I perhaps understand the way the justices are operating," he said.

But Berlove isn't playing this season, saying the lack of a cash prize has made it difficult to devote so much time to the game.

Blackman said he is considering adding a cash prize next year.

Kathleen Arberg, a spokeswoman for the Supreme Court, declined to comment about the fantasy league.

Blackman said he has heard that the justices are aware of his website.

FantasySCOTUS has also led to the creation of the Harlan Institute, a nonprofit Blackman started that's established a version of site that is used as a teaching tool in high schools across the country.

Anthony Sabino, a law professor at St. John's University in New York City, said while the idea of the fantasy league might sound silly at first, he believes it can be a good way to educate the public about the high court. A 2012 survey by the FindLaw.com legal information website found that nearly two-thirds of Americans couldn't name a single member of the Supreme Court.

"It makes people aware of the court and when you become aware of the Supreme Court, you become aware of your rights as an American and that is very, very important and that is always to the good," said Sabino, who teaches business and constitutional law.

Law professor Josh Blackman talks about his online game FantasySCOTUS Jan. 29 at his office in Houston. Participants try to predict how the judges will vote on cases that come before them as a fun way of understanding an institution that for many remains mysterious.

PAT SULLIVAN/AP

Films with CHARACTER

This year, the best picture nominees for the Academy Awards are really about the characters.

The nine films nominated for best picture are full of great and memorable characters who endure long after the movie has ended. The nominees feature men suffering and persevering — "Captain Phillips," "12 Years a Slave," "Dallas Buyers Club" and "Her." They feature grieving mothers — "Gravity" and "Philomena." They feature cons — those perpetuating them and those falling for them — "American Hustle," "Nebraska" and "The Wolf of Wall Street."

And many of the films feature supporting characters just as memorable as their protagonist — such as the voice of the OS in "Her," the wife in "Nebraska," and a young slave woman in "12 Years a Slave." No wonder it felt like the actor and actress categories needed to be expanded to 10 nominees each.

Stripes staffers share their takes on the nine best picture nominees.

The show airs on AFN on March 3.

Countdown to the Academy Awards 3 2 1

Get full-length assessments of the best picture nominees, a printable ballot and the latest updates on the events at **stripes.com/oscars2014**

12 Years a Slave

"12 Years a Slave" is the favorite to win going into this year's Academy Awards — and deservedly so. It is a masterfully made epic tale featuring a well-told story, beautiful directing and incredible performances.

The film is adapted from the 1853 memoir of Solomon Northup, a free black man living in New York. The father, husband and talented musician is lured to Washington, D.C., drugged and sold into slavery. He endures and witnesses horror after horror while enslaved — brutality, abuse and degradation. It would be easy to say that this is a film about slavery and those trapped in it. But it's not. The film is really about Northup's battle to sustain his identity, his humanity and his hope in the face of very long odds that he would ultimately be free again and with his family.

The movie's cinematography is stunning — terrible events are juxtaposed against the beauty of northern Louisiana, where the movie was set and shot. But the performances elevate this film. Michael Fassbender disappears into his role as a sadistic slave owner. Lupita Nyong'o gives her role as slave woman Patsey incredible depth and feeling. Patsey is alternately childlike and sweet and desperate and hopeless in the face of a seemingly never-ending situation. Her final moments in the film are unforgettable. And Chiwetel Ejiofor shines as Northup. He manages to make you understand his character's struggles while he hides his true self from those determined to strip him forever of his identity.

"12 Years a Slave"
Fox Searchlight Pictures

The cast said making the movie was like "dancing with ghosts." I was haunted by the film's characters long after the lights went up and I made my way back out into the streets of Washington, D.C. — not far from where Northup himself was held after he was kidnapped and sold. I couldn't let go of the sight of Patsey's face after she was once again abused by her masters, or Northup's expression when he is once again denied a chance at freedom. This was not an easy film to watch, but a worthy one. And it will take home the Oscar for best picture.

— Danielle L. Kiracofe, entertainment/features editor, @dorogaya26

"American Hustle"
Columbia Pictures

American Hustle

The story of this best picture nominee is complex yet simple: Everyone in this story is conning someone, and a few are also conning themselves. It's "The Sting," only with bad hair and lots of cleavage. This crazy caper, based on the late 1970s/early '80s Abscam scandal, is a true ensemble piece. That makes it great to watch, but hard to predict for Oscars. The Academy doesn't have a performance by a cast category — for which "Hustle" earned a SAG award — and the competition for best picture is stiff. While I loved the movie — pay attention or you might miss a twist or two — and I loved tripping through the disco era, its value is the sum of its performances, so I don't see it as best picture winner.

Bradley Cooper stands out as Richie DiMas, a rogue FBI agent with visions of grandeur despite living with his degrading mother and putting off his long-suffering fiancee. It's almost sad when the stars in his eyes — powered by dreams of the FBI sting — fade. Cooper would win

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

THE ACADEMY AWARDS

FROM PAGE 15

best supporting actor if I were voting. And I'll go with beautiful chameleon Amy Adams to win as best actress for her role as the interesting character Sydney — and for the best use of double-stick tape.

Christian Bale is oddly charismatic as Irving, with his bald-man swirlie and huge glasses, but he's too easily manipulated by Sydney (Adams) and his controlling wife, Rosalyn (Jennifer Lawrence). It's easy to see why he was nominated for best actor; I hope that's enough for him. As for Lawrence, she's eye-candy with her faux vulnerability, and the critics loved her. Me, not so much. In a film full of small fish treading water in a big pond, she's too koi for me.

There's another amazing ensemble in this film: the soundtrack. From Duke Ellington's "Jeep's Blues" (when Irving meets Sydney) to Santana's "Evil Ways" (when Rosalyn saunters over to mobster bad boys), the music fits the characters and the moments. And yes, there's the requisite disco-era touch: The Bee Gees pine about broken hearts when Rosalyn kisses Sydney, and Donna Summer heats it up when Irving and Sydney dance.

But perhaps I've said too much for the folks who haven't seen "American Hustle" — if there are any left. The movie is worth the hype and its 10 nominations, but I'm betting against a clean sweep.

— Tina Croley, enterprise editor

"Captain Phillips"
Columbia Pictures

"Gravity"
Warner Bros.

"Dallas Buyers Club"
Focus Features

Captain Phillips

The film "Captain Phillips," which was nominated for an Academy Award for best picture, is a story about the real-life hijacking of the U.S.-flagged MV Maersk Alabama by Somali pirates in 2009. During the incident, Richard Phillips, played by Tom Hanks, was taken hostage by the Somalis after they disembarked from his vessel.

The seizure of the Maersk Alabama marked the first time in 200 years that an American cargo ship had been hijacked on the high seas. The shocking attack mobilized U.S. Navy warships, and the subsequent standoff with the pirates ultimately drew in President Barack Obama, the commander-in-chief who had been in office only a few months. It was one of the first national security crises of his presidency.

The film was well-acted. Tom Hanks did a solid job as the main character. Although it was not the finest performance of his amazing career, his acting in the final scene demonstrated why he is one of the best in the business.

But Hanks was outshined by Barkhad Abdi, who played the leader of the pirate gang. Abdi, a Somali native who was starring in his first film, delivered an outstanding performance that earned him a well-deserved best supporting actor nomination. Although the other nominees did a fine job in their respective films, the Oscar should clearly go to Abdi.

Overall, "Captain Phillips" is an intense adventure story that appeals to a wide audience. It is entertaining and well worth seeing. But given the caliber of the competition this year, it is not worthy of winning best picture.

— Jon Harper, Pentagon reporter
@JHarperStripes

Dallas Buyers Club

It's difficult to judge Matthew McConaughey's star turn in "Dallas Buyers Club" without considering it in the context of the past two years. During that time, he's made film fans and critics take notice with his performances in "Mud," "Magic Mike," "The Wolf of Wall Street" and the HBO series "True Detective." This stretch of incredible work makes one wonder how he got lost in the land of lame rom-coms for so many years.

The crowning jewel in this career renaissance is McConaughey's performance as Ron Woodroof in "Dallas Buyers Club." Based on real events, the film tells Woodroof's story from his 1985 HIV diagnosis to the end of his life. The hard-charging electrician and rodeo aficionado reacts to the news with angry denial. The homophobic Texan couldn't have HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, because he's not a homosexual. To suggest otherwise would be a request for a faceful of fist. Woodroof sneers at the doctor's prognosis: 30 days to live.

Woodroof does some research, and quickly discovers that, given his history of unprotected sex, the diagnosis is real. Still, he's determined to die with his boots on. He finds a sympathetic ear in Dr. Saks, played by Jennifer Garner, but she can't give him what he really wants — the drug AZT. Instead, he gets it illegally through a hospital employee. When that well runs dry, Woodroof heads south of the border.

A Mexican doctor tells him that AZT (along with continued booze and coke binges) has compromised his immune system, and Woodroof has developed AIDS. The doctor prescribes unapproved pharmaceuticals and vitamins. Woodroof sees results, and sees the opportunity to make money by selling the drugs to other patients. During a subsequent hospital stay, Woodroof is placed in a room with Rayon, best supporting actor nominee Jared Leto, a transgender woman enrolled in an AZT trial. Woodroof and Rayon become unlikely business partners. Ron is repulsed by Rayon's lifestyle, but attracted to his new associate's network of potential clients.

After run-ins with the law and the FDA, Woodroof decides to stop selling drugs and start selling memberships. Hence the formation of the titular club. For $400 a month, clients get all the drugs they want. The wiry Woodroof is a scrapper, battling for his life on one front and fighting tooth and nail with The Man on the other.

Capturing the fighting side of Woodroof is the heart of McConaughey's performance. He is a man possessed. He lost more than 40 pounds for the role (Leto, deservedly nominated for best supporting actor, lost more than 30), making it at times uncomfortable to look at this doomed man. The way he channels Woodroof's rage, first into looking for a lifeline and then into compassionately helping others, makes it impossible to look away. McConaughey transformed himself physically, and Woodroof, who lost his friends after his diagnosis, evolved through tolerance.

Oscar voters love transformation, and McConaughey has got it to spare. Physical change, change of character and the reawakening of a promising career. The plot of "Dallas Buyers Club" feels a little too contrived at times (even for a movie script), and that's why it's unlikely to win best picture. McConaughey, though, is likely to continue his career resurgence with the Oscar for best actor.

— Sean Moores, assistant managing editor/sports, features and graphics

Gravity

Alfonso Cuaron's "Gravity" is a visual marvel. One gets the sensation at times that you're an additional member of the crew, floating above a beautiful Earth, weightless and feeling poetic, as the vast majority of what we experience glides by beneath you.

So why did I come away feeling empty?

Maybe it's the improbability of having human drama — even one as gripping as the events portrayed would be — match up to the technical achievement. Maybe the dialogue feels flat, because what can be said? How do you even process the notion of being stranded in space, and having to climb in and out of disabled spacecraft in the hopes of finding the lifeboat that will get you home?

Cinema purists might take issue with a cinematography award for something artificial, but that feels like the realm in which this movie should be competing for awards; the sheer magic of being in a theater and feeling like you're somewhere few people have been.

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Oscars trivia

MCT

289
the number of features eligible for best picture for the 86th Academy Awards

6,028
the number of voting members of the academy

50
the number of statuettes created for the 86th Academy Awards

8.5
the weight, in pounds, of an Oscar statuette

Source: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

THE ACADEMY AWARDS

"Her"
Warner Bros.

"Nebraska"
Paramount Pictures

FROM PAGE 16

I am OK with suspending my disbelief. I won't feel the need to pick nits, as a colleague did: "All the space stations and space telescopes don't hang around in an area the size of the greater Washington [D.C.,] metro area," he said. "The Hubble and ISS are at different altitudes and on different orbits, each going like 17,000 miles an hour. If you managed to leave one and contact the other, you would disintegrate and it would be damaged."

True. Still, the movie's great shortcoming, in my view, is that it didn't make me believe the human drama.

I like visually appealing, technologically-savvy popcorn fare as much as the next guy. I wish I'd gone into the movie knowing that's all it was. Why on Earth is this movie a best-picture nominee?

— Patrick Dickson, Washington Bureau Chief, @StripesDCchief

Her

In the not-too-distant future, people live practically virtual lives. Or so we're led to believe from observing our protagonist, Theodore Twombly, played by Joaquin Phoenix. Theodore is a writer-for-hire — his company's employees write letters for strangers. He writes love letters for other couples with great passion, and surprising intimacy, as his computer takes dictation.

But he goes home alone to an empty apartment, aside from a video game. His estranged wife, played by Rooney Mara, has been asking him to sign final divorce papers for a year. He just can't bring himself to do it.

Theodore sees an advertisement for a sentient computer operating system, and decides — why not? After just a few less than thorough personal questions, his tailor-made OS is ready. And she sounds just like Scarlett Johansson. Thus begins an unlikely relationship — first a friendship, then something more intimate — and a dip into the familiar "sentient computer wants to learn what it's like to be truly human" trope. But, to writer/director Spike Jonze's credit, he doesn't stop there. The OS, who names herself Samantha, and the other sentient operating systems learn all they can from the humans, then start conversing among themselves, and come to conclusions their human creators most likely never intended them to reach.

Johansson acquits herself well as her voice-only character. I wouldn't go so far as to call it Oscar-worthy (she's not nominated, but some have said she should have been), but the role continues to push the envelope that the likes of Andy Serkis (Gollum in "The Lord of the Rings" and "Hobbit" movies) began — the idea that an acting role is more than a physical body being filmed. I suspect it doesn't hurt that Johansson's physical body is well-known to movie fans in genres far and wide, and it's pretty easy to picture who's talking, even if she can't be seen.

The movie touches many themes that have been done before — lonely characters in need meet each other, get to know one another in unlikely ways and become more fulfilled and better from the acquaintance. But by the end, the story has also taken us somewhere refreshingly new. Through the humans vs. OS element, the movie encourages us to ponder what it means to be alive, and in love, and what a relationship really requires.

The movie isn't likely to take the night's biggest Oscar prize — it's a bit too quiet for that — but it has earned its spot in the running through its insightful script, its gorgeous camera work and Phoenix's powerful acting.

By the end of the movie, Theodore is in a better place through knowing Samantha. One of the critical moments occurs, interestingly enough, when his thinking about relationships is more binary than hers. Perhaps the machines have something to teach us after all.

— Kate Maisel, features editor

Nebraska

Watching "Nebraska," a line in Baz Luhrmann's song, "Everybody's Free (to Wear Sunscreen)" came to mind: "Get to know your parents/You never know when they might be gone for good."

Believing he has won a million dollars in a direct-mail sweepstakes, cantankerous, shambling drunk Woody Grant, portrayed brilliantly by Bruce Dern, tries to walk from his home in Billings, Mont., to Lincoln, Neb., to claim his prize. Following another failed attempt to do so and after the insistence of his wife Kate (nominee June Squibb) and two sons that this is a scam, Woody's son David (Will Forte) finally agrees to take his father on an 850-mile journey, as a way to bond with his father, give the elder a break from his nagging wife and allow him a possible final adventure.

Along the way, the pair get detoured to the fictional town of Hawthorne, Neb., where Woody grew up and where his older brother still resides. An impromptu family reunion takes place, and soon Woody's wife, never one to bite her tongue, and their slightly more successful son Ross join in. The story proceeds like an episode of "This Is Your Life," and we learn more about Woody's difficult past.

Beneath the surprising humor of "Nebraska" is a story of disappointment, regret and despair. The backdrop of Hawthorne, its wide-open spaces where little life is seen, plays an important role in the film and helps us understand how Woody came to be so despondent and uninterested in the people around him.

"Nebraska" is deserving of the Oscar for best picture this year quite simply because it feels so real. There's no feeling of overacting or underacting. The characters are convincing and you feel connected to them. You pity them. You root for them. By the end, you care for them. A drama, a comedy and a character study all in one, it's a thought-provoking story. It takes you to an uncomfortable but necessary place, where you must face your own mortality and the mortality of your parents.

Squibb's brazen portrayal of a feisty, forever suffering wife ("You know what I'd do with a million dollars? I'd put him in a home.") is genius, and Forte is highly effective as the underachieving but well-meaning son in one of his first dramatic film roles. However, Dern, who won the best actor award at the Cannes Film Festival for his portrayal of Woody, steals the show and delivers the performance of a lifetime.

While Woody does not leave Lincoln a millionaire, he definitely won me over in "Nebraska," one of the most touching and important movies of the year.

— Laura Evans, copy editor

Philomena

I expected "Philomena" to be another excellent example of the stately and critically acclaimed British actress Dame Judi Dench being ... well, the stately and critically acclaimed British actress. And it was.

What I didn't expect is that I would also see Dench in this Oscar-nominated role taking on such complex issues as love, faith and forgiveness.

"Philomena" is the story of a woman's quest to find her son, taken from her 50 years earlier. In 1952, the title character, inspired by the real-life Philomena Lee, is 18 years old and pregnant when she is banished to a Catholic home for unwed mothers in Roscrea, Ireland. After giving birth, Philomena does hard duty in the convent's laundry. She lives for the one hour a day that the convent allows the mothers to see their children. Without warning, the convent gives the boy to an American couple when he is 3 years old, leaving the young Philomena to scream and cry as she sees the last glimpse of his small face looking out from the car driven away by his adoptive parents.

Philomena lives with her pain secretly until she finally tells her grown daughter, and the daughter enlists the help of former BBC journalist Martin Sixsmith, played by Steve Coogan, to write her mother's story.

Thus begins a journey that takes the cynical but kind journalist and a woman in her dotage to the U.S. to search for the long-lost son.

Philomena is a sweet but at times exasperating old woman. Once in Washington, D.C., where Sixsmith scours birth records, she assumes that a dark-skinned server is Mexican and tells him that she believes Mexico must be lovely "aside from the kidnappings." She marvels at America and the gigantic food portions.

As the pair piece together details of her

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Oscars trivia

500
approximate length, in feet, of the Oscars red carpet at Dolby Theater in Hollywood

2,900
the number of Oscar statuettes presented since the first Academy Awards

8
the number of times Martin Scorsese has been nominated for best director (He has won once.)

Source: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

On the Web

For the latest on the Oscars from Stars and Stripes: stripes.com/oscars2014

Follow the Academy:

- **Facebook:** Facebook.com/TheAcademy
- **Twitter:** Twitter.com/TheAcademy (Official Oscars hashtags: #Oscars #BestDressed)
- **YouTube:** YouTube.com/Oscars
- **Google+:** bit.ly/OscarsGplus

THE ACADEMY AWARDS

Ideas on how the awards telecast can be better

BY GLENN WHIPP
Los Angeles Times

We're days away from the Oscars, which means we're days away from the first tweet complaining about the show.

But why wait?

Let's be clear: We're not wishing failure on this year's Oscar telecast or predicting that host Ellen DeGeneres will bomb. When it comes to the Oscars, we're always hopeful. And then the show starts and ... mmmph ... it's wait 'til next year.

But it's going to be different on March 2, right? (It will air March 3 on AFN-Movie). Producers Craig Zadan and Neil Meron are back on the job, as is DeGeneres, returning as host seven years after her first turn. We're sure they're going to put all that experience to good use. But, you know, just in case, here are a few ideas for a more perfect night, both for this year and the future.

Ramp up the energy, Ellen. We enjoyed your low-key charm back in '07. Asking Steven Spielberg to snap your picture with Clint Eastwood? Adorbs. But there's a fine line between unpretentious and just a little dull. Don't let last year keep you from stirring the pot. As long as you're funny, no one will mind the barbs. (Publicly, at least.)

Pick a host. Then stay the course. We've gone from the "OMG! Oscars heart young people" Anne Hathaway/James Franco debacle to nostalgic, Old Hollywood Billy Crystal ("We've cornered the 70- to 85-year-old market!") then, last year, to naughty (Seth MacFarlane) to this year's return to nice. The Golden Globes, meanwhile, are enjoying record ratings, having established a consistent tone by employing the same great hosts year after year. (Ricky Gervais ran things from 2009 to 2011; Tina Fey and Amy Poehler are signed next year for a third straight go-around.) The audience knows what to expect and actually looks forward to what's coming. Crazy, huh?

So, if DeGeneres kills it this year, bring her back. If not, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences needs to find the 21st century equivalent of Crystal, Johnny Carson and Bob Hope — hosts who skillfully presided over the Oscars for years. Since ABC has the telecast through 2020, it's not going to be Jimmy Fallon, who amped up the fun as Emmy host in 2010. So why not Jimmy Kimmel, who, at the 2012 Emmys, displayed a winning goofiness that played both at home and the room itself?

Change the venue. "The Oscars used to be a good time," says Robert Osborne, author of "85 Years of the Oscar: The Official History of the Academy Awards."

"But that was back in the early years when it was a banquet and people used to be able to eat and drink and relax. It was a party everyone wanted to attend. Now no one wants to go unless they have to." So why not move it back to a ballroom? Scaling back on the starchiness of a theater setting would do wonders for the vibe in the room and, by extension, the show itself.

Keep it at three hours.

Television icon Ellen DeGeneres returns to host the Oscars for a second time. It airs March 3 on AFN-Movie. The show will air at 1 a.m. Central European Time and 9 a.m. in Japan and Korea.
ABC

FROM PAGE 17

son's life, Philomena practices her faith, and Sixsmith practices his atheism. He becomes enraged about the secrecy that shrouds the convent's baby trade, and the lies it tells to keep the mothers and children from finding each other. But Philomena is without guile. She forgives. Is she just a naive old woman guilty of accepting the easy answers offered by the church? Or is Sixsmith the hardened journalist who is guilty of asking the easy, anti-God questions? Did God cause the pain inflicted on the girls at the convent, or was it human beings who presumed to speak for Him?

It's a gut-wrenching but beautifully told story. Still, the best picture nominee is not without cliches. The worst is the cartoonish portrayal of the business of journalism, as Sixsmith's superficial editor only wants to hear Philomena's story told as good guys versus bad guys and happy versus sad endings. The ending was a bit of both. When I left the theater, I felt as if Philomena's story had happened to me. I'm pretty sure that's a sign of an Oscar-worthy performance.

— Jolene Carpenter, features travel editor

"Philomena"
The Weinstein Company

The Wolf of Wall Street

Have you ever wondered just how excessive your life might become if you ever had an unlimited amount of money at your disposal?

Sure you have. So have I.

No one's better at presenting the trappings and travails of excess quite like Martin Scorsese, who once again goes down that road in his latest movie, "The Wolf of Wall Street."

Viewers will notice a certain similarity among two of Scorsese's earlier films, "Goodfellas" and "Casino," and "The Wolf of Wall Street." All three films let the protagonist tell the story as it unfolds, explaining to the audience what he was thinking and just how his actions came back to haunt him.

"The Wolf of Wall Street"
Paramount Pictures

In this case, it's Leonardo DiCaprio telling the point of view of Jordan Belfort, the once wealthy stockbroker who eventually went to prison on fraud and market manipulation charges.

But the fun is in the journey, and how he reached that point.

DiCaprio and his cronies start out pitching penny stocks to wealthy investors before eventually becoming involved in "pump and dump" schemes in which they purchase most of the stock for themselves, sell the remaining stock to investors to drive up the value of the stock, then sell their own stock for astounding profits. Along with the money comes overindulgence in drugs, sex and alcohol, as well as spending sprees that allow him to live a life that royalty in many other countries might only dream of living. From palatial estates to yachts and helicopters, DiCaprio prods his charges to come along for the ride and enjoy the life that had always eluded them until they went to work for him.

The scenes are true to Belfort's story, and if you didn't know better you'd think Scorsese had dreamed them up. More than once, I found myself saying, surely they didn't do that. From shaving a female co-worker's head for $10,000 to shopping for various levels of prostitutes, DiCaprio seems to relish the role.

Of course, it eventually all comes crashing down and Belfort is forced to incriminate his underlings to avoid a lengthy jail sentence. Just as in "Goodfellas" and "Casino," we get to see where all the excess eventually leads the main character.

But what a ride. Oh, what a ride.

"The Wolf of Wall Street" is also nominated for four other Academy Awards, including best director for Scorsese and best actor for DiCaprio and Jonah Hill for best supporting actor.

— Rich Killmon, sports copy editor

HEALTH & FITNESS

Got flab? Stress?

Health coaches are here to help

By Marni Jameson
The Orlando Sentinel

Like many working moms, advertising executive Regina Camplin put work and family ahead of personal wellness.

"After I had my second child, work was crazy breakneck. I was traveling and struggling to find myself in all of that," said the 38-year-old mother of two daughters, ages 4 and 5.

That changed two years ago when the Oviedo, Fla., woman started working with certified health coach Nicole Copare, who helped Camplin lose weight, get stronger and find some balance in her life.

A relatively new profession — at least in name — health coaches are part weight-loss counselor, part personal trainer and part motivational expert. The field is growing rapidly thanks to a big boost from the new health-care law.

Obamacare requires private insurance companies to cover "intensive behavioral counseling for obesity" for adults beginning in 2014. That coverage has to be without any co-pay from patients. Medicare already covers obesity counseling for Americans older than 65.

Sessions with a certified health coach would qualify. The American Council on Exercise, the accrediting agency best known for certifying personal trainers, began offering health-coach certifications in October 2012. Since then it has become "the fastest-growing certification we have ever seen," said Cedric Bryant, chief science officer for ACE.

Today, the council has 2,600 certified health coaches, including 128 in Florida, Bryant said.

Coaches differ from personal trainers in key ways, he said. Personal trainers focus on helping individuals with their exercise and physical activity. They conduct fitness assessments, then design exercise programs.

Health coaches take a more holistic view and factor in what else is going on in clients' lives, including work, family, stress levels and diet.

"Most people know what they should be doing," Bryant said. "The secret sauce is to translate that knowledge into activity that leads to sustainable change."

Camplin, who has had a personal trainer before, says working with a health coach is better. "Nicole takes it beyond how much do I weigh and how far can I run, to, if I don't feel right, asking me what's changed in my life."

Since she began working out with Copare, Camplin has lost "at least 20 pounds," but more important to her is what she's gained. "I found a way to fit it all in."

The working mom pays $40 out of pocket for each 30-minute session, which she attends two to three times a week. "I have to invest in lifestyle changes, otherwise I won't get results," she said.

Beyond the promise of coverage, Obamacare is driving the health-coach trend another way. As more Americans become insured as a result of the law, more will see primary-care doctors, who are already in short supply.

"I am one physician with 5,000 patients in my practice," said Dr. Steven McCarus, a gynecologist for Florida Hospital for Women at Winter Park Memorial Hospital, who relies on a health coach to do what he doesn't have time for. "I'm working at max. For me, a health coach is a way to get through my day and address problems I can't."

The health-coach concept is still new to most physicians. When Florida Hospital for Women-Winter Park opened in October, it had one "life designer" on staff. The nurse provides a personalized approach to health and wellness. "This is very new to our Winter Park campus, so we are still working on getting more doctors to refer to it," said hospital spokeswoman Jennifer Roberts.

Having a health coach helps doctors provide support for patients who need help dealing with chronic diseases, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease and obesity, said Bridgette Jameson, a certified health coach who started working for a family doctor at Batson Family Health and Wellness in Longwood, Fla., last January.

"The doctor's goal is to prescribe as little medicine as possible and treat as much as we can with lifestyle. That's where I come in," she said.

Non-Medicare patients pay $25 for a 30-minute session. That's likely to change next year for some patients when the new law will require health insurance plans to provide more coverage, she said.

While the notion of using health coaches is fairly new, McCarus thinks many more doctors will begin relying on them. "Health coaches help providers be proactive. In the long run we will benefit," he said.

"As with any new concept, there are some doubting Thomases," he said. The concern is coach oversight. Doctors need to work closely with health coaches to guard against bad advice.

However, McCarus said, that won't slow the trend. "This is the tip of the iceberg."

How to choose a health coach

Health coaches are gaining popularity so fast that knowing the good ones from the fakes is tricky. Some tips:

- Be sure the coach has a credential from a reputable certifying agency. To become certified by the American Council on Exercise, for instance, applicants spend about 10 hours a week for 12 to 15 weeks on guided study, then take a three-hour exam, said Cedric Bryant, ACE chief science officer.
- Ask what training and experience the coach has. A college degree in a fitness or nutrition-related field would add credibility.
- Talk to some of the coach's clients to see how their experience has gone.
- Be sure the coach is a personality match for you. Chemistry will be important.
- Get a referral from a respected health provider, said Dr. Steven McCarus, a gynecologist for Florida Hospital. "If it's from a physician, that should bring some credibility, especially if the coach is collaborating with a doctor."
- Beware of any coach promoting a product, like a nutrition supplement, or a trendy or extreme plan, said Bryant. Consider that a red flag.

Photos by Stephen M. Dowell, The Orlando Sentinel/MCT

Working mom Regina Camplin, left, works out with health coach Nicole Copare at TV Fitness Pros in Orlando, Fla. While personal trainers focus on an individual's exercise and physical activity, health coaches focus on the person's diet and stress levels.

Fitbit recalls its Force wristband

By Rene Lynch
Los Angeles Times

Fitbit is voluntarily recalling the Force, a wristband fitness tracker that won rave reviews — until users began complaining about skin irritation, rashes and, in some cases, burns.

James Park, Fitbit's CEO and co-founder, released a statement explaining the recall. It said in part: "While only 1.7 percent of Force users have reported any type of skin irritation, we care about every one of our customers. We have now learned enough to take further action. We have stopped selling Force and have decided to conduct a voluntary recall. We are offering a refund directly to consumers for full retail price."

Fitness trackers have become all the rage, spurred on by remarkable tech advances that have turned the fuddy-duddy pedometer into something sleek and cool: Wearable bio feedback that can keep track of steps taken, stairs climbed, calories burned and even how well you slept last night.

A Google search will attest to how cluttered the fitness tracker niche has become.

Yet to many, the Fitbit Force was the standout, winning high marks in categories like ease of setup, its ability to sync feedback across multiple devices, ease of use and at-a-glance feedback. (Many devices, such as those worn on the waistband or bra strap, require retrieval to check in on steps taken so far, or checking a computer or smartphone.)

To those who love their Force fitness trackers, Park said: "Rest assured we're working on our next-generation tracker and will announce news about it soon."

It's still unclear what was causing the Force skin problems. Park's statement suggests that there might be multiple causes:

"Independent test results have not found any issues with the battery or electrical systems. Test results show that users are likely experiencing allergic contact dermatitis. All Force materials are commonly used in consumer products. However, some users may be reacting to the nickel present in the surgical grade stainless steel used in the device. Other users are likely experiencing an allergic reaction to the materials used in the strap or the adhesives used to assemble the product."

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Bitcoin exchange files for bankruptcy

By Yuri Kageyama
The Associated Press

TOKYO — The Mt. Gox bitcoin exchange in Tokyo filed for bankruptcy protection Friday and its chief executive said 850,000 bitcoins, worth several hundred million dollars, are unaccounted for.

The exchange's CEO, Mark Karpeles, appeared before Japanese TV news cameras, bowing deeply for several minutes.

He said a weakness in the exchange's systems was behind a massive loss of the virtual currency involving 750,000 bitcoins from users and 100,000 of the company's own bitcoins. That would amount to about $425 million at recent prices.

The online exchange's unplugging earlier this week and accusations it had suffered a catastrophic theft have drawn renewed regulatory attention to a currency created in 2009 as a way to make transactions across borders without third parties such as banks.

It remains unclear if the missing bitcoins were stolen, voided by technological flaws or both.

"I am sorry for the troubles I have caused all the people," Karpeles said in Japanese at a Tokyo court.

Karpeles had not made a public appearance since rumors of the exchange's insolvency surfaced last month. He said in a web post Wednesday that he was working to resolve Mt. Gox's problems.

The loss is a giant setback to the currency's image because its boosters have promoted bitcoin's cryptography as protecting it from counterfeiting and theft.

Bitcoin proponents have insisted that Mt. Gox is an isolated case, caused by the company's technological failures, and the potential of virtual currencies remains great.

Debts at Mt. Gox totaled more than $65 million, surpassing its assets, according to Teikoku Databank, which monitors bankruptcies.

Just hours before the bankruptcy filing, Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso had scoffed that a collapse was only inevitable.

"No one recognizes them as a real currency," he told reporters. "I expected such a thing to collapse."

Japan's financial regulators have been reluctant to intervene in the Mt. Gox situation, saying they don't have jurisdiction over something that's not a real currency.

They pointed to the Consumer Affairs Agency, which deals with product safety, as one possible place where disgruntled users may go for help.

The agency's minister, Masako Mori, urged extreme caution about using or investing in bitcoins. The agency has been deluged with calls about bitcoins since earlier this year.

"We're at a loss for how to help them," said Yuko Otsuki, who works in the agency's counseling department.

It's hard to know how many people around the world own bitcoins, but the currency has attracted outsize media attention and the fascination of millions as an increasing number of large retailers such as Overstock.com begin to accept it.

Speculative investors have jumped into the bitcoin fray, too, sending the currency's value fluctuating wildly in recent months. In December, the value of a single bitcoin hit an all-time high of $1,200. One bitcoin has cost about $500 lately.

MARKET WATCH

Feb. 27, 2014

Dow Jones industrials	+74.24	16,272.65
Nasdaq composite	+26.87	4,318.93
Standard & Poor's 500	+9.13	1,854.29
Russell 2000	+6.22	1,187.94

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates

Euro costs (March 3)	$1.4168
Dollar buys (March 3)	€0.7058
British pound (March 3)	$1.71
Japanese yen (March 3)	100.00
South Korean won (March 3)	1,039.00

Commercial rates

Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3771
British pound	$1.6700/0.5988
Canada (Dollar)	1.1087
China (Yuan)	6.1453
Denmark (Krone)	5.4102
Egypt (Pound)	6.9630
Euro	$1.3795/0.7249
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7612
Hungary (Forint)	224.89
Israel (Shekel)	3.4902
Japan (Yen)	102.26
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.2812
Norway (Krone)	5.9918
Philippines (Peso)	44.65
Poland (Zloty)	3.02
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7505
Singapore (Dollar)	1.2667
South Korea (Won)	1,068.33
Switzerland (Franc)	0.8820
Thailand (Baht)	32.64
Turkey (New Lira)	2.2066

(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.)

INTEREST RATES

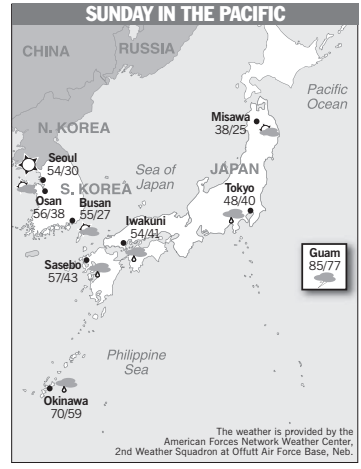
Prime rate	3.25
Discount rate	0.75
Federal funds market rate	0.07
3-month bill	0.05
30-year bond	3.59

WEATHER OUTLOOK

SATURDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

SATURDAY IN EUROPE

SUNDAY IN THE PACIFIC



The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

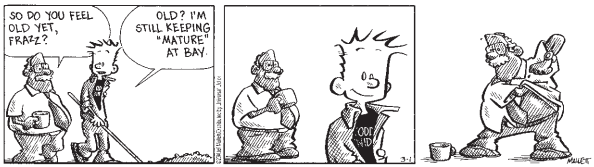
Saturday's US temperatures

City	Hi	Lo	Wthr	Chattanooga	58	37	Cldy	Fort Wayne	32	19	Snow	Louisville	49	33	Cldy	Pocatello	50	36	Rain	Sioux City	4	1	Snow
Abilene, Tex	84	47	PCldy	Cheyenne	18	14	Snow	Fresno	63	49	Rain	Lubbock	76	40	PCldy	Portland,Maine	28	5	Cldy	Sioux Falls	-1	-4	Snow
Akron, Ohio	37	17	Cldy	Chicago	25	20	Cldy	Goodland	16	10	Cldy	Macon	67	39	PCldy	Portland,Ore.	41	37	Rain	South Bend	26	18	Snow
Albany,N.Y.	31	-3	Cldy	Cincinnati	46	28	Cldy	Grand Junction	50	34	Rain	Madison	14	7	Snow	Providence	35	14	Cldy	Spokane	14	7	Clr
Albuquerque	61	42	Clr	Cleveland	34	16	Snow	Grand Rapids	23	11	Cldy	Medford	57	39	Cldy	Pueblo	51	28	Cldy	Springfield,Ill	29	23	Cldy
Allentown, Pa.	33	7	Cldy	Colorado Springs	48	27	Cldy	Great Falls	-11	-22	Snow	Memphis	59	40	Cldy	Raleigh-Durham	45	29	Cldy	Springfield,Mo	43	27	Rain
Amarillo	65	34	Cldy	Columbia,S.C.	59	37	Cldy	Green Bay	11	0	Cldy	Miami Beach	81	66	Clr	Rapid City	-2	-5	Snow	Syracuse	28	8	Cldy
Anchorage	37	27	PCldy	Columbus,Ga.	68	41	PCldy	Greensboro,N.C.	47	29	Cldy	Midland-Odessa	84	47	PCldy	Reno	54	36	Cldy	Tallahassee	74	35	Clr
Asheville	55	28	Cldy	Columbus,Ohio	43	23	Cldy	Harrisburg	36	7	Cldy	Milwaukee	17	13	Cldy	Richmond	42	21	Cldy	Tampa	76	56	Clr
Atlanta	62	40	Cldy	Concord,N.H.	28	0	Cldy	Hartford Spgfld	32	8	Cldy	Mpls-St Paul	2	-6	Clr	Roanoke	49	25	Cldy	Toledo	30	15	Cldy
Atlantic City	41	15	Cldy	Corpus Christi	79	66	Cldy	Helena	9	-13	Snow	Missoula	13	4	Snow	Rochester	37	9	Snow	Topeka	24	16	Rain
Austin	80	55	Rain	Dallas-Ft Worth	79	48	Cldy	Honolulu	81	70	Rain	Mobile	71	49	PCldy	Rockford	21	13	Cldy	Tucson	68	57	Rain
Baltimore	41	18	Cldy	Dayton	42	24	Cldy	Houston	78	62	Rain	Montgomery	69	42	PCldy	Sacramento	62	48	Cldy	Tulsa	49	30	Cldy
Baton Rouge	73	54	Cldy	Daytona Beach	74	50	PCldy	Huntsville	60	39	Cldy	Nashville	57	37	Cldy	St Louis	35	25	Cldy	Tupelo	60	40	Cldy
Billings	-6	-9	Snow	Denver	31	21	Cldy	Indianapolis	39	27	Cldy	New Orleans	73	54	Cldy	St Petersburg	75	60	Clr	Waco	80	48	Cldy
Birmingham	63	42	Cldy	Des Moines	10	1	Snow	Jackson,Miss.	69	48	Cldy	New York City	34	15	Cldy	St Thomas	84	72	PCldy	Washington	42	24	Cldy
Bismarck	-3	-12	Clr	Detroit	32	15	Cldy	Jacksonville	72	46	PCldy	Newark	36	15	Cldy	Salem,Ore.	45	40	Rain	W. Palm Beach	80	61	Clr
Boise	52	36	Rain	Duluth	0	-13	Clr	Juneau	30	14	Clr	Norfolk,Va.	48	25	Cldy	Salt Lake City	55	43	Rain	Wichita	31	20	Rain
Boston	33	13	Cldy	El Paso	78	52	Clr	Kansas City	25	14	Rain	North Platte	8	4	Clr	San Angelo	85	48	PCldy	Wichita Falls	71	41	PCldy
Bridgeport	32	13	Cldy	Elkins	43	21	Cldy	Key West	79	68	Clr	Oklahoma City	56	34	Rain	San Antonio	84	58	Rain	Wilkes-Barre	29	10	Cldy
Brownsville	79	65	PCldy	Erie	33	12	Snow	Knoxville	55	33	Cldy	Omaha	10	6	Snow	San Diego	64	56	Rain	Wilmington,Del.	38	16	Cldy
Buffalo	34	10	Snow	Eugene	50	43	Rain	Lake Charles	73	59	Cldy	Orlando	79	52	PCldy	San Francisco	60	51	Clr	Yakima	28	25	Cldy
Burlington,Vt.	28	0	Cldy	Evansville	46	31	Cldy	Lansing	24	10	Cldy	Paducah	50	32	Cldy	San Jose	62	49	Cldy	Youngstown	36	15	Cldy
Caribou,Maine	18	-10	Snow	Fairbanks	24	-1	Cldy	Las Vegas	61	49	Cldy	Pendleton	26	23	Cldy	Santa Fe	56	36	Cldy				
Casper	4	-2	Snow	Fargo	-5	-17	Clr	Lexington	48	32	Cldy	Peoria	25	19	Cldy	St Ste Marie	9	3	Clr				
Charleston,S.C.	65	43	Cldy	Flagstaff	39	38	Snow	Lincoln	12	7	Snow	Philadelphia	38	16	Cldy	Savannah	67	44	PCldy				
Charleston,W.Va.	50	28	Cldy	Flint	27	11	Cldy	Little Rock	60	42	Cldy	Phoenix	65	59	Rain	Seattle	42	39	Rain				
Charlotte,N.C.	52	34	Cldy	Fort Smith	63	38	Cldy	Los Angeles	60	54	Rain	Pittsburgh	41	19	Cldy	Shreveport	75	55	Cldy				

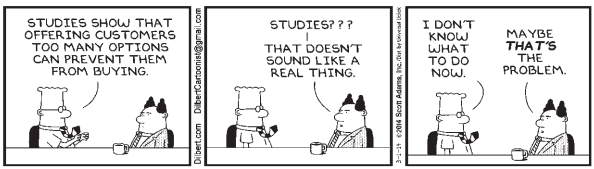
National temperature extremes

Hi: Thu., 84, Thermal, Calif.
Lo: Thu., -36 Crane Lake, Minn., and Kabetogama, Minn.

Frazz



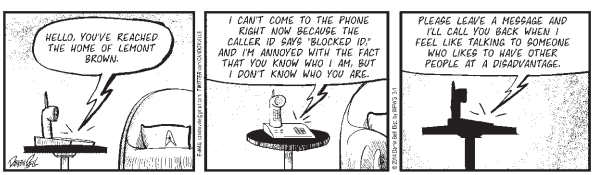
Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine

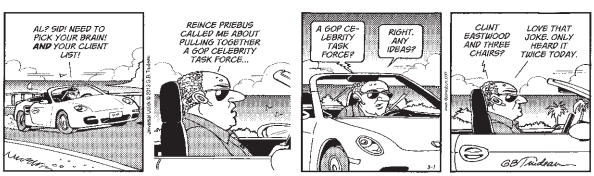
Non Sequitur

Candorville



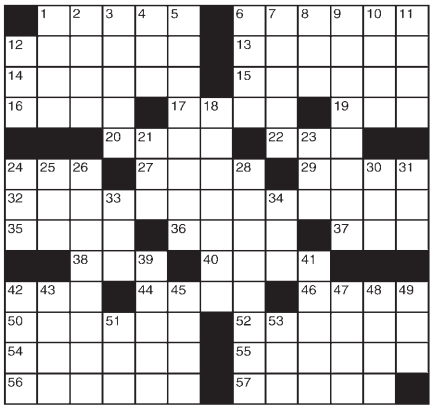
Get Fuzzy

Doonesbury



Fort Knox

Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Startle
6 Liftoff sensation
12 Grads
13 Sacrifice sites
14 Foreign correspondent?
15 Slogans
16 Authentic
17 Deck in the ring
19 — Jima
20 Sailing vessel
22 Pi follower
24 Six-pack, perhaps
27 Bound
29 Data
32 Ariel, with "The"
35 Quartet
36 Nickelodeon's explorer
37 Began
38 Reuben holder
40 Understands
42 Pooch
44 Detail, for short
46 Mountain of Thessaly
50 Familiar with
52 Took to the hammock
54 Created a surfeit
55 Had green eyes?
56 Printer supplies
57 Leaks slowly

DOWN

1 Out of the storm
2 Moth variety
3 In plentiful amounts
4 Genetic stuff
5 Latex source
6 Like venison
7 Elevator option
8 Mel of Cooperstown
9 Sane
10 Gloat
11 Old gas brand
12 Spring mo.
18 With a scoop
21 Every iota
23 That guy
24 TV alien
25 Resume, for short
26 Caviar provider
28 "—, Prince of Tyre"
30 Old expletive
31 Strange
33 Take a whack at
34 Joplin's genre
39 Perfumer's compound
41 Figure out
42 Channel
43 Scandinavian city
45 Groups of seals
47 Misstep
48 Witnesses
49 Toss in
51 Prepare Easter eggs
53 Inseparable

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

3-1 CRYPTOQUIP

D U K O J W U A U W P Q M M S U U N U N

P L R M O S B L G A Q W D Q Z

O S Z M Q S Z P G Q R , Q Z J U W W A U

A O N J S B Q W A U N D J W Q S U W W .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A PRODUCT IS INVENTED IN THE LAND SOUTH OF SLOVENIA, I SUPPOSE IT'S A CROATIAN CREATION.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: U equals E

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OPINION

Smaller Army fits current security needs

By Andrew J. Bacevich

Armies are like newspapers. They have become 21st-century anachronisms. To survive, they must adapt. For the press, that means accommodating the demands of the Internet. For the United States Army, it means adjusting to a changing security environment. Nostalgia about a hallowed past is a luxury that neither armies nor newspapers can afford to indulge.

So the hand-wringing triggered by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel's plan to reduce the Army's size, while predictable, is beside the point. Yes, those cuts would leave the United States with its fewest active-duty soldiers since the eve of World War II.

So what?

This isn't 1940. Moreover, as an instrument of coercion, that smaller army would be more lethal than the much larger one that helped defeat Nazi Germany and imperial Japan. Given a choice between a few hundred of today's Abrams tanks and a few thousand vintage Shermans, Gen. George Patton would not hesitate to choose the former.

More relevant questions are: Do we need even a few hundred tanks? And for what? In its 2012 report to Congress, the Army's senior leadership described the service as "The Nation's Force of Decisive Action." In the 2013 version, they "guarantee the agility, versatility and depth to Prevent, Shape and Win."

Yet to judge by outcomes, the Army is not a force for decisive action. It cannot be counted on to achieve definitive results in a timely manner. In Afghanistan and Iraq, actions that momentarily appeared to be decisive served as preludes to protracted and inconclusive wars. As for preventing, shaping and winning, this surely qualifies as bluster — the equivalent of a newspaper promising advertisers that it will quadruple its print circulation.

Armies are well suited to defending and containing. But invading and occupying countries are fraught with risk.

Washington's preoccupation with budgets provides Army leaders — and the entire national security establishment — an excuse to dodge core questions. The most pressing: What should the nation expect of its armed forces?

After the Cold War and especially after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, expectations of what the U.S. military should be able to accomplish expanded considerably. Defense per se figured as an afterthought, eclipsed by the conviction that projecting power held the key to transforming the world from what it is into what Washington would like it to be: orderly, predictable, respectful of American values and deferential to U.S. prerogatives.

The "Global War on Terror" put that proposition to the test, with disappointing results. Putting boots on the ground produced casualties and complications, but little by way of peace and harmony. It did nothing to enhance the standing and reputation of the United States. And as a means to engineer positive political change, America's Army proved sadly wanting. That's not a knock against our soldiers. They performed admirably, even if the same cannot be said for those who conceived and mismanaged the wars our soldiers were sent to fight.

Americans today are not inclined to indulge this experiment further. With his widely noted preference for drones and special operations forces, President Barack Obama has tacitly endorsed the public's view — even if his improvised way of war is devoid of any serious strategic rationale.

The principal military lesson of the Global War on Terror affirms what ought to have been the principal military lesson of the Cold War: Force held in readiness has far greater political utility than force expended. Armies are well suited to defending and containing. But invading and occupying countries are fraught with risk.

It's the Bush Doctrine, just inverted: Rather than engaging in preventive war, commit troops only after exhausting every other alternative. As long as that approach pertains — may it do so for many decades — the projection of U.S. military might will come in the form of bombs and missiles, falling under the purview of naval and air forces.

What role, then, remains for the U.S. Army? The honorable and necessary one of defending this country. For that task, absent the emergence of a major Mexican or Canadian threat, a smaller Army should serve just fine.

Andrew J. Bacevich is a professor of history and international relations at Boston University. His most recent book is "Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country." This column first appeared in The Washington Post.

Obama has kicked the very can he decried

By Carl P. Leubsdorf
The Dallas Morning News

White House officials selling President Barack Obama's new budget have focused on his proposals to expand such Democratic Party standbys as education and job training.

But given the likelihood that Congress won't buy these, Obama's more significant proposal may be his decision to withdraw last year's proposed limits on Social Security benefits as a first step in renewing bipartisan efforts to rein in long-term federal spending.

It underscores the fact that Obama's hopes of dealing with this long-festering problem are dead for the remainder of his administration.

Obama had hoped that, in return for a Democratic initiative cutting costly entitlement programs, the Republicans would renew their 2011 offer to accept revenue increases, presumably through tax reform that closed loopholes giving special preferences to business and wealthy taxpayers.

Unfortunately, Obama's proposal went nowhere at a time the bases of both parties had already indicated reluctance to take the necessary steps to reach such an agreement. The fact that an improving economy is reducing the current federal deficit has reduced pressure to do something now.

The reasons many Democrats made it clear they wouldn't accept even a modest cutback in Social Security benefits are twofold: The bulk of the long-term spending problem lies not there but in the soaring costs of Medicare and Medicaid, and they are unwilling to curb the program that represents their party's most significant political legacy.

Similarly, a majority of congressional Republicans resisted House Speaker John Boehner's effort to accept some $800 billion in revenue increases during his unsuccessful July 2011 talks with Obama. Those talks were the best opportunity of recent years to reach a significant budget agreement.

A special 12-member congressional panel's subsequent failure in November 2011 to agree on a more modest package of spending cuts and revenue increases signaled the end of serious efforts to enact a significant spending control measure.

Thus, once again, the president and Congress have done exactly what Obama had been determined to avoid.

"What we have done is kicked this can down the road," he told the Washington Post editorial board in discussing the nation's fiscal problems just days before taking office. "We are now at the end of the road and are not in a position to kick it any further. We have to signal seriousness in this by making sure some of the hard decisions are made under my watch, not someone else's."

But Obama's new budget continues to kick the issue down the road by conceding tacitly that the onset of election-year politics prevents any serious effort in 2014. After that, the 2016 campaign will have a similar effect.

It's one of the more notable programmatic failures for a president who has achieved some success on many of the major proposals he campaigned on: national health care, reform of the securities markets, economic recovery and an end of U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And while the two parties share the blame, Obama can't escape responsibility for fumbling the best opportunity he had to lead on the problem: the December 2010 proposal of his own bipartisan commission, headed by former Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo., and former Clinton White House chief of staff Erskine Bowles.

To be fair, that panel, which was filled with serious budget thinkers from both parties, itself failed to agree on the package of spending cuts and revenue increases proposed by its two co-chairmen. And its inclusion of entitlement cuts and tax increases posed political perils, which explains why so few political figures endorsed them.

But the Simpson-Bowles plan could have been a good starting point for Obama. Yet he never acknowledged his support, though it was roughly similar to his administration's approach.

Of course, congressional Republicans showed even less willingness to deal with the problem. And any serious effort to curb spending requires both the president and the opposition party to deal with the exploding cost of entitlements and a badly skewed tax system.

Perhaps the next president will make it a major priority. But there is no guarantee that will happen, especially when neither party is willing to face reality and a brightening short-term fiscal outlook creates the misleading impression that the long-term problem isn't really so serious.

Carl P. Leubsdorf is the former Washington bureau chief of the Dallas Morning News.

OPINION

It's no retreat, no surrender for Gov. Jindal

By Kathleen Parker

WASHINGTON

This town can get pretty wound up when a politician misbehaves.

Given some of the reactions to Bobby Jindal's off-script remarks Monday, you'd think he'd been caught with a mirror on his shoe in the ladies' restroom.

No, it was much worse than that.

Hide the children. He defied protocol!

In town for the National Governors Association winter meeting, Jindal joined other state chief executives in front of the White House after a meeting with the president. Taking the microphone, Jindal said among other things that "the Obama economy is now the minimum wage economy," and the president is "waving the white flag of surrender."

It's a wonder no one fainted.

According to those who follow closely every little thing, governors are in town to share blankies and not hurt feelings. They're supposed to be bipartisan-ish and leave the spleen venting to Congress. Bobby didn't get the memo.

His comments prompted a faux-angry rejoinder from Connecticut's Democratic Gov. Dannel Malloy, who called Jindal's remarks "the most partisan statement that we've had all weekend," — and Jindal's white flag comment "the most insane statement I've ever heard." (Really? Even wackier than you-can-keep-your-insurance-if-you-like-it?)

A smiling Jindal took the microphone again, adding that if his earlier comments were the most partisan thing Malloy had heard, "I want to make sure that he hears a more partisan statement."

And so it went.

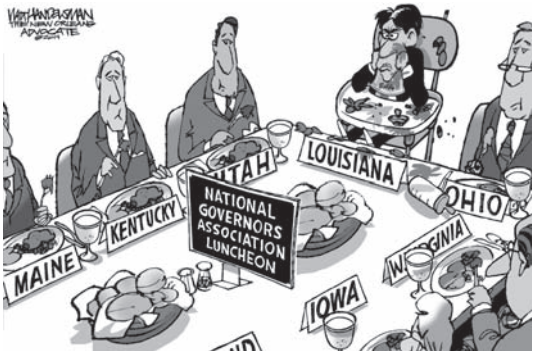
It should be mentioned that there were plenty of smiles all around and no one seemed to be reaching for their Valium. But Jindal seemed to be having a really good time — comfortable in his bravura, not to mention being in such close proximity to the White House, his hoped-for future home.

Of course, he's running for president in 2016. He hasn't said so, but he clearly is. His actions speak far louder than his words. Given this obvious fact, Jindal can't start too soon demonstrating his older, wiser more experienced persona. He has to be aggressive to convince the Republican base that he's a stand-up guy willing to jump in the ring with Apollo Creed. OK, so maybe with Dannel Malloy.

This isn't such an easy sell for the slightly built Rhodes scholar who became the nation's youngest governor. And though Jindal is a Catholic convert — and he speaks with the natural lilt of his birth state of Louisiana — he is not visually "one of us" in the way some Republicans have demonstrated they're most comfortable. To the birther sensibility, if President Barack Obama was born in Kenya, then Jindal could be from Punjab. In fact, he was conceived there but born in Baton Rouge.

Birtherism is not unique to the fever swamps of Republican fringe dwellers, it is useful to remember. When Jindal ran for governor in 2007, opponents frequently noted that his first name is Piyush. Democrats mentioned "Piyush Bobby Jindal" as often as Republicans brought up "Barack Hussein Obama" the following year. Of course, Vice President George H.W. Bush couldn't resist referring to his Republican presidential rival Pete du Pont as "Pierre." And so it goes.

Whatever you call him, anyone who has met Jindal quickly realizes that he considers himself a good ol' boy, born and bred. Bubba Bobby. An admitted policy nerd who probably would rather revamp health care reform — overnight with no coffee — than attend a gator-wrestling match, he's apparently ready to start flexing his muscles.



Though new to the broader public, this is a familiar Jindal to Louisianans during the Katrina era. While then-Gov. Kathleen Blanco was clearly overwhelmed by events, Jindal became the Incredible Hulk. Then a congressman in Washington, you might say he was bustin' his britches to save the day, or at least as many fellow citizens as possible. He flew to Louisiana, presumably by his own powers, rolled up his sleeves and procured caravans of trucks for relief efforts.

More recently, alas, Jindal is better known as the young man who delivered the GOP's State of the Union response in 2009. A naturally fast talker, Jindal obviously had been coached to slow down. This did not work well. Rather than coming across as deliberative and thoughtful, Jindal seemed to be having an out-of-body experience enhanced by special brownies.

No one is more aware of this than Jindal. Hence, what we saw Monday and likely will see again and again. Whether he could land the Republican nomination seems iffy at best, but it won't be for lack of intelligence. Smarts is something else.

Kathleen Parker is a member of Washington Post Writers Group.

Same activists huffing and puffing over e-cigarettes

By Joel Mathis and Ben Boychuk
McClatchy-Tribune News Service

The anti-smoking movement has too much invested to let a new vice that looks like a despised old one gain too much ground.

Democrats in the U.S. Senate this week introduced a bill that would ban the marketing of electronic cigarettes to minors. "We cannot risk undoing decades of progress in reducing youth smoking by allowing e-cigarette makers to target our kids," said Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., one of the bill's co-sponsors.

E-cigarettes are a burgeoning trend and growing share of the $40 billion U.S. tobacco market. Virtually unknown five years ago, e-cigarette sales could reach $1.5 billion this year, according to industry groups.

Unlike traditional cigarettes, which burn processed tobacco leaves, e-cigarette users inhale and exhale a nicotine-laced vapor. Critics say fruit- or candy-flavored vapors are designed to appeal to kids.

Should the government regulate or even ban e-cigarettes to protect kids? Ben Boychuk and Joel Mathis, the RedBlueAmerica columnists, weigh in.

BEN BOYCHUK

Tobacco use — any kind of tobacco use — brings out the Puritan in people who might otherwise espouse a live-and-let-live, "keep-your-laws-off-my-body" philosophy.

For a certain type of busybody, if it looks like a cigarette, smells like a cigarette, tastes like a cigarette, then it must be a cigarette — and therefore it's rotten, no good, probably deadly, and in desperate demand of government regulation as soon as possible. A half-century of public education warning Americans against smoking's dangers is bound to do that.

Without question, cigarette smoking is bad for your health. You shouldn't smoke — even though, despite all of those anti-smoking campaigns, public bans and high taxes, about 18 percent of American adults still smoke.

Fact is, e-cigarettes sort of resemble old-fashioned cigarettes. But they don't taste like cigarettes — in fact, many former smokers who have turned to e-cigs as a way to help kick their nasty old habit quickly realize that traditional cigarettes taste terrible.

And e-cigarettes don't smell like cigarettes, either. Vapor isn't smoke. E-cigarettes don't produce the same nasty byproducts as cigarettes, such as tar. What little research we have suggests e-cigarettes might emit trace amounts of bad stuff — hardly a cause for panic.

But the anti-smoking movement has too much invested to let a new vice that looks like a despised old one gain too much ground.

Several cities and states have already passed bans on "vaping" in the strange belief that old regulations are good enough for new technology. Now Senate Democrats would summon the ghost of Joe Camel to argue that e-cigarettes are just a high-tech version of the same old cancer sticks, using "the children" once again as human shields for their policy preferences.

Although e-cigarette makers don't market the devices as a way to quit smoking, that's how many "vapers" use them. One unintended consequence of regulating e-cigarettes the same as traditional cigarettes may be to discourage people from quitting the more dangerous habit.

Politicians are always in a rush to "do something." But a little less hyperbole, and a great deal more evidence, would do this debate a world of good.

JOEL MATHIS

Have e-cigarettes demonstrated enough harm to invite regulation? Probably not yet — the science, as they say, isn't there yet. From that standpoint, anti-smoking advocates and legislators would be wise to keep their powder dry instead of launching a crusade right away.

But there's an ancient principle that suggests e-cigs are deserving, at the very least, of some regulatory scrutiny: If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it's probably a duck. And e-cigarettes — which are designed to emulate the look and feel of regular cigarettes, right down to the glowing battery-powered tips — sure do quack like a duck, don't they?

What's more, they even do a duck's job. (OK, enough of that metaphor.) A cigarette's function, after all, is to deliver a dose of sweet, stimulating nicotine to the smoker's bloodstream — which is exactly the same function of the vapor hits produced by e-cigs.

Now the vapor is probably an improvement over smoke, which contains all kinds of cancerous, unhealthy chemicals. Then again: Nicotine tends to be extremely addictive. Authorities quite rightly take a dim view of any product whose primary purpose is to create a bodily craving to use the product again and again. From that standpoint, the need for regulation starts to look compelling.

The case may become more compelling when you consider this: E-cig critics see the devices as toy versions of the real thing — and thus a gateway drug to real cigarettes. Critics will scoff, but it wouldn't be the first time the tobacco industry has taken a back door to wooing new, younger customers: American society was once awash in candy cigarettes and Joe Camel cartoons designed to lure youngsters into a lifetime of smoking.

Anti-tobacco advocates have been, perhaps, too quick to threaten regulations and possible bans against e-cigarettes. It's tough to blame them, however. Cigarettes have killed millions of Americans. Better to stop the next needless holocaust in its tracks, before it gets started.

Ben Boychuk is associate editor of the Manhattan Institute's City Journal. Joel Mathis is associate editor for Philadelphia Magazine.

SCOREBOARD

Sports on AFN

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Tennis

Mexican Open

Thursday
At The Fairmont Acapulco Princess
Acapulco, Mexico
Purse: Men, $1.45 million (WT500)
Women, $250,000 (Intl.)
Surface: Hard-Outdoor
Singles
Men
Quarterfinals
Alexandr Dolgopolov, Ukraine, def. Ivo Karlovic, Croatia, 7-6 (4), 6-4.
Kevin Anderson (5), South Africa, def. David Ferrer (1), Spain, 2-6, 4-1 retired.
Andy Murray (2), Britain, def. Gilles Simon (6), 1-6, 7-6 (4), 6-2.
Grigor Dimitrov (4), Bulgaria, def. Ernests Gulbis (7), Latvia, 4-6, 7-6 (2), 7-5.
Women
Quarterfinals
Dominika Cibulkova (1), Slovakia, def. Marina Erakovic, New Zealand, 6-4, 7-5.
Zhang Shuai (8), China, def. Ajla Tomljanovic, Croatia, 6-1, 5-7, 6-2.
Christina McHale, United States, def. Kaia Kanepi (3), Estonia, 6-1, 2-6, 6-4.
Caroline Garcia, France, def. Eugenie Bouchard (2), Canada, 3-6, 6-4, 6-1.

Brazil Open

Thursday
At Ginasio do Ibirapuera
Sao Paulo
Purse: $539,730 (WT250)
Surface: Clay-Outdoor
Singles
Second Round
Juan Monaco (4), Argentina, def. Albert Ramos, Spain, 7-6 (4), 2-6, 7-5.
Paolo Lorenzi, Italy, def. Rogerio Dutra Silva, Brazil, 6-4, 6-3.
Martin Klizan, Slovakia, def. Marcel Granollers (3), Spain, 6-4, 6-3.
Thomaz Bellucci, Brazil, def. Andreas Haider-Maurer, Austria, 7-6 (4), 5-7, 6-3.

Brazil Cup

Thursday
At Federacao Catarinense de Tenis
Florianopolis, Brazil
Purse: $235,000 (Intl.)
Surface: Hard-Outdoor
Singles
Quarterfinals
Yaroslava Shvedova, Kazakhstan, def. Alexandra Cadantu (6), Romania, 6-3, 6-3.
Klara Zakopalova (3), Czech Republic, def. Alexandra Dulgheru, Romania, 6-3, 5-2, retired.
Garbine Muguruza (2), Spain, def. Alison Van Uytvanck, Belgium, 6-2, 6-7 (1), 6-3.
Carla Suarez Navarro (1), Spain, def. Monica Niculescu (5), Romania, 4-6, 6-0, 4-1, retired.
Doubles
Semifinals
Francesca Schiavone, Italy, and Silvia Soler-Espinosa, Spain, def. Julia Glushko, Israel, and Paula Kania, Poland, 6-4, 6-2.
Anabel Medina Garrigues, Spain, and Yaroslava Shvedova (3), Kazakhstan, def. Vania King, United States, and Barbora Zahlavova Strycova (1), Czech Republic, 7-6 (7), 6-1.

Dubai Championship

Thursday
At Dubai Tennis Stadium
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Purse: $2.36 million (WT500)
Surface: Hard-Outdoor
Singles
Quarterfinals
Novak Djokovic (1), Serbia, def. Mikhail Youzhny (6), Russia, walkover.
Philipp Kohlschreiber (7), Germany, def. Malek Jaziri, Tunisia, 6-2, 6-3.
Tomas Berdych (3), Czech Republic, def. Jo-Wilfried Tsonga (5), France, 6-4, 6-3.
Roger Federer (4), Switzerland, def. Lukas Rosol, Czech Republic, 6-2, 6-2.

College baseball

Thursday's scores

SOUTH
Blue Mountain 9-6, Spring Hill 4-7
Bridgewater 7, Ferrum 2
Charleston Southern 8, Rhode Island 4
Christian Brothers 15, St. Joseph's (Ind.) 5
Hampden-Sydney 13, Christophe Newport 12
Lipscomb 18, Alabama A&M 5
Penn St.-Harrisburg 6-5, Eastern Mennonite 3-13
Randolph-Macon 16, St. Mary's, Md. 6
SOUTHWEST
Texas Tech 5, Stephen F. Austin 4

College basketball

Thursday's men's scores

EAST
Albany (NY) 66, New Hampshire 48
CCSU 86, LIU Brooklyn 82, OT
Gordon 66, Wentworth Tech 55
Hartford 89, Binghamton 83, OT
Mass.-Lowell 84, Maine 72
Penn St. 65, Ohio St. 63
Robert Morris 69, Fairleigh Dickinson 64
Sacred Heart 72, Mount St. Mary's 65
Siena 72, Quinnipiac 70
St. Francis (NY) 62, Bryant 59
VCU 85, Fordham 66
Vermont 69, Stony Brook 53
Wagner 74, St. Francis (Pa.) 45
SOUTH
Appalachian St. 63, Samford 57
Arkansas 71, Kentucky 67, OT
Belhaven 59, Loyola NO 51
Chattanooga 83, W. Carolina 81, OT
Christian Brothers 81, West Florida 67
Cumberland (Tenn.) 59, Shawnee St. 49
Cumberlands 74, Georgetown (Ky.) 71
Davidson 79, LSU Greensboro 46
E. Kentucky 74, Tennessee Tech 67
East Carolina 75, Charlotte 68
Georgia Southern 82, Furman 73
Jacksonville 71, Kennesaw St. 69
Lindsey Wilson 91, Rio Grande 75
Lipscomb 92, Florida Gulf Coast 71
Louisiana Tech 55, Middle Tennessee 39
Louisiana-Monroe 71, South Alabama 54
Louisville 88, Temple 66
Lyon 73, Mid Continent 57
Martin Methodist 72, Bethel (Tenn.) 65
McNeese St. 87, Incarnate Word 72
Milligan 76, Bryan 63
Murray St. 86, UT-Martin 72
N. Kentucky 96, Stetson 58
Nicholls St. 79, Abilene Christian 60
North Florida 79, Mercer 76, OT
Northwestern St. 88, SE Louisiana 83
Old Dominion 70, Marshall 63
Pikeville 67, Campbellsville 64
Reinhardt 75, St. Andrews 68
Southern Miss. 78, FIU 66
Stephen F. Austin 103, New Orleans 63
Tennessee St. 70, Morehead St. 68
UALR 62, Troy 55
Union (Ky.) 73, Point (Ga.) 59
Va. Intermont 84, Tenn. Wesleyan 80
Williams Baptist 84, Freed-Hardeman 80
Winston-Salem 74, Elizabeth City St. 70
Wofford 63, Elon 59
MIDWEST
Ashland 76, Lake Erie 72
Culver-Stockton 96, Benedictine (Kan.) 81
Duquesne 71, Saint Louis 64
Grand Valley St. 74, Ferris St. 73, OT
Green Bay 71, Oakland 63
Hillsdale 86, Findlay 67
IPFW 65, W. Illinois 56
Indiana 93, Iowa 86
Marquette 75, Georgetown 73
Michigan Tech 69, N. Michigan 56
Milwaukee 68, Detroit 67
N. Dakota St. 82, South Dakota 54
Nebraska-Omaha 88, IUPUI 66
North Dakota 83, Portland St. 73
Northwood (Mich.) 86, Saginaw Valley St. 84
Park 94, Missouri Baptist 78
S. Dakota St. 78, Denver 69
SE Missouri 83, Austin Peay 80
Tiffin 79, Ohio Dominican 52
Walsh 81, Malone 71
Wayne (Mich.) 82, Lake Superior St. 78
SOUTHWEST
Cent. Arkansas 54, Sam Houston St. 71
Georgia St. 77, Texas-Arlington 49
Houston 77, Memphis 68
Lubbock Christian 86, McMurry 78
North Texas 71, UTSA 62
Oral Roberts 75, Lamar 67
Tulsa 65, UTEP 60
UAB 61, Rice 60
W. Kentucky 51, Texas St. 50
Wayland Baptist 89, Oklahoma Science 85
FAR WEST
Alaska Fairbanks 70, Alaska-Anchorage 68
Cal St.-Fullerton 82, CS Northridge 81
Chicago St. 84, Seattle 77, 3OT
E. Washington 80, N. Colorado 66
Gonzaga 70, Pacific 53
Long Beach St. 63, Hawaii 61
Loyola Marymount 75, Santa Clara 71
Montana St. 77, S. Utah 72, OT
N. Arizona 66, Idaho St. 65
NW Nazarene 66, Montana St.-Billings 60
Oregon 87, UCLA 83, 2OT
Oregon St. 76, Southern Cal 66
Saint Mary's (Cal) 70, Portland 61
San Francisco 77, Pepperdine 53
Seattle Pacific 91, Cent. Washington 59
Texas-Pan American 63, CS Bakersfield 61
UC Davis 85, Cal Poly 73
UC Irvine 71, UC Santa Barbara 60
UMKC 85, Grand Canyon 80
Utah Valley 66, New Mexico St. 61, OT
W. Washington 80, St. Martin's 56
Weber St. 79, Sacramento St. 67
TOURNAMENTS
CIAA Tournament
Quarterfinals
Johnson C. Smith 81, Bowie St. 77
Livingstone 77, St. Augustine's 63
UMAC Tournament
Semifinals
Crown (Minn.) 97, Minn.-Morris 95
Northwestern (Minn.) 73, St. Scholastica 50

Thursday's women's scores

EAST
Delaware 55, Hofstra 50
Drexel 56, UNC Wilmington 45
Iona 80, Quinnipiac 74
Maryland 92, Boston College 66
Mount St. Vincent 76, Farmingdale 59
NC State 79, Pittsburgh 68
New England 59, Salve Regina 49
Saint Joseph's 85, UMass 51
SOUTH
Abilene Christian 78, Nicholls St. 62
Auburn 70, Alabama 65, 2OT
Belhaven 49, Loyola NO 47
Blue Mountain 74, Spring Hill 72
Campbell 61, UNC Asheville 52
Campbellsville 75, Pikeville 59
Christian Brothers 64, West Florida 57
Coll. of Charleston 85, James Madison 78
Cumberlands 61, Georgetown (Ky.) 60
Duke 71, Wake Forest 56
Florida 73, Vanderbilt 68
Florida Gulf Coast 108, Lipscomb 67
Freed-Hardeman 72, Williams Baptist 49
Gardner-Webb 80, Coastal Carolina 73
Georgia Tech 86, Florida St. 78
High Point 74, Winthrop 71
Jacksonville 62, ETSU 57
Kentucky 81, Mississippi St. 74, OT
Kentucky Wesleyan 77, Ursuline 75
Liberty 90, Radford 46
Lindsey Wilson 110, Rio Grande 80
Lyon 72, Mid-Continent 57
Martin Methodist 67, Bethel (Tenn.) 44
McNeese St. 92, Incarnate Word 37
Miami 83, Virginia 63
Northwestern St. 73, SE Louisiana 58
Presbyterian 66, Charleston Southern 55
Randolph-Macon 96, Bridgewater (Va.) 91
SC-Upstate 79, North Florida 63
Shawnee St. 77, Cumberland (Tenn.) 74
South Carolina 67, Georgia 56
Stephen F. Austin 68, New Orleans 36
Stetson 74, N. Kentucky 57
Tennessee 72, LSU 67
Tennessee St. 71, Morehead St. 66
Tennessee Tech 76, E. Kentucky 74
Virginia Tech 74, Clemson 48
William & Mary 67, Northeastern 50
MIDWEST
Ashland 95, Lake Erie 48
Benedictine (Kan.) 60, Culver-Stockton 56
Bowling Green 82, Kent St. 38
Bradley 59, Illinois St. 58
Cent. Michigan 85, Ball St. 72, OT
Evansville 74, Wichita St. 54
Ferris St. 59, Grand Valley St. 56
Findlay 78, Hillsdale 66
Grand Canyon 67, UMKC 63
Green Bay 79, Wright St. 72, OT
IPFW 99, W. Illinois 92
IUPUI 69, Nebraska-Omaha 52
Ill.-Chicago 73, Youngstown St. 65
Iowa 65, Ohio St. 61
Michigan St. 75, Northwestern 44
Minnesota 73, Indiana 62
Missouri 75, Mississippi 72
Missouri St. 93, S. Illinois 76
N. Illinois 68, Toledo 59, OT
N. Michigan 67, Michigan Tech 59
Nebraska 72, Illinois 65
Northwood (Mich.) 83, Saginaw Valley St. 68
Notre Dame 100, North Carolina 75
Oakland 81, Cleveland St. 71
Ohio 83, Buffalo 71
Ohio Dominican 86, Tiffin 77
South Dakota 95, N. Dakota St. 87, OT
UT-Martin 93, E. Illinois 69
Walsh 68, Malone 60
Wayne (Mich.) 90, Lake Superior St. 74
SOUTHWEST
Cent. Arkansas 54, Sam Houston St. 49
Lubbock Christian 89, McMurry 59
Oral Roberts 84, Lamar 78
Texas A&M 77, Arkansas 54
Texas-Pan American 84, CS Bakersfield 62
Wayland Baptist 104, Oklahoma Science 46
FAR WEST
Alaska-Anchorage 76, Seattle Pacific 65
CS Northridge 79, Cal St.-Fullerton 59
California 75, Washington St. 68, OT
Cent. Washington 74, W. Oregon 58
E. Washington 74, N. Colorado 61
Gonzaga 75, Saint Mary's (Cal) 65
Idaho St. 72, N. Arizona 65
Loyola Marymount 88, Santa Clara 74
Montana St.-Billings 104, Alaska Fairbanks 77
North Dakota 73, Portland St. 52
Pacific 70, Portland 57
S. Dakota St. 69, Denver 55
Sacramento St. 76, Weber St. 60
San Francisco 75, Pepperdine 61
Southern Cal 67, Utah 57
St. Martin's 59, NW Nazarene 50
Stanford 83, Washington 60
UC Davis 77, Cal Poly 69
UC Irvine 77, UC Santa Barbara 73
Utah Valley 87, New Mexico St. 81
TOURNAMENTS
MIAA Tournament
Semifinals
Calvin 80, Olivet 76
Hope 71, Adrian 48
MIAC Tournament
Semifinals
St. Mary's (Minn.) 94, Bethel (Minn.) 63
St. Thomas (Minn.) 71, Concordia (Moor.) 56
ODAC Tournament
Quarterfinals
E. Mennonite 53, Shenandoah 52
Guilford 79, Va. Wesleyan 57
UMAC Tournament
Semifinals
Minn.-Morris 66, Martin Luther 56
Northwestern (Minn.) 63, St. Scholastica 50
WHAC Tournament
First Round
Cornerstone 66, Concordia (Mich.) 57
Davenport 80, Madonna 64
Indiana Tech 88, Aquinas 75
Siena Heights 80, Northwestern Ohio 39
WIAC Tournament
Semifinals
Wis.-Oshkosh 68, Wis.-Stevens Pt. 44
Wis.-Superior 84, Wis.-Whitewater 63

Pro baseball

Spring training

Thursday's games
Pittsburgh 8, N.Y. Yankees 2
Toronto 7, Philadelphia 5
Detroit 5, Atlanta 2
L.A. Dodgers 4, Arizona (ss) 3
Arizona (ss) 5, Chicago Cubs 2
Milwaukee 11, Oakland 3
Texas 11, Kansas City 7
Cleveland 12, Cincinnati 3
Seattle 7, San Diego 1
Friday's games
Pittsburgh vs. Toronto at Dunedin, Fla.
Minnesota vs. Boston at Fort Myers, Fla.
N.Y. Yankees vs. Detroit (ss) at Lakeland, Fla.
Detroit (ss) vs. Philadelphia at Clearwater, Fla.
Baltimore vs. Tampa Bay at Port Charlotte, Fla.
Miami vs. St. Louis at Jupiter, Fla.
Washington vs. N.Y. Mets at Port St. Lucie, Fla.
Milwaukee vs. San Francisco (ss) at Scottsdale, Ariz.
Cincinnati vs. Cleveland at Goodyear, Ariz.
San Francisco (ss) vs. Oakland at Phoenix
Kansas City vs. Texas at Surprise, Ariz.
Chicago White Sox vs. L.A. Dodgers at Glendale, Ariz.
Seattle vs. San Diego at Peoria, Ariz.
Chicago Cubs vs. L.A. Angels at Tempe, Ariz.
Colorado vs. Arizona at Scottsdale, Ariz.
Houston vs. Atlanta at Kissimmee, Fla.
Saturday's games
Atlanta vs. Washington at Viera, Fla.
Toronto vs. Baltimore at Sarasota, Fla.
St. Louis vs. Miami (ss) at Jupiter, Fla.
Philadelphia vs. N.Y. Yankees at Tampa, Fla.
Boston vs. Minnesota at Fort Myers, Fla.
Houston vs. Detroit at Lakeland, Fla.
Tampa Bay vs. Pittsburgh at Bradenton, Fla.
Miami (ss) vs. N.Y. Mets at Port St. Lucie, Fla.
Texas vs. Oakland at Phoenix
L.A. Dodgers vs. Milwaukee at Phoenix
L.A. Angels vs. Seattle at Peoria, Ariz.
Colorado vs. Cincinnati at Goodyear, Ariz.
Cleveland vs. Chicago White Sox at Glendale, Ariz.
San Francisco vs. Chicago Cubs at Mesa, Ariz.
San Diego vs. Kansas City at Surprise, Ariz.
Milwaukee vs. Arizona at Scottsdale, Ariz.
Chicago Cubs vs. Arizona at Scottsdale, Ariz.

Golf

Honda Classic Par

Thursday
PGA Tour
At PGA National Resort and Spa,
The Champion
Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.
Purse: $6 million
Yardage: 7,140; Par 70 (35-35)
First Round

Rory McIlroy	33-30—63	-7
Russell Henley	34-30—64	-6
Rory Sabbatini	33-32—65	-5
William McGirt	32-33—65	-5
Jamie Donaldson	33-32—65	-5
Brendon de Jonge	33-33—66	-4
Derek Ernst	33-33—66	-4
Tommy Gainey	35-31—66	-4
Brice Garnett	34-32—66	-4
Matt Every	33-33—66	-4
Luke Donald	32-35—67	-3
Zach Johnson	32-35—67	-3
Will MacKenzie	34-33—67	-3
Luke Guthrie	35-32—67	-3
Brian Harman	31-36—67	-3
Hudson Swafford	33-34—67	-3
Tyrone Van Aswegen	34-33—67	-3
Mark Wilson	32-35—67	-3
David Hearn	33-34—67	-3
Matteo Manassero	33-34—67	-3
Derek Fathauer	33-34—67	-3
Padraig Harrington	34-34—68	-2
James Driscoll	35-33—68	-2
Troy Merritt	33-35—68	-2
Nicholas Thompson	33-35—68	-2
Boo Weekley	35-33—68	-2
Adam Scott	34-34—68	-2
Ken Duke	35-33—68	-2
Lee Westwood	35-33—68	-2
Ryan Palmer	33-35—68	-2

HSBC Women's Champions

LPGA Tour
Thursday
At Sentosa Golf Club (Serapong Course)
Singapore
Purse: $1.4 million
Yardage: 6,611; Par: 72 (36-36)
First Round
a-amateur

Karrie Webb	32-34—66	-6
Paula Creamer	33-34—67	-5
Caroline Hedwall	34-33—67	-5
Teresa Lu	33-35—68	-4
Angela Stanford	36-32—68	-4
Azahara Munoz	34-35—69	-3
Danielle Kang	35-35—70	-2
Caroline Masson	35-35—70	-2
Inbee Park	36-34—70	-2
Gerina Piller	36-34—70	-2
Amy Yang	36-34—70	-2

Deals

Thursday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE — Suspended San Francisco minor league 2B Ryan Jones (Augusta-SAL) 50 games after testing positive for an amphetamine.
American League
CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Traded INF Jake Elmore to Oakland for cash considerations.
KANSAS CITY ROYALS — Agreed to terms with LHPs Francisley Bueno, Chris Dwyer, Donnie Joseph and John Lamb; RHPs Michael Mariot and Yordano Ventura; INFs Pedro Grifol and Christian Colon; and OFs Lorenzo Cain and Jarrod Dyson on one-year contracts.
OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Designated INF Andy Parrino for assignment.
SEATTLE MARINERS — Agreed to terms with RHPs Brandon Maurer, Hector Noesi, Stephen Pryor, Erasmo Ramirez and Taijuan Walker; LHPs Bobby LaFromboise and Lucas Luetge; C Jesus Sucre; and INFs Brad Miller, Jesus Montero and Carlos Triunfel on one-year contracts. Named Joe Myhra vice president, ballpark operations.
National League
SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Agreed to terms with OF Tyler Colvin on a minor league contract.
BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association
NBA — Suspended Sacramento C DeMarcus Cousins one game and fined him $20,000 for punching an opposing player and verbally abusing an official during Tuesday's game.
ATLANTA HAWKS — Signed C Mike Muscala. Released C Dexter Pittman.
DALLAS MAVERICKS — Assigned F Jae Crowder, F Shane Larkin and G Bernard James to the NBADL. Recalled G Ricky Ledo.
MILWAUKEE BUCKS — Waived F Caron Butler.
SACRAMENTO KINGS — Agreed to terms with G Jimmer Fredette on a contract buyout.
FOOTBALL
National Football League
BALTIMORE RAVENS — Terminated the contracts of FB Vonta Leach and B Jameel McClain.
CHICAGO BEARS — Agreed to terms with C Roberto Garza on a one-year contract.
PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Agreed to terms with WR Riley Cooper on a five-year contract and C Jason Kelce on a seven-year contract.
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Agreed to terms with OL Daniel Kilgore on a three-year contract extension through the 2017 season.
WASHINGTON REDSKINS — Re-signed DL Chris Baker to a one-year contract.
HOCKEY
National Hockey League
NEW JERSEY DEVILS — Named Adam Davis executive vice president of corporate partnerships.
SOCCER
Major League Soccer
CHIVAS USA — Waived M Carlo Chueca.
FC DALLAS — Signed F Tesho Akindele and F Nicholas Walker.
National Women's Soccer League
WASHINGTON SPIRIT — Signed D Cecilie Sandvej.
COLLEGE
EAST CAROLINA — Dismissed WR Danny Webster.
FORDHAM — Signed athletic director Dave Roach to a contract extension through 2019.
LSU — Named Bradley Dale Peveto special teams coordinator and a defensive assistant.
NORTH TEXAS — Named Perry Carter safeties coach and LaMarcus Hicks cornerbacks coach.

AP spotlight

March 1

1934 — Primo Carnera retains his world heavyweight title with a unanimous 15-round decision over Tommy Laughren in Miami.
1946 — Top-ranked NYU, the nation's only unbeaten basketball team, is upset by Notre Dame 64-59 at New York's Madison Square Garden. In a game with 17 lead changes, the Fighting Irish hold Dolph Schayes to nine points and Kevin O'Shea scores 18 for Notre Dame.
1955 — Allen Fieldhouse, home of the Kansas Jayhawks, hosts its first basketball game and the Jayhawks beat rival Kansas State 77-66.
1983 — Tamara McKinney becomes the first American woman to win skiing's overall World Cup championship.
1986 — Billy Cunningham, Tom Heinsohn and Red Holzman are named to the Basketball Hall of Fame.
1988 — Wayne Gretzky of the Edmonton Oilers becomes the NHL's all-time assist leader, breaking the longtime mark of Gordie Howe. In his ninth season, Gretzky picks up assist No. 1,050 in a game against the Los Angeles Kings. Gretzky takes 681 games to surpass the record that took Howe 1,767 games to set.
1994 — NBA referee Steve Javie ejects Portland radio analyst Mike Rice in the third quarter of the Pacers' 106-94 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers.
1997 — Canada's Elvis Stojko nails the first quad-triple combination jump in figure skating history to win the Champions Series final.

GOLF/SPORTS BRIEFS

Lynne Sladky/AP

Rory McIlroy tees off on the fifth hole during the first round of the Honda Classic on Thursday in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. McIlroy held a one-shot lead over Russell Henley after the first day of play.

Golf roundup

McIlroy leads Honda Classic

Woods continues to struggle; Webb holding her own in Singapore

The Associated Press

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. — Rory McIlroy isn't interested in recent history at the Honda Classic — good or bad.

Two years ago, McIlroy posted four rounds in the 60s at PGA National for a two-shot victory that moved him to No. 1 in the world for the first time in his career. It was a sign of big things to come, for Boy Wonder went on to win the PGA Championship, five times around the world and the money title on the PGA Tour and European Tour.

And then there was last year.

The newest star in the Nike galaxy, McIlroy showed up at PGA National with expectations that far exceeded his game — a missed cut in Abu Dhabi, a first-round loss in the Match Play Championship. So when he was 7-over par through eight holes on the second round, he walked off the course and didn't stop until he was in his car and headed home. It was a mistake he said he would never repeat.

Thursday brought another chapter of McIlroy and the Honda Classic.

With some long birdie putts, a few key saves, three birdies to start the back nine and two more at the end, McIlroy had a 7-under 63 to take a one-shot lead over Russell Henley after the first round.

It was the second time this year that McIlroy opened with a 63. He also did that at the Dubai Desert Classic, though McIlroy wound up tying for ninth when neither he nor anyone else could keep up with Stephen Gallacher.

Even so, the 24-year-old from Northern Ireland is trending in the right direction.

"Coming in this week, I knew that I was playing well and I just wanted to try and get off to a good start," he said. "Regardless of what happened last year or where it is, it's always nice to shoot a round like this and get yourself in the mix early."

> **'It's always nice to... get yourself in the mix early.'**
>
> **Rory McIlroy**
> PGA golfer

Tiger Woods wouldn't know the feeling so far this year.

In his first tournament in a month, Woods couldn't make a birdie putt early and had to scramble for pars late in his round. A birdie on the last hole gave him a 71, leaving him eight shots behind.

"I hit it good starting out, hit it kind of scrappy in the middle and then hit it good at the end," Woods said. "But it was just one or the other. I either hit it good and missed the putt, and then scrap around and make a putt."

In his other two events this year, Woods was eight shots behind after the opening round at Torrey Pines and five shots behind at Dubai. He goes into the second round Friday outside the cut line.

LPGA Tour: For all the talk of the youth movement in women's golf, Karrie Webb showed on Friday that experienced players can still show up their younger competitors from time to time.

The 39-year-old Webb recovered from two bogeys on the back nine to card a 3-under 69 and open a two-stroke lead over 36-year-old Angela Stanford after the second round of the HSBC Women's Champions in Singapore.

Webb, who was at 9-under 135 overall, was quick to point out after her round that being older can have its advantages.

"Two old ducks, I guess," she said about her and Stanford topping the leaderboard. "Did you ask any of the younger players if it's hard to play against girls in their 30s? Because you always ask me the opposite question."

Stanford, the 2012 HSBC champion, also shot a 69, while Taiwan's Teresa Lu was in third place at 6 under after a 70.

Sweden's Caroline Hedwall briefly pulled into a share of the lead with Webb on the back nine before two bogeys and a double bogey on her final three holes. She fell back to joint fourth at 4-under 140 with four others.

The U.S. LPGA Tour's latest teenage prodigy, 16-year-old Lydia Ko, was at 2-under 142, tied for 13th with 19-year-old Lexi Thompson and world No. 1 Inbee Park.

Sweden's Anna Nordqvist, winner of last week's LPGA Thailand, made seven birdies for a 5-under 67, tied for the low round of the day. She was joint fourth with Hedwall and three Americans: Morgan Pressel (69), Paula Creamer (73) and Danielle Kang (70).

Briefly

Belfort gives up title shot after Nevada bans TRT

The Associated Press

Vitor Belfort has dropped out of his upcoming UFC middleweight title shot a few hours after the Nevada Athletic Commission banned testosterone replacement therapy.

Belfort was scheduled to fight 185-pound champion Chris Weidman in Las Vegas at UFC 173 on May 24. His title shot was given to Lyoto Machida on Thursday night.

The 36-year-old Belfort has been open about his use of synthetic testosterone for a few years. The former light heavyweight champion's sanctioned steroid use has coincided with an improbable career resurgence for three consecutive early round knockout victories in 2013.

The influential Nevada commission voted unanimously on Thursday to stop granting therapeutic use exemptions for TRT, closing a widely criticized loophole that allowed fighters to compete on steroids.

Belfort says he'll continue fighting, but without TRT.

Warrant for former NFL star accused of rape

NEW ORLEANS — An arrest warrant has been issued for former NFL safety Darren Sharper and another man, accusing them of raping two women in New Orleans last year.

Sharper also is under investigation in sexual assault cases in Florida, Nevada and Arizona and has pleaded not guilty to rape charges in Los Angeles.

The Orleans Parish District Attorney's Office and New Orleans Sex Crimes detectives Thursday obtained warrants for the 38-year-old Sharper and 26-year-old Erik Nunez. Each faces two counts of aggravated rape.

New Orleans police say the two women were raped at the same location on Sept. 23.

In other NFL news:

■ The Carolina Panthers say they have re-signed kicker Graham Gano to a four-year contract.

Gano was set to become an unrestricted free agent. Financial terms were not released Friday.

The 26-year-old Gano joined the Panthers last season and converted 24 of 27 field-goal attempts in helping Carolina win the NFC South. He set a franchise record and tied for the NFL lead with six made field goals from 50 yards or more.

■ The Baltimore Ravens have terminated the contracts of three-time Pro Bowl fullback Vonta Leach and six-year linebacker Jameel McClain.

Leach and McClain were part of the Super Bowl champions two seasons ago.

■ The Washington Redskins have re-signed defensive lineman Chris Baker to a three-year contract worth $12 million.

The deal announced Thursday includes $4 million of guaranteed money.

Baker has spent two seasons with the Redskins, playing in 29 games. He started the final three games last season after Stephen Bowen was sidelined with a knee injury.

■ The Chicago Bears say they have agreed to a one-year contract with center Roberto Garza.

The Bears had expressed a desire to bring him back, and they announced the move on Thursday.

Garza, who turns 35 in March, was the lone holdover on a line that featured four new starters last season. He has appeared in 194 games and made 164 starts over 13 seasons with the Bears and Atlanta Falcons.

■ The San Francisco 49ers and offensive lineman Daniel Kilgore have agreed to a three-year contract extension through the 2017 season.

San Francisco selected Kilgore in the fifth round of the 2011 draft out of Appalachian State. He has played in 33 regular-season games, plus all six playoff games the last two seasons. He has split time at guard and center.

■ Police checking on reported damage to a car belonging to Richie Incognito, the player at the center of the Miami Dolphins' bullying scandal, say Incognito told an officer he did the damage himself.

Sgt. Mark Clark says the Dolphins guard took responsibility when police contacted him Thursday.

New sponsor restores Independence Bowl

SHREVEPORT, La. — Independence Bowl Foundation officials say Duck Commander, the company run by the stars of the reality television series "Duck Dynasty," is the new title sponsor of Shreveport's annual college football bowl game.

Officials say Duck Commander chief operating officer Willie Robertson also has agreed to bring back the game's original name.

The move restores the word "Independence" to the bowl's name after it was called only by the name of its previous sponsor, AdvoCare V100, last season.

Robertson says college football and the tradition associated with the Independence Bowl are important to his family.

The Independence Bowl began in 1976 to honor the United States' bicentennial.

NHL

Roundup

Talbot, Rangers stop Blackhawks

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Cam Talbot came within 12 seconds of shutting out the defending Stanley Cup champions. Before he could blink, he was nearly headed for overtime.

The Rangers' backup goalie gathered himself quickly after the Chicago Blackhawks cut their deficit in half and turned aside one final chance to seal New York's 2-1, post-Olympic victory on Thursday night.

Derick Brassard scored in the first period, and Rick Nash added an insurance goal in the third that became crucial when Chicago's Peter Regin ended the shutout bid with 11.6 seconds remaining.

"It felt like the longest 11 seconds in the world," Talbot said. "I didn't think they were going to get down the ice that quick."

They did.

"It is just kind of a hope play there with 11 seconds left," Blackhawks defenseman Duncan Keith said. "We got a good prime scoring chance."

Talbot denied Patrick Kane in tight to seal the win in relief of resting No. 1 goalie Henrik Lundqvist.

Talbot got the starting nod after Lundqvist received extended work in Sweden's run to the Olympics gold medal game.

Sharks 7, Flyers 3: Joe Pavelski had a hat trick to move into a tie for second in the NHL in goals and visiting San Jose beat Philadelphia in the first game for both teams following the Olympic break.

Raffi Torres and Logan Couture each scored twice in their return to the San Jose lineup following injuries.

Red Wings 6, Senators 1: Johan Franzen scored three goals to lead visiting Detroit past Ottawa.

Riley Sheahan, Tomas Jurco and Tomas Tatar also scored, and Jonas Gustavsson stopped 37 shots for the Red Wings (28-20-12), who have a five-point lead over the Senators (26-23-11) for the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference.

Kings 2, Flames 0: Dustin Brown had a goal and an assist and Jonathan Quick made 25 saves as visiting Los Angeles made it back-to-back wins with a victory over Calgary.

Quick was steady all night in earning his third shutout of the season and 29th of his career. He was especially sharp through the opening 40 minutes as Calgary built a 23-13 edge in shots, but trailed 1-0.

Canadiens 6, Penguins 5 (SO): David Desharnais scored the lone goal in the shootout, leading visiting Montreal to victory over Pittsburgh.

Canadiens goaltender Peter Budaj, in his second straight start for injured starter Carey Price, stopped Penguins shooters James Neal and Sidney Crosby before denying Evgeni Malkin's slap shot for the win.

Jets 3, Coyotes 2 (SO): Olli Jokinen scored the shootout winner and host Winnipeg edged Phoenix.

Bryan Little and Blake Wheeler scored in regulation for the Jets, who continued their winning ways under new head coach Paul Maurice. The Jets are 10-3-1 since Maurice replaced the fired Claude Noel.

Islanders 5, Maple Leafs 4 (OT): Lubomir Visnovsky scored 1:55 into overtime and host New York outlasted Toronto in a wild game.

Visnovsky's winner came after Anders Lee scored two tying goals for the Islanders in a see-saw third period in which the teams combined for five goals in a nine-minute span. Evgeni Nabokov made 18 saves for New York.

Capitals 5, Panthers 4: Alex Ovechkin scored the go-ahead goal in the third period and had two assists, and Troy Brouwer had two power-play goals to lift visiting Washington past Florida.

Nicklas Backstrom and Brooks Laich also tallied for the Capitals and Braden Holtby made 30 saves.

Stars 4, Hurricanes 1: Jamie Benn had a goal and two assists to lead host Dallas over Carolina.

Kari Lehtonen made 29 saves for the Stars, who also got goals from Tyler Seguin, Brenden Dillon and Cody Eakin. The victory put Dallas (28-21-10) in eighth place, the final playoff spot, in the Western Conference.

Wild 3, Oilers 0: Darcy Kuemper made 21 saves to earn his second career shutout and visiting Minnesota returned from the Olympic break with a victory over Edmonton.

Mikael Granlund, Stephane Veilleux and Dany Heatley scored for the Wild, who won their third game in a row.

Devils 5, Blue Jackets 2: Adam Henrique scored twice, Jaromir Jagr netted the 699th goal of his career and host New Jersey had a rare goal-scoring binge in defeating Columbus.

Ryane Clowe also scored and the special teams tallied twice on the power play and once short-handed.

Predators 3, Lightning 2: Patric Hornqvist scored a power-play goal at 13:56 of the third period to send host Nashville to the victory over Tampa Bay.

Matt Cullen and Roman Josi also scored power-play goals to help Nashville snap a three-game losing streak.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Boston	58	37	16	5	79	180	130
Montreal	61	33	21	7	73	155	149
Tampa Bay	59	33	21	5	71	170	148
Toronto	61	32	22	7	71	182	187
Detroit	60	28	20	12	68	159	165
Ottawa	60	26	23	11	63	170	197
Florida	59	22	30	7	51	143	188
Buffalo	59	17	34	8	42	118	178
Metropolitan Division							
Pittsburgh	59	40	15	4	84	191	144
N.Y. Rangers	60	33	24	3	69	157	147
Philadelphia	60	30	24	6	66	165	174
Washington	60	28	23	9	65	176	179
Columbus	59	29	25	5	63	172	166
New Jersey	60	25	22	13	63	140	148
Carolina	59	26	24	9	61	147	165
N.Y. Islanders	61	23	30	8	54	169	204

Western Conference

Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
St. Louis	58	39	13	6	84	196	136
Chicago	61	35	12	14	84	208	165
Colorado	59	37	17	5	79	178	159
Minnesota	60	32	21	7	71	148	147
Dallas	59	28	21	10	66	168	165
Winnipeg	61	29	26	6	64	171	177
Nashville	60	26	24	10	62	149	182
Pacific Division							
Anaheim	60	41	14	5	87	196	147
San Jose	60	38	16	6	82	182	145
Los Angeles	61	33	22	6	72	147	132
Phoenix	59	27	21	11	65	165	172
Vancouver	61	28	24	9	65	147	160
Calgary	59	22	30	7	51	137	181
Edmonton	61	20	34	7	47	153	202

Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss.

Thursday's games

New Jersey 5, Columbus 2
N.Y. Islanders 5, Toronto 4, OT
N.Y. Rangers 2, Chicago 1
San Jose 7, Philadelphia 3
Montreal 6, Pittsburgh 5, SO
Detroit 6, Ottawa 1
Washington 5, Florida 4
Nashville 3, Tampa Bay 2
Winnipeg 3, Phoenix 2, SO
Dallas 4, Carolina 1
Los Angeles 2, Calgary 0
Minnesota 3, Edmonton 0

Friday's games

San Jose at Buffalo
Phoenix at Colorado
Minnesota at Vancouver
St. Louis at Anaheim

Saturday's games

Washington at Boston
New Jersey at N.Y. Islanders
N.Y. Rangers at Philadelphia
Florida at Columbus
Winnipeg at Nashville
Tampa Bay at Dallas
Carolina at Los Angeles
Toronto at Montreal
Pittsburgh vs. Chicago at Chicago, IL
Calgary at Edmonton

Thursday

Devils 5, Blue Jackets 2

Columbus 1 1 0—2
New Jersey 3 1 1—5

First Period—1, New Jersey, Clowe 4 (Loktionov), 6:09. 2, New Jersey, Jagr 18 (Gelinas, Elias), 7:31 (pp). 3, New Jersey, Henrique 15 (Greene, Merrill), 8:54 (pp). 4, Columbus, Anisimov 14 (Johnson), 11:36.

Second Period—5, Columbus, Gaborik 6 (Anisimov, Foligno), 11:42. 6, New Jersey, Henrique 16 (Elias), 19:41 (sh).

Third Period—7, New Jersey, Elias 12, 19:24 (en).

Shots on Goal—Columbus 8-8-3—19. New Jersey 13-13-9—35.

Power-play opportunities—Columbus 0 of 3; New Jersey 2 of 3.

Goalies—Columbus, Bobrovsky 20-15-3 (34 shots-30 saves). New Jersey, Schneider 12-11-9 (19-17).

A—15,185 (17,625). **T—**2:20.

Islanders 5, Maple Leafs 4 (OT)

Toronto 1 0 3 0—4
N.Y. Islanders 2 0 2 1—5

First Period—1, Toronto, Kessel 32 (Bozak, van Riemsdyk), 6:53. 2, N.Y. Islanders, Grabner 10 (Cizikas), 15:53 (sh). 3, N.Y. Islanders, Grabner 11, 16:41 (sh).

Third Period—4, Toronto, Ranger 3 (van Riemsdyk, Kessel), 8:50. 5, Toronto, Phaneuf 6 (Bozak, van Riemsdyk), 11:26. 6, N.Y. Islanders, Lee 1 (Bailey, de Haan), 12:52 (pp). 7, Toronto, Lupul 18 (Kadri, Gunnarsson), 13:54. 8, N.Y. Islanders, Lee 2 (Strome, Hamonic), 17:20.

Overtime—9, N.Y. Islanders, Visnovsky 3, 1:55.

Shots on Goal—Toronto 7-8-7-0—22. N.Y. Islanders 11-5-15-4—35.

Power-play opportunities—Toronto 0 of 4; N.Y. Islanders 1 of 4.

Goalies—Toronto, Bernier 22-16-6 (35 shots-30 saves). N.Y. Islanders, Nabokov 11-12-5 (22-18).

A—13,922 (16,170). **T—**2:32.

Rangers 2, Blackhawks 1

Chicago 0 0 1—1
N.Y. Rangers 1 0 1—2

First Period—1, N.Y. Rangers, Brassard 12 (Pouliot, Miller), 10:14.

Third Period—2, N.Y. Rangers, Nash 19 (Stepan, Hagelin), 15:53. 3, Chicago, Regin 3 (Smith, Seabrook), 19:48.

Shots on Goal—Chicago 12-7-13—32. N.Y. Rangers 11-11-2—24.

Power-play opportunities—Chicago 0 of 3; N.Y. Rangers 0 of 1.

Goalies—Chicago, Crawford 22-10-10 (24 shots-22 saves). N.Y. Rangers, Talbot 11-5-0 (32-31).

A—18,006 (18,006). **T—**2:23.

KATHY WILLENS/AP

New York Rangers goalie Cam Talbot makes a save during the first period of Thursday's game against Chicago in New York. Talbot stopped 31 shots in the Rangers' 2-1 victory.

Sharks 7, Flyers 3

San Jose 1 5 1—7
Philadelphia 2 0 1—3

First Period—1, San Jose, Torres 1 (Desjardins, Demers), 4:25. 2, Philadelphia, Meszaros 5 (Downie, Read), 10:36. 3, Philadelphia, B.Schenn 16 (Lecavalier, Simmonds), 10:58.

Second Period—4, San Jose, Pavelski 30 (Marleau, Boyle), 4:23 (pp). 5, San Jose, Pavelski 31 (Vlasic), 10:12. 6, San Jose, Couture 15 (Marleau, Demers), 10:47. 7, San Jose, Pavelski 32 (Irwin, Thornton), 14:10. 8, San Jose, Torres 2 (M.Brown, Desjardins), 19:57.

Third Period—9, San Jose, Couture 16 (Wingels), 4:50 (sh). 10, Philadelphia, Read 16 (Couturier, Grossmann), 12:12.

Shots on Goal—San Jose 5-16-8—29. Philadelphia 10-8-12—30.

Power-play opportunities—San Jose 1 of 5; Philadelphia 0 of 5.

Goalies—San Jose, Stalock 9-4-0 (30 shots-27 saves). Philadelphia, Mason 23-15-5 (16-12), Emery (10:47 second, 13-10), Mason 23-15-5 (10:49 third).

A—19,879 (19,541). **T—**2:39.

Canadiens 6, Penguins 5 (SO)

Montreal 1 2 2 0—6
Pittsburgh 2 1 2 0—5

Montreal won shootout 1-0

First Period—1, Montreal, Gallagher 15 (Desharnais, Pacioretty), 4:57. 2, Pittsburgh, Neal 21 (Malkin, Maatta), 8:23. 3, Pittsburgh, Engelland 5 (Neal, Crosby), 15:48.

Second Period—4, Montreal, Briere 10 (Gorges, Parros), 6:17. 5, Pittsburgh, Maatta 7 (Jokinen, Sutter), 10:38 (pp). 6, Montreal, Pacioretty 27 (Desharnais, Markov), 11:35 (pp).

Third Period—7, Pittsburgh, Sutter 10, 7:16 (sh). 8, Montreal, Emelin 2 (Bourque, Briere), 7:40. 9, Pittsburgh, Crosby 29 (Malkin, Niskanen), 12:29 (pp). 10, Montreal, Briere 11 (Galchenyuk, Plekanec), 14:06 (pp).

Shootout—Montreal 1 (Eller NG, Desharnais G), Pittsburgh 0 (Neal NG, Crosby NG, Malkin NG).

Shots on Goal—Montreal 9-7-8-5—29. Pittsburgh 12-12-8-0—32.

Power-play opportunities—Montreal 2 of 4; Pittsburgh 2 of 5.

Goalies—Montreal, Budaj 7-4-2 (32 shots-27 saves). Pittsburgh, Fleury 31-13-3 (29-24).

A—18,636 (18,387). **T—**2:41.

Red Wings 6, Senators 1

Detroit 4 2 0—6
Ottawa 0 1 0—1

First Period—1, Detroit, Sheahan 4, 10:59. 2, Detroit, Franzen 10 (Nyquist), 11:28. 3, Detroit, Franzen 11 (Alfredsson, Kronwall), 13:27 (pp). 4, Detroit, Jurco 4 (Kronwall, Tatar), 18:00.

Second Period—5, Detroit, Franzen 12 (Nyquist, DeKeyser), 3:49. 6, Ottawa, Ryan 22 (Zibanejad, Methot), 4:19. 7, Detroit, Tatar 14 (Jurco, Kronwall), 5:04.

Shots on Goal—Detroit 12-11-3—26. Ottawa 16-11-11—38.

Power-play opportunities—Detroit 1 of 4; Ottawa 0 of 6.

Goalies—Detroit, Gustavsson 14-4-3 (38 shots-37 saves). Ottawa, Lehner 7-11-3 (15-9), Hammond (5:04 second, 11-11).

A—18,931 (19,153). **T—**2:30.

Capitals 5, Panthers 4

Washington 2 2 1—5
Florida 1 1 2—4

First Period—1, Washington, Brouwer 15 (Laich, Carlson), 5:48 (pp). 2, Washington, Laich 6 (Ovechkin, Orlov), 8:10. 3, Florida, Fleischmann 6 (Winchester, Goc), 15:27.

Second Period—4, Florida, Boyes 16 (Bergenheim), :40. 5, Washington, Backstrom 12 (Erat, Carlson), 3:44. 6, Washington, Brouwer 16 (Ovechkin, Backstrom), 19:13 (pp).

Third Period—7, Florida, Shore 5 (Campbell, Jovanovski), 8:01 (pp). 8, Florida, Boyes 17 (Bergenheim, Bjugstad), 9:23. 9, Washington, Ovechkin 41 (Laich, Backstrom), 15:43.

Shots on Goal—Washington 11-13-8—32. Florida 9-12-13—34.

Power-play opportunities—Washington 2 of 2; Florida 1 of 6.

Goalies—Washington, Holtby 18-13-2 (34 shots-30 saves). Florida, Thomas 15-19-3 (32-27).

A—14,180 (17,040). **T—**2:28.

Predators 3, Lightning 2

Tampa Bay 2 0 0—2
Nashville 0 2 1—3

First Period—1, Tampa Bay, St. Louis 26 (Palat), 5:26. 2, Tampa Bay, St. Louis 27 (Kucherov, Purcell), 9:13 (pp).

Second Period—3, Nashville, Cullen 6 (Ellis, Smith), 12:05 (pp). 4, Nashville, Josi 9 (Weber), 13:16 (pp).

Third Period—5, Nashville, Hornqvist 11 (Fisher, Weber), 13:56 (pp).

Shots on Goal—Tampa Bay 9-4-3—16. Nashville 8-13-8—29.

Power-play opportunities—Tampa Bay 1 of 3; Nashville 3 of 4.

Goalies—Tampa Bay, Bishop 28-9-4 (29 shots-26 saves). Nashville, Hutton 14-9-4 (16-14).

A—17,113 (17,113). **T—**2:23.

Jets 3, Coyotes 2 (SO)

Phoenix 1 0 1 0—2
Winnipeg 1 1 0 0—3

Winnipeg won shootout 2-1

First Period—1, Phoenix, Ekman-Larsson 9 (Vrbata, Klinkhammer), 12:17. 2, Winnipeg, Wheeler 23 (Byfuglien), 14:55.

Second Period—3, Winnipeg, Little 19, 18:01 (pp).

Third Period—4, Phoenix, Hanzal 15 (Schlemko, Ribeiro), 6:40 (pp).

Shootout—Phoenix 1 (Boedker NG, Vrbata NG, Vermette G, Ribeiro NG), Winnipeg 2 (Little NG, Ladd NG, Setoguchi G, Jokinen G).

Shots on Goal—Phoenix 11-7-13-5—36. Winnipeg 9-10-9-1—29.

Power-play opportunities—Phoenix 1 of 5; Winnipeg 1 of 4.

Goalies—Phoenix, Smith 20-17-10 (29 shots-27 saves). Winnipeg, Pavelec 19-22-4 (36-34).

A—15,004 (15,004). **T—**2:44.

Stars 4, Hurricanes 1

Carolina 0 0 1—1
Dallas 2 1 1—4

First Period—1, Dallas, Seguin 25 (Nichushkin, Ja.Benn), 3:18. 2, Dallas, Dillon 6 (Ja.Benn), 6:13 (sh).

Second Period—3, Dallas, Ja.Benn 23, 18:35 (sh).

Third Period—4, Carolina, E.Staal 16 (Tlusty, Sekera), 2:42. 5, Dallas, Eakin 13 (Horcoff, Golgoski), 19:04 (en).

Shots on Goal—Carolina 11-7-12—30. Dallas 11-11-12—34.

Power-play opportunities—Carolina 0 of 5; Dallas 0 of 7.

Goalies—Carolina, Khudobin 13-7-0 (33 shots-30 saves). Dallas, Lehtonen 23-15-10 (30-29).

A—0 (18,532). **T—**2:26.

Kings 2, Flames 0

Los Angeles 1 0 1—2
Calgary 0 0 0—0

First Period—1, Los Angeles, Brown 11, 3:00.

Third Period—2, Los Angeles, King 12 (Brown, Muzzin), 3:30.

Shots on Goal—Los Angeles 7-6-11—24. Calgary 8-15-2—25.

Power-play opportunities—Los Angeles 0 of 1; Calgary 0 of 4.

Goalies—Los Angeles, Quick 17-13-2 (25 shots-25 saves). Calgary, Ortio 0-1-0 (24-22).

Wild 3, Oilers 0

Minnesota 1 1 1—3
Edmonton 0 0 0—0

First Period—1, Minnesota, Granlund 6 (Parise, Spurgeon), 2:04.

Second Period—2, Minnesota, Veilleux 2 (Haula, Prosser), 9:37.

Third Period—3, Minnesota, Heatley 12 (Coyle, Niederreiter), 9:29.

Shots on Goal—Minnesota 6-10-5—21. Edmonton 6-10-5—21.

Power-play opportunities—Minnesota 0 of 2; Edmonton 0 of 4.

Goalies—Minnesota, Kuemper 9-3-2 (21 shots-21 saves). Edmonton, Scrivens 10-9-4 (21-18).

A—16,839 (16,839). **T—**2:24.

Calendar

March 1 — NHL Stadium Series: Pittsburgh Penguins at Chicago Blackhawks, Soldier Field.

March 5 — Trade deadline, 3 p.m., EST.

March 10-12 — NHL general managers meeting, Boca Raton, Fla.

April 13 — Last day of regular season.

AUTO RACING

Around the track

SPRINT CUP

This week: The Profit on CNBC 500 at Avondale, Ariz.

TV: AFN-Xtra, 8:30 p.m. Sunday, Central European Time

Track: Phoenix International Raceway (oval, 1.0 miles).

Race distance: 312 miles, 312 laps.

Last year: Carl Edwards won to snap a 70-race victory drought.

Last week: Dale Earnhardt Jr. won the Daytona 500 for the second time, beating Denny Hamlin in the rain-delayed race.

Fast facts: The race is the first to use the new group qualifying format. The fastest 12 cars after the opening 30-minute session will compete for the pole in the final 10-minute session. At tracks 1.25 miles or longer, there will be three rounds. ... Kevin Harvick won the November race at the track. He's in his first year at Stewart-Haas Racing after 13 Cup seasons at Richard Childress Racing.

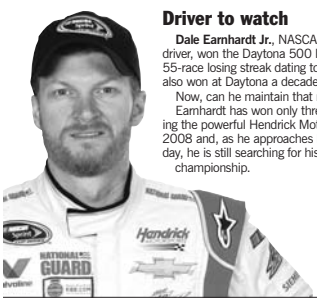
Next race: Kobalt 400, March 9, Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

Online: nascar.com

— The Associated Press

Driver standings

1. Dale Earnhardt Jr. 48
2. Denny Hamlin 43
3. Brad Keselowski 42
4. Jeff Gordon 40
5. Jimmie Johnson 40
6. Matt Kenseth 38
7. Ricky Stenhouse Jr. 37
8. Greg Biffle 37
9. Austin Dillon 36
10. Casey Mears 34
11. Joey Logano 34
12. Kevin Harvick 31
13. Jamie McMurray 30
14. Bobby Labonte 29



Driver to watch

Dale Earnhardt Jr., NASCAR's most popular driver, won the Daytona 500 last week to snap a 55-race losing streak dating to 2012. Earnhardt also won at Daytona a decade ago.

Now, can he maintain that momentum?

Earnhardt has won only three races since joining the powerful Hendrick Motorsports team in 2008 and, as he approaches his 40th birthday, he is still searching for his first Sprint Cup championship.

NATIONWIDE SERIES

This week: Blue Jeans Go Green 200 at Avondale, Ariz.

TV: AFN-Xtra (joined in progress), 10 p.m. Saturday CET

Track: Phoenix International Raceway (oval, 1.0 miles).

Race distance: 200 miles, 200 laps.

Last year: Kyle Busch won to end a 24-race Nationwide drought.

Last week: Regan Smith won at Daytona, holding off Brad Keselowski.

Fast facts: Busch also won the November race at the track for the last of his 12 series victories in 2013. Busch, driving the No. 54 Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota, has a series-record 63 victories — six at the track. ... Kevin Harvick is driving the Dale Earnhardt Jr.-owned No. 88 Chevrolet.

Next race: Boyd Gaming 300, March 8, Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

Online: nascar.com

— The Associated Press

Driver standings

1. Regan Smith 47
2. Trevor Bayne 41
3. Elliott Sadler 39
4. Brendan Gaughan 38
5. Ty Dillon 37
6. Dylan Kwasniewski 36
7. Joe Nemechek 32
8. Mike Wallace 31
9. Chase Elliott 29
10. James Buescher 28

CAMPING WORLD TRUCKS SERIES

Next race: Kroger 250, March 29, Martinsville Speedway, Martinsville, Va.

Last week: Kyle Busch won at Daytona to become the first driver to win Truck, ARCA, Nationwide and Sprint Cup races at the track.

Online: nascar.com

— The Associated Press

Driver standings

1. Timothy Peters 43
2. Johnny Sauter 41
3. Ron Hornaday Jr. 39
4. Ryan Blaney 38
5. Jeb Burton 37
6. Jimmy Weller III 35
7. German Quiroga 34
8. Ryan Sieg 33
9. Tyler Reddick 32
10. Matt Crafton 31
11. Ben Kennedy 31
12. John Wes Townley 30
13. Justin Jennings 28
14. Bryan Silas 27
15. Chris Fontaine 25

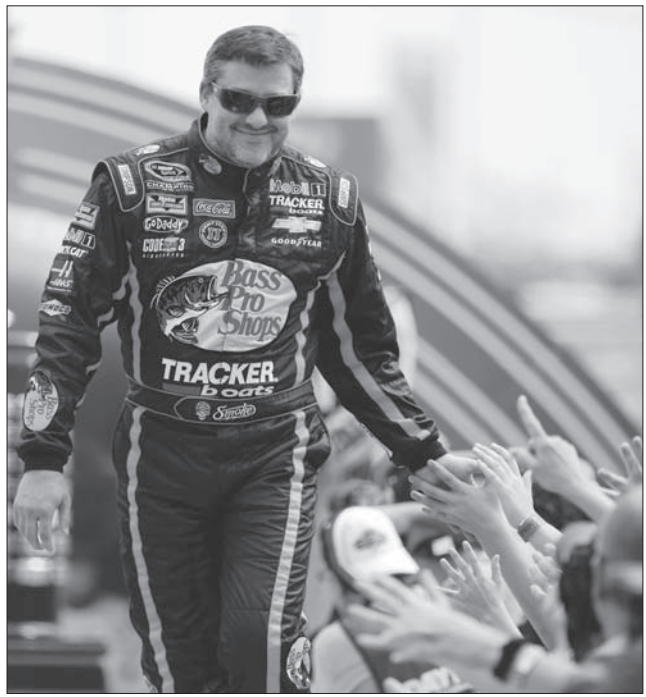
NHRA MELLO YELLO DRAG RACING

Next event: NHRA Gatornationals, March 13-16, Auto Plus Raceway at Gainesville, Fla.

Last week: Alexis DeJoria raced to her first career Funny Car victory, beating Robert Hight in the final at Wild Horse Pass in Chandler, Ariz. Antron Brown won in Top Fuel and Allen Johnson topped the Pro Stock field.

Online: nhra.com

— The Associated Press



John Raoux/AP

Tony Stewart greets fans as he is introduced before the Daytona 500 last weekend. The three-time Sprint Cup champion, returning from a broken leg, finished 35th in the season opener.

Getting back on his feet

Stewart confident about leg heading into Phoenix

By Jenna Fryer
The Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Tony Stewart does not consider the Daytona 500 a disaster, despite the engine problems that spoiled his return to racing from a broken right leg.

The three-time NASCAR champion wound up 35th in the season opener, but he logged enough laps during Speedweeks that he feels good going into the upcoming stretch of seven consecutive races. Stewart missed the final 15 races last year after breaking his leg during a sprint car crash in Iowa.

His first time back in a race car was Feb. 14, the day before he competed — and was crashed out of — the exhibition Sprint Unlimited. He also raced in the Budweiser Duel before the 500, giving him 672 miles of racing in three events.

Stewart goes to Sunday's race at Phoenix International Raceway "a lot more confident than I was before we got to Daytona."

"I think having all the races that we ran, and actually getting in a crash, while not a great thing, allowed me to sort of test my leg and it felt good," Stewart said in a Stewart-Haas Racing team release. "There have been some little things that have felt a little different, but for the most part, it's felt like an old pair of tennis shoes that you're just comfortable with. I think the whole time in Daytona exceeded my expectations of what I hoped it would be like."

But the 500 itself was a letdown for SHR.

Stewart had the engine issue and Danica Patrick was involved in a crash and finished 40th. It left only Kevin Harvick and Kurt Busch, the two newcomers to the organization, in contention for a solid finish and both had difficulties at the end. Busch wound up 21st and Harvick was involved in the final accident of the race and finished a team-best 13th.

Stewart said Phoenix will be a better indicator of where the team is than Daytona, one of only four restrictor-plate races on the schedule.

"Daytona and Talladega have always just been two different forms of racing," Stewart said, referring to the necessary teamwork and drafting. "What happens at Phoenix and the races after that has to be done on your own. You can't help each other at Phoenix. You just have to go race."

He likes his chances at Phoenix, where he has one win, eight top-fives and 12 top-10s in 23 career starts. He's completed all but 14 of 7,257 laps on the 1-mile oval.

PIR is also the place that pushed Stewart into becoming a full-time driver in 1993. Still working eight-hour days at $5-an-hour at a machine shop in Columbus, Ind., Stewart headed West to run USAC Silver Crown season-opening Copper World Classic. He qualified second to Davey Hamilton, then led 31 of 50 laps before finishing second to Mike Bliss.

Stewart earned $3,500 that day — a payout that convinced him running the Silver Crown, Sprint and Midget races across the nation that year sounded a lot better than returning to the machine shop.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Arkansas scores OT win over No. 17 Kentucky

By Gary B. Graves
The Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Kentucky players only had to look at the box score to see how they lost another overtime game to Arkansas.

With each missed free throw in the second half and particularly down the stretch went a chance for the Wildcats to put away the stubborn Razorbacks. Kentucky missed eight of 14 from the line in the second half and three of four near the end of regulation, leaving openings that Arkansas gladly seized.

The Razorbacks took advantage and eventually forced overtime by making their foul shots. In fact, they made all 16 from the line, including six in OT, when Coty Clarke and Kikko Haydar combined for perfection that handed the 17th-ranked Wildcats a 71-67 defeat on Thursday night.

Kentucky (21-7, 11-4 Southeastern Conference) had its two-game winning streak snapped and lost its third straight to Arkansas (19-9, 8-7).

"They play hard," Wildcats forward Alex Poythress said. "They're really scrappy. They played a great game, hitting all their open shots, got to the foul line a lot. They just played a great game."

Missed foul shots were among the many reasons the Wildcats lost five days after an emotional, come-from-behind win over LSU. They struggled to make shots around the basket, went 3-for-11 from behind the arc and committed 18 turnovers that led to 21 points.

"We took a big step back," Kentucky coach John Calipari said. "Great lesson. Had our chances to win. They made offensive rebounds. They miss a shot, the ball comes, we've got no one. It was frustrating."

Willie Cauley-Stein led Kentucky with 16 points and 13 rebounds. Andrew Harrison and Julius Randle each scored 14 and James Young 11 on a night when the Wildcats shot just 26-for-76 (34 percent) from the field.

Arkansas shot only 41 percent, but that was good enough for its first win at Rupp Arena since its 1993-94 NCAA championship season.

"Our guys wanted it more," Razorbacks coach Mike Anderson said, "and you could see that coming down the stretch."

Kentucky trailed by as many as 12 in the first half and 37-30 at halftime. The Wildcats were down 50-43 with 12:03 remaining and struggling for offensive consistency before battling back with tough defense to outscore the Razorbacks 11-2 over 6:14. Cauley-Stein's dunk at the 5:31 mark provided Kentucky's first lead since the early minutes.

James Crisp/AP

Arkansas' Bobby Portis (10) pulls down a rebound between Kentucky's Willie Cauley-Stein (15), Julius Randle and James Young during the second half of Thursday's game. Arkansas won 71-67.

But the Wildcats missed three of four free throws late in regulation, allowing Arkansas to come back and force overtime.

Arkansas had a chance to win at the end of regulation after Clarke blocked Andrew Harrison's jumper, but Alandis Harris' long three-pointer bounced off the rim.

Clarke took over from there in overtime, scoring seven points to help Arkansas beat Kentucky six weeks after Michael Qualls stunned the Wildcats with a last-second dunk in OT.

Clarke lifted the Razorbacks this time with a three-pointer and four free throws in the extra period, including two with 36.7 seconds left for a 69-64 lead.

Young's three-pointer brought Kentucky within two, but Haydar made two more from the line with 17 seconds left for the final margin.

Aaron Harrison and Andrew Harrison each missed a three at the end for the Wildcats.

"It just seemed like the energy wasn't there like normal," Cauley-Stein said.

The surging Razorbacks have won four straight and six of seven.

Clarke finished with 11 points, one of four Razorbacks in double figures. Qualls scored 14 to lead the way, with Rashad Madden adding 12 and Anthlon Bell 10.

Timothy D. Easley/AP

Louisville's Montrezl Harrell, left, dunks against Temple's Devontae Watson during the second half of Thursday's 88-66 win over the Owls in Louisville, Ky. Harrell finished with 21 points as the Cardinals completed a season sweep over outmanned Temple.

Top 25 Roundup

Louisville routs Temple

The Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Russ Smith had 24 points, moving into eighth place on Louisville's career scoring list, and the seventh-ranked Cardinals throttled Temple 88-66 on Thursday night.

Montrezl Harrell added 21 points and freshman Terry Rozier scored a career-high 19 as Louisville capped a perfect February with its seventh straight victory. The trio combined to shoot 25-for-34 from the field and nearly outscored Temple all by itself.

Five days after drawing within a half-game of first-place Cincinnati with a road win over the Bearcats, the Cardinals (24-4, 13-2 American Athletic Conference) followed up by completing a season sweep of the outmanned Owls (7-20, 2-13).

Will Cummings scored 18 points and Quenton DeCosey added 17 for the Owls. Temple has lost 15 of 17 since New Year's Day, including an eight-game losing streak to start 2014.

Duquesne 71, No. 10 Saint Louis 64: Micah Mason had 22 points, Jerry Jones added 19 and the visiting Dukes surprised the Billikens in snapping their school-record, 19-game winning streak.

Saint Louis (25-3, 12-1 Atlantic 10) had not lost since dropping a 70-65 decision on Dec. 1 to unbeaten Wichita State, now ranked No. 2 in the country.

Mason, who entered leading the nation in three-point shooting percentage (.554), hit four of five from behind the arc for Duquesne (12-15, 4-10), which beat a top-10 opponent on the road for the fifth time (5-28).

Indiana 93, No. 20 Iowa 86: Will Sheehey scored 19 of his career-high 30 points in the first half and Stanford Robinson added a career-best 17 to lead the Hoosiers over the visiting Hawkeyes in a game that was postponed last week.

Indiana (16-12, 6-9 Big Ten) went on a 9-0 run in the second half, capped by a three-pointer from Evan Gordon that gave it a 62-60 lead with 13:13 remaining.

Roy Devyn Marble had 20 points and Aaron White added 19 points and 10 rebounds for the Hawkeyes (19-9, 8-7), who have lost three straight.

Houston 77, No. 21 Memphis 68: Danuel House had 19 points and the host Cougars closed with a surge to beat the Tigers.

TaShawn Thomas added 16 points and seven rebounds for Houston, which finished on a 14-5 run to win its second consecutive game.

Jherrod Stiggers chipped in with 14 points and L.J. Rose had seven points, seven rebounds and 10 assists for the Cougars (14-14, 6-9 American Athletic Conference).

Penn State 65, No. 22 Ohio State 63: D.J. Newbill scored 23 points, Tim Frazier added 16 and the host Nittany Lions held off a late rally by the Buckeyes on Senior Night to sweep the season series.

Ohio State (22-7, 9-7 Big Ten) had a chance to win at the end. Coming out of a timeout with 6.8 seconds left, Lenzelle Smith Jr.'s three-pointer rimmed out. Penn State (14-14, 5-10) grabbed the rebound and time expired.

NBA

Chris Young, The Canadian Press/AP

Wizards center Marcin Gortat, center, blocks the shot of Raptors' forward Amir Johnson as Al Harrington, left, looks on in Toronto on Thursday night. Gortat finished with 31 points and 12 rebounds.

Roundup

Wizards survive 3OT epic

The Associated Press

TORONTO — Trevor Ariza put down his plate of chicken long enough for a brief postgame interview, but he wasn't about to stop eating.

Ariza scored the go-ahead basket on a fast-break layup with 1:20 left in the third overtime and the Washington Wizards outlasted Toronto 134-129 on Thursday night to win the longest game by time in Raptors franchise history. At 3:32, the game was 10 minutes longer than the previous Toronto record, a 3:22, triple-OT loss to the Nets in England on March 5, 2011.

"I was ready for this one tonight," Ariza said of his meal, practically a midnight snack. "It was the longest game in the world. You give it all so at the end of the game you're just totally drained."

Would he be having seconds after playing nearly 50 minutes?

"Oh, I'm going get some more," Ariza said. "This is not the end of it."

Even watching this one was draining, whether you were in the stands or on the sidelines.

"My feet and back are hurting and I didn't even play," Wizards coach Randy Wittman said.

Marcin Gortat fouled out with a career-best 31 points and 12 rebounds, John Wall also had 31 points, and Ariza fouled out with 16 points and 10 rebounds for the Wizards, who won their fifth straight, snapped a three-game skid against Toronto and improved to 2-0 since losing Nene to a knee injury.

"The feeling is great," Gortat said. "We won the game, we've proven that we can beat this team. We really build the chemistry, we really build the team spirit with this win."

Chris Singleton had 13 points, and Bradley Beal and Andre Miller each had 11 for Washington. The Wizards are unbeaten since a Feb. 18 home loss to Toronto.

"It's a great win for us," Ariza said. "They took us all the way to the wire."

Heat 108, Kicks 82: LeBron James scored 31 points, Dwyane Wade added 23 and host Miami used a huge third quarter to run away and eventually rout New York.

James donned a dark mask to protect his broken nose and was clearly unencumbered, hitting 13 of 19 shots and topping 30 points for the fifth consecutive game.

Wade shot 10-for-13 from the field, and Miami outscored New York 23-3 over the final 7:02 of the third and won its sixth straight. The Heat shot 61 percent, while the Knicks shot 37 percent.

Carmelo Anthony scored 29 points for New York, but none in the final 21:38. Tyson Chandler had 19 points and 16 rebounds, and J.R. Smith added 11 points. The Knicks fell to 2-10 in February.

Nets 112, Nuggets 89: Paul Pierce scored 18 points and visiting Brooklyn rebounded from its worst loss in more than 10 years.

Joe Johnson, Marcus Thornton, and Mason Plumlee each added 10 points for the Nets, who snapped a six-game losing streak in Denver. The Nets hadn't won in the Mile High City since a 112-102 victory on Jan. 27, 2007.

Randy Foye had 15 points to lead Denver, which has lost four in a row and nine of 10.

Brooklyn's 7-foot center Jason Collins, the NBA's first openly gay player appearing in his third game since being signed to a 10-day contract, was given a round of applause from the crowd when he entered the game for the first time with 8:02 left. Collins finished with three points.

Pacers 101, Bucks 96: Roy Hibbert had 24 points and 12 rebounds to help host Indiana rally to beat Milwaukee.

Paul George and Lance Stephenson each scored 18 points for NBA-leading Indiana. The Pacers, 44-13 overall and an NBA-best 28-3 at home, blew a 17-point lead in the first half.

The Bucks, an NBA-worst 11-46, tied it at 50 at the half and built a six-point lead in the third quarter. Brandon Knight had 23 points for Milwaukee, and Khris Middleton added 22.

Before the game, the Bucks waived forward Caron Butler after agreeing to a contract buyout.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Toronto	32	26	.552	—
Brooklyn	27	29	.482	4
New York	21	37	.362	11
Boston	20	39	.339	12½
Philadelphia	15	43	.259	17
Southeast Division				
Miami	41	14	.745	—
Washington	30	28	.517	12½
Charlotte	27	30	.474	15
Atlanta	26	31	.456	16
Orlando	18	42	.300	25½
Central Division				
Indiana	44	13	.772	—
Chicago	31	26	.544	13
Detroit	23	35	.397	21½
Cleveland	23	36	.390	22
Milwaukee	11	46	.193	33

Western Conference

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
San Antonio	41	16	.719	—
Houston	39	19	.672	2½
Dallas	36	23	.610	6
Memphis	32	24	.571	8½
New Orleans	23	34	.404	18
Northwest Division				
Oklahoma City	43	15	.741	—
Portland	40	18	.690	3
Minnesota	28	29	.491	14½
Denver	25	32	.439	17½
Utah	21	36	.368	21½
Pacific Division				
L.A. Clippers	40	20	.667	—
Golden State	35	23	.603	4
Phoenix	33	24	.579	5½
Sacramento	20	37	.351	18½
L.A. Lakers	19	39	.328	20

Wednesday's games

Orlando 101, Philadelphia 90
Boston 115, Atlanta 104
Chicago 103, Golden State 83
Dallas 108, New Orleans 89
Cleveland 114, Oklahoma City 104
Memphis 108, L.A. Lakers 103
San Antonio 120, Detroit 110
Utah 109, Phoenix 86
Portland 124, Brooklyn 80
L.A. Clippers 101, Houston 93

Thursday's games

Indiana 101, Milwaukee 96
Washington 134, Toronto 129,3OT
Miami 108, New York 82
Brooklyn 112, Denver 89

Friday's games

Utah at Cleveland
Memphis at Oklahoma City
Golden State at New York
Chicago at Dallas
Charlotte at San Antonio
Sacramento at L.A. Lakers
New Orleans at Phoenix

Saturday's games

Washington at Philadelphia
Orlando at Miami
Detroit at Houston
Indiana at Boston
Brooklyn at Milwaukee
Cleveland at Memphis
Denver at Portland
Minnesota at Sacramento
New Orleans at L.A. Clippers

Thursday
Nets 112, Nuggets 89

BROOKLYN — Johnson 3-11 2-3 10, Pierce 7-12 2-2 18, Garnett 2-4 0-0 4, Williams 3-7 2-2 9, Livingston 3-5 2-2 8, Blatche 4-6 0-0 9, Thornton 3-7 4-4 10, Teletovic 3-9 0-0 8, Kirilenko 2-3 5-7 9, Plumlee 3-6 4-4 10, Teague 3-5 2-2 8, Anderson 2-6 0-1 6, Collins 1-1 1-2 3. Totals 39-82 24-29 112.

DENVER — Fournier 3-9 2-2 8, Faried 6-11 2-3 14, Mozgov 3-9 3-3 9, Brooks 4-8 2-2 13, Foye 5-12 3-4 15, Hickson 4-9 6-10 14, Miller 2-6 3-4 7, Randolph 3-13 1-3 8, Vesely 0-3 1-2 1. Totals 30-80 23-33 89.

Brooklyn	29	30	30	23—112
Denver	8	28	20	33— 89

Three-Point Goals—Brooklyn 10-31 (Pierce 2-5, Anderson 2-5, Johnson 2-6, Teletovic 2-8, Blatche 1-1, Williams 1-3, Kirilenko 0-1, Thornton 0-2), Denver 6-22 (Brooks 3-5, Foye 2-8, Randolph 1-5, Miller 0-1, Fournier 0-3). Fouled Out—None. Rebounds—Brooklyn 51 (Plumlee, Blatche 9), Denver 57 (Faried, Mozgov 8). Assists—Brooklyn 21 (Livingston 8), Denver 14 (Fournier 5). Total Fouls—Brooklyn 25, Denver 22. A—14,826 (19,155).

Heat 108, Knicks 82

NEW YORK — Anthony 11-20 4-6 29, Smith 4-9 2-4 11, Chandler 6-9 7-8 19, Felton 1-7 0-0 2, Prigioni 0-3 0-0 0, Hardaway Jr. 2-15 2-2 6, Stoudemire 2-6 0-0 4, Brown 3-7 0-0 6, Tyler 0-1 1-2 1, Clark 1-3 0-0 2, Murry 1-3 0-0 2. Totals 31-83 16-22 82.

MIAMI — James 13-19 4-6 31, Battier 3-6 0-0 8, Bosh 3-6 0-0 6, Chalmers 5-8 0-0 11, Wade 10-13 3-4 23, Cole 5-9 1-2 11, Allen 4-6 2-2 11, Andersen 0-1 0-0 0, Beasley 1-4 1-2 4, Oden 1-2 1-2 3, Lewis 0-0 0-0 0, Douglas 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 45-74 12-18 108.

New York	22	28	14	18— 82
Miami	28	27	32	21—108

Three-Point Goals—New York 4-23 (Anthony 3-8, Smith 1-2, Felton 0-2, Prigioni 0-3, Hardaway Jr. 0-8), Miami 6-15 (Battier 2-4, Beasley 1-1, James 1-2, Chalmers 1-3, Allen 1-3, Cole 0-1, Bosh 0-1). Fouled Out—None. Rebounds—New York 50 (Chandler 16), Miami 43 (Bosh, Andersen 7). Assists—New York 16 (Felton, Smith 5), Miami 18 (Battier 5). Total Fouls—New York 21, Miami 22. A—19,634 (19,600).

Alan Diaz/AP

Miami Heat small forward LeBron James, wearing a protective mask over his broken nose, made 13 of 19 shots en route to 31 points in a 108-82 blowout victory over the New York Knicks on Thursday.

Wizards 134, Raptors 129, 3OT

WASHINGTON — Ariza 6-12 2-2 16, Booker 2-5 1-2 5, Gortat 12-23 7-11 31, Wall 12-20 6-8 31, Beal 4-16 2-2 11, Webster 3-9 0-0 7, Singleton 3-7 7-8 13, Miller 5-7 1-2 11, Harrington 4-9 0-0 8, Temple 0-0 1-2 1. Totals 51-108 27-37 134.

TORONTO — Ross 3-5 2-2 11, Johnson 5-10 5-8 16, Valanciunas 3-9 1-1 7, Lowry 6-18 5-7 18, DeRozan 11-23 12-14 34, Patterson 2-5 0-0 5, Salmons 3-9 0-0 7, Novak 1-2 0-0 3, Hansbrough 0-0 2-4 2, Vasquez 11-19 0-0 26, Fields 0-0 0-0 0, Hayes 0-0 0-0 0, De Colo 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 45-100 27-36 129.

Washington	21	36	26	23	8	4	16—134
Toronto	27	27	24	28	8	4	11—129

Three-Point Goals—Washington 5-22 (Ariza 2-5, Wall 1-4, Beal 1-4, Webster 1-5, Harrington 0-4), Toronto 12-30 (Vasquez 4-9, Ross 3-5, Patterson 1-1, Novak 1-2, Johnson 1-2, Salmons 1-5, Lowry 1-5, DeRozan 0-1). Fouled Out—Gortat, Ariza, Lowry, Patterson, Johnson. Rebounds—Washington 65 (Gortat 12), Toronto 66 (Valanciunas 10). Assists—Washington 22 (Wall 9), Toronto 29 (Lowry 10). Total Fouls—Washington 32, Toronto 35. Technicals—Lowry. Flagrant Fouls—Harrington. A—17,758 (19,800).

Pacers 101, Bucks 96

MILWAUKEE — Middleton 9-15 1-1 22, Ilyasova 3-7 2-2 9, Pachulia 1-8 0-0 2, Knight 10-20 0-0 23, Wolters 2-4 0-0 4, Mayo 5-14 1-2 14, Henson 0-4 0-2 0, Adrien 2-3 0-0 4, Antetokounmpo 2-4 0-0 5, Sessions 4-8 4-4 13. Totals 38-87 8-11 96.

INDIANA — George 7-15 2-2 18, West 4-8 1-2 9, Hibbert 10-16 4-5 24, G.Hill 3-4 2-2 9, Stephenson 7-11 2-2 18, Mahinmi 1-3 0-0 2, Turner 2-10 4-5 8, Watson 2-3 4-4 9, Scola 2-4 0-0 4. Totals 38-74 19-22 101.

Milwaukee	15	35	16	30— 96
Indiana	30	20	23	28—101

Three-Point Goals—Milwaukee 12-24 (Middleton 3-4, Knight 3-7, Mayo 3-9, Ilyasova 1-1, Antetokounmpo 1-1, Sessions 1-2), Indiana 6-15 (Stephenson 2-3, George 2-8, G.Hill 1-1, Watson 1-2, Turner 0-1). Fouled Out—None. Rebounds—Milwaukee 41 (Ilyasova 11), Indiana 50 (Hibbert 12). Assists—Milwaukee 19 (Sessions, Knight 5), Indiana 22 (George 6). Total Fouls—Milwaukee 22, Indiana 15. A—17,892 (18,165).

Leaders

Scoring

	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Durant, OKC	57	593	484	1797	31.5
Anthony, NYK	55	550	330	1554	28.3
James, MIA	53	528	299	1430	27.0
Love, MIN	54	464	377	1435	26.6
Harden, HOU	50	369	380	1227	24.5
Griffin, LAC	60	542	362	1457	24.3
Aldridge, POR	53	518	229	1267	23.9
Curry, GOL	55	453	221	1311	23.8
DeRozan, TOR	56	444	335	1272	22.7
George, IND	57	437	275	1287	22.6
Cousins, SAC	49	387	319	1093	22.3
Nowitzki, DAL	57	444	251	1232	21.6
Irving, CLE	56	430	236	1197	21.4
Lillard, POR	58	404	261	1232	21.2
Jefferson, CHA	48	428	125	983	20.5
Thomas, SAC	57	393	271	1164	20.4
Davis, NOR	49	378	235	992	20.2
Dragic, PHX	53	378	234	1072	20.2
Gay, SAC	51	384	208	1026	20.1
Wall, WAS	58	418	253	1161	20.0

MLB

Cardinals impressed with 'nasty' Martinez

By Chuck King
The Associated Press

JUPITER, Fla.

Before joining the Cardinals in the offseason, Jhonny Peralta had only heard about Carlos Martinez's live arm.

Getting a firsthand look this spring has made a much bigger impression.

"He's nasty," Peralta said. "He's really good. His fastball has really good, heavy sink. It's hard to hit him."

Peralta, an 11-year veteran, isn't alone in that assessment.

"It's pretty universal," Cardinals manager Mike Matheny said. "Every time he walks off the mound and (our hitters) walk out of the cage, it's, 'Wow! That stuff looked good from the field, but I didn't realize up close what it looked like.'"

Martinez was scheduled get the ball on Friday when the Cardinals opened their Grapefruit League schedule against Miami, beginning a road that they hope will lead back to the World Series. When Martinez walks to the mound he will be trying to put the events of a trying week behind him.

The 22-year-old Martinez made news this week when a website published the favorite list from his Twitter account, which contained pornographic images and links to adult websites. General manager John Mozeliak indicated that the club thought hackers were at least partially responsible for the content and Martinez apologized.

"I want to acknowledge fault for what happened," Martinez said through an interpreter. "That was my responsibility. I want to apologize to the fans, the organization. I didn't mean to cause a distraction. Obviously, it's something that you don't want to go through, but I accept responsibility, and I'm ready to move on and focus on baseball."

Considered a candidate for the fifth spot in the rotation, Martinez has a blazing fastball and a good slider. That combination made him a success out of the bullpen late last season and in the playoffs, but he's expected to ultimately move to a starting role.

"The ball is exploding out of his hand," Matheny said. "He just has a real good presence. You watch him finish his pitching and he is not even breathing hard."

> **'He's nasty. He's really good. His fastball has really good, heavy sink. It's hard to hit him.'**
>
> **Jhonny Peralta**
> Cardinals veteran on Carlos Martinez

Martinez's early spring performance takes on even greater importance now that the Cardinals have, at least temporarily, halted the workload of Jaime Garcia. The left-hander, who is coming off shoulder surgery, had been considered the favorite to claim the fifth rotation spot, but shoulder soreness prompted Garcia to get a cortisone injection on Wednesday and he is unlikely to be ready for the start of the season.

That would leave Martinez battling with Joe Kelly, and possibly Tyler Lyons, for the final starting spot.

Should Martinez claim that fifth starter's spot, he'd likely have an innings limit.

"If he ended up winning a starting spot, looking at his past couple years he was in the 125-ish (innings range), trying to say he would be good to go to 200 — I don't think that would be accurate," Mozeliak said.

David Carson, St. Louis Post-Dispatch/MCT

St. Louis pitcher Carlos Martinez throws during batting practice Thursday in Jupiter, Fla. The Cardinals are hoping Martinez can claim the fifth starting spot.

Max Faulkner, Fort Worth Star-Telegram/MCT

Texas relief pitcher Neal Cotts appeared in 58 games last season. His 1.11 ERA was the lowest in franchise history.

Chance: Rangers like Cotts' work ethic

FROM BACK PAGE

"If they wouldn't have come, I don't know," he said, when asked if he thought he'd ever pitch in the majors again after Tommy John ligament replacement surgery and four different hip operations.

"He showed his form, he has tremendous work ethic and he has a passion for what he's doing," manager Ron Washington said. "We were very fortunate to have him after he came up and did what he did for us. He's a big piece and deserves a lot of credit."

The Rangers were already in spring training two years ago when one of their scouts asked Cotts to throw a bullpen session. Cotts joined them in Arizona a few days later — and never even found out his grade on the only exam he took in a finance class. Cotts spent only a few days in minor league camp before moving over to the big league side. He was on track to make the 2012 opening day roster before straining a muscle in his left side late during spring training.

That injury landed Cotts on the disabled list at Triple-A and he didn't pitch until June. Last season, he started in Round Rock's bullpen before making his Rangers debut by retiring the side against Oakland on six pitches.

> **'I worked pretty hard the last couple of years trying to get back.'**
>
> **Neal Cotts**
> Texas Rangers relief pitcher on his years away from baseball

"I got the first strike, and the first out and then I think everything kind of eased up a little bit," Cotts said. "Warming up, I was nervous like it was a debut almost. I felt more of an excitement than a fear. I was just excited to get back out there."

Cotts appeared in 284 career major league games with the White Sox (2003-06) and Cubs (2007-09), before not pitching in 2010 and 2011. He was part of a World Series title as a 25-year-old reliever in 2005, appearing in all four games of the White Sox sweep of Houston after going 4-0 with a 1.94 ERA in 69 regular-season games.

"It came pretty quick, where I don't think you fully understand how hard it is," he said. "I don't think I realized until later on when things weren't as good how hard it really was to have such a good team like that."

The perfect inning against Oakland was Cotts' first major league appearance since May 25, 2009. He hadn't won a major league game since 2006 before earning four of the Rangers' seven victories over a 2½-week span. Asked what last season meant to him, Cotts chuckled while responding that it was a start since he got invited back for another season.

"I worked pretty hard the last couple of years trying to get back, and it was fulfilling to get back and be able to get out there in meaningful situations and be a part of that bullpen," he said. "It was a really good bullpen, and to be a part of it was a good thing for me."

And the Rangers.

MLB

Gregory Bull/AP

Athletics relief pitcher Jim Johnson, who led the AL in saves with the Orioles last season, allowed three hits and one run in his first spring appearance.

Johnson glad to get through first outing

By Rick Eymer
The Associated Press

PHOENIX — New Oakland closer Jim Johnson was glad to get through his first outing of the spring with the Athletics, and manager Bob Melvin is allowing him to prepare at his own pace.

"Guys like him you don't worry about," Melvin said after the Athletics' 11-3 loss to the Milwaukee Brewers on Thursday.

The A's acquired Johnson, last year's AL saves leader, for Jemile Weeks in a December trade with the Baltimore Orioles. Johnson converted 50 of 59 save opportunities, going 3-8 with a 2.94 ERA, with the Orioles.

Johnson signed a 1-year, $10 million deal in January to replace Grant Balfour, who signed with the Tampa Bay Rays.

He wanted to throw as many fastballs as he could against the Brewers as he tries to establish command of the strike zone.

"I have a game plan for what I want to accomplish," Johnson said. "I felt like I was holding the runner at first if that makes a difference."

He felt good about what he accomplished in his one inning of work. He allowed three hits, including a home run, and struck out one.

"I gave up one fly ball, so overall I did my job to keep the ball on the ground," Johnson said. "Now I will sit down and figure out what I want to work on for the next time."

The one fly ball was Juan Francisco's second home run of the game. Francisco also hit one against A's starter Tommy Milone.

"That was a ball down to a low-ball hitter," Melvin said. "He was just working on commanding his stuff."

There was one scary moment when Johnson and A's third baseman Josh Donaldson went after a bunt and collided. Donaldson came up limping a bit and jogged around the infield to shake it off.

"I'm glad he wasn't hurt there," said Johnson, who thought he would be able to catch the ball in the air.

Knuckling down

Blue Jays pitcher Dickey works toward duplicating 2012's Cy Young success

The Associated Press

DUNEDIN, Fla. — R.A. Dickey is getting up to speed this spring.

The knuckleballer made his exhibition debut Thursday, starting for the Toronto Blue Jays and giving up an unearned run in two innings during a 7-5 victory over the Philadelphia Phillies.

For the first time out, Dickey said his flutter was fine. He walked back-to-back batters in the opening inning, but said there was a reason for that.

"It was moving quite a bit. It was tough to find the zone for a bit because it had such depth late," he said. "It was a good sign all around, really. They only hit pieces of it. The two hits I gave up were little flares."

Dickey, 39, is hoping to duplicate the success he found in 2012 when he won the NL Cy Young Award with the New York Mets. He went 20-6 for a team that finished 74-88, with a 2.73 ERA.

Dickey led the NL with 230 strikeouts and 233$^{2}/_{3}$ innings that season, then was traded to Toronto.

In his first year with the Blue Jays, Dickey went 14-13 with a 4.21 ERA. He also pitched for the U.S. team in the World Baseball Classic.

"Last year was a challenge," he said.

Dickey got off to a slow start last season, hampered by problems with his back and neck. That prevented him from throwing his knuckler as hard as he wanted.

Unlike many knuckleballers over the years who have tossed the ball to the plate, Dickey has found success by throwing it much faster.

"Ideally, at the end of the spring, I'd like to have my comfortable knuckleball at about 76 or 77 and my low one about 75. So I've probably got to get about 3 mph on each of the high and low," he said.

Last spring, Dickey said he found himself glancing at the radar gun reading on the scoreboard "and seeing high 60s and low 70s."

"I obviously feel better at this point than I did last year, which I'm hoping will carry throughout the spring and into the season," he said.

Dickey struck out two, both with batters chasing 61 mph knucklers.

"Just playing with the speeds and using that slow knuckleball as a changeup and it had good movement," he said.

The lone run against Dickey scored on a passed ball by Erik Kratz, who played last season for the Phillies.

Dioner Navarro is likely to be the Blue Jays' top catcher this season, and Kratz is competing for a backup role.

Trying to catch a knuckleball certainly isn't easy, and Dickey said he thought Kratz did a good job.

"I call my own game most of the time. If he's got a gut-feel, it might be two or three times a game that he might want me to stick with him on any given pitch," he said. "The other 97 pitches, I'm in control of what I want to do. That only leaves him to have to receive the ball and I like it that way."

Toronto Blue Jays starter R.A. Dickey gave up one unearned run in two innings of an exhibition game against the Philadelphia Phillies on Thursday in Dunedin, Fla. After winning the NL Cy Young Award with the New York Mets in 2012, Dickey went 14-13 with a 4.21 ERA for the Blue Jays last year.

Frank Gunn, The Canadian Press/AP

SPORTS

Making history in Toronto

Wizards' triple-overtime win longest game in Raptors history | **NBA, Page 29**

MLB

Making the most of it

Second chance pays off for Cotts

By Stephen Hawkins
The Associated Press

SURPRISE, Ariz.

Neal Cotts was taking college classes again, making a two-hour drive twice a week to Illinois State. He was 32 years old and it was nearly three years after his last major league appearance.

"I was throwing on the side here and there, but not particularly going gung-ho," Cotts said. "I was doing other things."

But the left-hander, who already had a World Series championship ring, got an unexpected extra chance with the Texas Rangers. Since then, Cotts has made a quite a comeback.

After getting called up last May, Cotts appeared in 58 of the Rangers' remaining 118 games. He matched the major league lead with eight relief victories and his 1.11 ERA was the lowest for a reliever in franchise history.

SEE CHANCE ON PAGE 30

Did you know

Texas reliever Neal Cotts was drafted in the second round of the 2001 amateur draft, 69th overall, by Oakland.

SOURCE: ESPN.com

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Texas reliever Neal Cotts gives a thumbs-up after throwing in the bullpen during spring training in Surprise, Ariz.

Tony Gutierrez/AP

Arkansas knocks off No. 17 Kentucky

College basketball, Page 28

NASCAR's Stewart progressing from leg injury

Auto racing, Page 27