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Free to Deployed Areas

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Militants parade down the streets of Mosul, Iraq, earlier this week in an image from Twitter.

TWITTER/AP

STRIPES.COM/IRAQCRISIS



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QUOTE OF THE DAY

"In 20 years, I've watched human tragedy unfold in this courtroom. I could have never imagined a victim's mother embracing her child's killer."

—Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Ellen Sue Venzler, after the mother of a 13-year-old girl accidentally shot and killed on a school bus embraced the 16-year-old defendant.

See story on Page 10

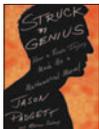
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2. Bergdahl to arrive at Texas hospital Friday, won't receive promotion
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MILITARY



Courtesy of the U.S. Navy

A Russian Tu-95 Bear long-range bomber in 2008. This week, similar bombers and a refueling tanker entered the outer portion of the North American air defense identification zone near Alaska.

US fighter jets scrambled after Russian bombers fly close to Alaska, California

By JON HARPER Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Russian bombers flew close to Alaska and California this week, prompting the U.S. Air Force to scramble fighter aircraft, according to North American Aerospace Defense Command.

The first encounter occurred Monday at about 4:30 p.m. Pacific Time when four Russian Tu-95 Bear-H long-range bombers and an Il-76 refueling tanker entered the outer portion of the North American air defense identification zone near Alaska.

In response, two American F-22 fighter jets based in Alaska were scrambled. The U.S. aircraft visually identified the Russian aircraft and shadowed them until they left the air defense identification zone, said Canadian Army Capt. Jennifer Stadnyk, a NORAD spokeswoman. NORAD, based in Colorado, is a joint military command staffed by U.S. and Canadian personnel. NORAD is charged with defending North American airspace.

After the F-22s began shadowing the bombers, two of the Tu-95s headed west and left the zone. The other two left the zone heading south, but later re-entered the near northern California around 9:30 p.m. Pacific time. At one point, the Russian bombers were only 50 miles off the California coast, according to Stadnyk. Two F-15s based in Oregon were launched, and the jets followed the bombers until they left the zone, Stadnyk said.

"The [Russian] aircraft re-

mained in international airspace at all times, behaved professionally, and undertook no dangerous military activities," according to Stadnyk. "At no time did any of the bombers ever enter sovereign [U.S.] airspace."

An ADIZ is a zone where foreign aircraft are required to identify themselves to the nation whose airspace they are approaching. The North American ADIZ extends 200 miles off the region's coastline. Sovereign airspace only extends 12 miles beyond the coast. Under international law, foreign military aircraft are not allowed to enter another nation's sovereign airspace without permission, but they are allowed to transit an ADIZ.

"There's no [legal] reason why they couldn't be there. But ... when they enter our ADIZ, that's our air defense identification zone, so we go up and check out to see what they're doing and who they are and what their intent is," Stadnyk explained.

The Russian bombers deployed from the country's Far East region.

"We believe that it was a training exercise," Stadnyk said. "It's not unusual for them to be more active at this time of the year as part of their training cycle. But ... often [when] they do their training, they might not get that close."

The last time Russian aircraft flew that close to California's coast was July 2012, according to Stadnyk.

The Tu-95s are capable of carrying nuclear weapons. Stadnyk did not know if the Russian

bombers were armed. She said for this type of aircraft, the ordnance on it wouldn't necessarily be clearly visible.

She said there was "standard communications" between the Russian and American pilots during the encounters, but would not provide additional details.

A few weeks ago, a U.S. electronic reconnaissance plane was intercepted by a Russian fighter, prompting complaints to Russian officials from top U.S. military officials.

On April 23, a U.S. Air Force RC-135U was flying in international airspace on a "routine mission" over the sea of Okhotsk when it was intercepted by a single Russian Su-27 Flanker, Pentagon spokesman Col. Steve Warren told reporters.

"The Su-27 approached the RC-135 across the nose of the U.S. aircraft within approximately 100 feet," Warren said.

There was no radio communication between the two aircraft, but the Russian jet rolled to expose its armaments to the crew of the U.S. jet, according to Warren. The RC-135U's pilots did not need to engage in evasive maneuvers, Warren said.

These recent aerial encounters came in the wake of Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region and large military buildup near Ukraine's borders, which raised tensions between the former Cold War rivals.

harper.jon@stripes.com
Twitter: @HarperStripes

Bergdahl back in US

Stars and Stripes

Bowe Bergdahl, the U.S. soldier who spent five years in Taliban captivity, arrived at Fort Sam Houston in Texas early Friday, the Army said in a statement.

The base is home to the San Antonio Military Medical Center, where Bergdahl will receive additional medical care and help in integrating back into normal life after half a decade as a prisoner of war.

"Following Sgt. Bergdahl's reintegration, the Army will continue its comprehensive review into the circumstances of his disappearance and captivity," the Army statement said.

Bergdahl was promoted twice while in captivity, from private first class up to his current rank of sergeant, but will not receive an automatic promotion to staff sergeant, which would have happened this month had he not been freed. The Associated Press reported Friday.

Before his arrival in Texas, Bergdahl spent nearly two weeks at the U.S. military's Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, where officials said he underwent treatment for malnutrition and other issues.

In Texas, "he will continue the next phase of his reintegration process," Pentagon spokesman Rear Adm. John Kirby said in a written statement. "There is no timeline for this process. Our focus remains on his health and well-being."

Bergdahl went missing from his post in Afghanistan's Paktika province on June 30, 2009, and spent almost five years in Taliban custody. Some of his former colleagues have said publicly that Bergdahl walked off of their base in the middle of the night, countering Taliban claims that they captured Bergdahl while he was on patrol with his unit.

American Special Forces retrieved Bergdahl from the Taliban on May 31 as part of a prisoner swap in which the U.S. remanded five Guantanamo detainees to the custody of Qatar. The deal has ruffled many Republicans and some Democrats, who think the swap could compromise American security.

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IRAQ

Obama says no US ground forces for Iraq

The Associated Press

President Barack Obama on Friday ruled out using U.S. ground forces to quell the growing insurgency in Iraq.

"We will not be sending U.S. troops back into combat in Iraq," he said.

Obama suggested that potential U.S. military action will be dependent on political efforts by Iraqi leaders to overcome sectarian differences that have plagued the country and have strengthened the insurgency.

"In the absence of this type of political effort, short-term military action — including any assistance we might provide — won't succeed ... The United States is not simply going to involve itself in a military action in the absence of a political plan by the Iraqis that gives us some assurance that they're prepared to work together," Obama said.

He also suggested that American military action is not imminent.

"Although events on the ground in Iraq have been happening very quickly, our ability to plan — whether it's military action or work with the Iraqi government on some of these political issues — is going to take several days. So people should not anticipate that this is something that is going to happen overnight. We want to make sure that we have good eyes on the situation there. We want to make sure that we gathered all the intelligence that's neces-



EMAD MATT/AP

Iraqi police deploy in Kirkuk on Friday.

sary so that if in fact I do direct and order any actions there, that they're targeted, they're precise and they're going to have an effect," he said.

The Pentagon intends to announce that it will conduct increased surveillance flights over Iraq with drones, according to news reports.

Meanwhile, the United States plans to move an aircraft carrier, the USS George H.W. Bush, into the Persian Gulf to provide Obama with options for possible airstrikes, a U.S. official told CNN on Friday, adding the move

did not mean a final decision had been made.

Years of U.S. investment of blood and treasure in Iraq is why the U.S. is considering new military action to quell a fast-moving insurgency that has taken key areas of northern Iraq and vows to march on Baghdad while still resisting direct involvement in neighboring Syria's civil war, Secretary of State John Kerry said Friday.

He said the Sunni insurgency, which has swept to control of several cities in Iraq's west and north, is also plotting against American

and Western interests.

Known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, the brutal insurgency has brought Iraq back to the forefront of U.S. foreign policy as the Obama administration debates how deeply to intervene halfway around the world. Obama has touted his decision to end the war in 2011 as one of his administration's key successes.

Kerry said no decision had been made as of Friday as to whether the U.S. military would help Iraq beat back the insurgency. The Iraqi government has asked for U.S. airstrikes to target terrorists, and the Obama administration is weighing whether to do so.

Kerry said a decision would be made soon.

"Iraq is a country we've had a very direct relationship with, very direct investment and engagement with, not to mention the lives of our soldiers who were lost there, providing this opportunity to them," Kerry told reporters at the end of a conference in London on combating sexual violence in conflict zones. "And I don't think anybody in the region, or in this administration, believes it is in the interest of the United States to turn our backs on that."

He said the U.S. is "laser focused" on helping Iraq. Nearly 4,500 U.S. troops were killed in the war that began with a 2003 invasion led by the U.S., and the conflict cost American taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars.

There were signs that pulling

together another international coalition — which Obama said in his recent West Point foreign policy speech was his preferred method of military intervention — on Iraq would be difficult.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague said the U.K. is not prepared to offer military intervention in Iraq. London's reluctance to provide military action in Syria last year was a driving factor in the White House's refusal to launch airstrikes there. The German foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, said Friday that the Sunni-led insurgency was a powerful force that could make preventing a partitioned Iraq very difficult.

Kerry also briefly cited evidence of plots that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant has built against the United States and the West, but he did not provide any details. Kerry described ISIL as a "terrorist enemy" that has threatened the U.S. and West. He said the insurgent network, which is inspired by if not directly linked to al-Qaida, "has been plotting and looking for opportunities to take on the West."

Obama made clear in the speech at the U.S. Military Academy on May 27 that he believes unilateral American military action should be reserved for instances in which core national interests are challenged or the public's safety is in jeopardy.

Stars and Stripes reporter Jon Harper contributed to this report.

Shiite cleric calls on Iraqis to defend country

By SAMEER N. YACOB
AND ADAM SCHRECK

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — A representative for Iraq's Shiite cleric on Friday urged Iraqis to defend their country as militants who have seized large swaths of the nation's Sunni heartland captured two towns in an ethnically mixed province northeast of Baghdad.

Neighboring Shiite powerhouse Iran signaled its willingness to confront the growing threat from this week's militant blitz, which the United Nations estimates has claimed hundreds of lives.

The fresh gains by insurgents, spearheaded by fighters from the al-Qaida-inspired Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, come as Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Shiite-led government struggles to form a coherent response after militants overran the country's second-largest city of Mosul, Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit and smaller communities, as well as military and police bases — often after meeting little resistance from state security forces.

The fast-moving rebellion, which also draws support from former Saddam-era figures and other disaffected Sunnis, has

emerged as the biggest threat to Iraq's stability since the U.S. withdrawal at the end of 2011. It has pushed the nation closer to a precipice that could partition it into Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish zones.

Rupert Colville, the spokesman for the U.N. human rights office, told journalists in Geneva that the number of people killed in recent days may run into the hundreds, and that the number of wounded could approach 1,000.

He said top U.N. rights official Navil Pillay plans to issue a statement later today expressing alarm at the rapid deterioration of security in Iraq, and said the office has received reports that Iraqi army soldiers as well as 17 civilians in a single street in Mosul had been rounded up and killed by militants.

The assault also threatens to embroil Iraq more deeply in a wider regional conflict feeding off the chaos caused by the civil war in neighboring Syria.

Iran's official IRNA news agency reported Friday that former members of Tehran's powerful Revolutionary Guard have announced their readiness to fight in Iraq against the Islamic State, while Iranian state television



ALBARRAKA - NEWS/AP

This image posted on a militant news Twitter account Thursday shows members of al-Qaida-inspired Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant raising a flag at the entrance of an army base in Ninevah Province, Iraq.

quoted President Hassan Rouhani as saying his country will do all it can to fight terrorism next door.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran will apply all its efforts on the international and regional levels to confront terrorism," the report said Rouhani told al-Maliki by phone.

Iran has built close political and economic ties with postwar Iraq, and many influential Iraqi Shites have lived for stretches of time in

the Islamic Republic. Iran earlier this week halted flights to Baghdad because of security concerns and said it was intensifying security measures along its borders.

Shiite cleric Sheikh Abdul-Mahdi al-Karbalai told worshippers Friday it is a civic duty to confront the threat facing Iraq. He represents Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most revered Shiite spiritual leader in Iraq.

"Citizens who can carry weapons and fight the terrorists in de-

fense of their country, its people and its holy sites should volunteer and join the security forces," al-Karbalai said.

Police officials said militants driving in machine gun-mounted pickups entered the two newly conquered towns in Diyala province late Thursday — July 14, 80 miles northeast of Baghdad, and Sadiyah, 60 miles north of the Iraqi capital. Iraqi soldiers abandoned their posts there without any resistance, they said.

IRAQ

Say what?

A sample of reader comments from stripes.com



Seeking options in Iraq crisis

Shock over the lightning advance of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant spread through Washington Thursday morning, and by midday, President Barack Obama announced that his national security team was "looking at all the options" for helping the government in Baghdad.

Readers respond:

The United States spends about \$75 billion a year on foreign intelligence, yet we were caught by surprise ... Our spy agencies also failed to predict the Russian invasion of Crimea. ... The \$75 billion we spend on foreign intelligence is roughly half what the federal government spends on education. ... Would the money for intelligence be better spent building the intelligence of Americans?

— BrwBoone

I've said since we left Iraq that we only created the probability of a greater threat and war. This administration has all this blood on their hands.

— asonofSocrates

Get the drones going and take out the ISIL!

— tiredopc

Why dont we send in SEAL TM 6? They could stop this.

— TeXan1111

I think we helped Iraq enough. Unless Feith, Wolfowitz, Cheney, Abrams, and Bolton want to send their sons and daughters, I'll take a pass.

— SFC Otha T. Jackson III

I say let them fight it out. The insurgents in Iraq and the Iraqi Army.

— Butch Lemmon

America is a dying nation which has no business doing the force projection thing anymore ... The will is gone.

— CLB1267

Bush? Obama? Who really cares? The invasion of Iraq was one of the biggest missteps in the history of the United States.

— Guest

The country is absolutely tired of Iraqi war.

— mytkaeis

Join the fray at: stripes.com/iraqcrisis

US military, Iraq share blame for army's collapse

By KEVIN SULLIVAN
AND GREG JAFFE
The Washington Post

The Iraqi army's collapse this week marked a stark failure for the U.S. military that trained it and for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government, which has struggled to address leadership and morale problems that now threaten the force's ability to defend the country.

Although they far outnumbered the insurgents and had greater firepower, al-Maliki's troops have fled by the thousands in the country's north, allowing the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria to take the city of Mosul and start an ominous march toward Baghdad. Former U.S. military officials who oversaw the building of the Iraqi military placed much of the blame for that deterioration on al-Maliki, who has persecuted the Iraqi army of some of its most capable leaders.

The army's dilemma came down to a single question that soldiers had to ask themselves as they faced sudden attack, said Derek Harvey, a former top U.S. military official in Iraq: "Do I want to die for Maliki?"

Instead of focusing on training and equipping the military, al-Maliki has "used all of his tools to target his political rivals," said Emma Sky, a top adviser to U.S. generals in Iraq during the latter years of the U.S. occupation. "Maliki sought to consolidate power and protect his regime. His opponents fear and distrust him."

In particular, al-Maliki, a Shiite Muslim, has alienated Sunni tribal leaders in northern and western Iraq who helped shift the course of the war in 2007 when they turned on forces aligned with al-Qaida in Iraq and backed the U.S. military.

Some former U.S. military officials also pointed to the failure of the United States and Iraq to secure an agreement that would have permitted American troops to remain in Iraq after 2011 — a pact that would have allowed for more training.

But the larger problem, many say, is al-Maliki, whose centralization of decision-making has made it hard for the Iraqi military to react quickly to changes on the battlefield.

In many instances, generals must wait for phone calls from the prime minister's office before they can move troops, said retired Lt. Gen. James Dubik, who led the U.S. military's training effort in Iraq from 2007 to 2009. Dubik said the Iraqis haven't even been able to select officers to send for

training in the United States paid for by the Pentagon.

"The prime minister's office can't decide who to send," Dubik said. "So the courses go unfiled."

The sudden collapse of Iraqi forces also highlights gaps in the army that U.S. military officials knew existed when American forces withdrew at the end of 2011. U.S. commanders had hoped to keep as many as 10,000 troops in the country to help Iraqi forces with the planning large-scale operations of the kind needed to launch a counteroffensive on a major city such as Mosul or Fallujah.

U.S. officials also realized that they needed to continue to work with the Iraqis to build logistics systems to ensure that armored vehicles and helicopters are ready for war.

The Obama administration, nevertheless, decided to withdraw U.S. forces following the Iraqi government's refusal to grant American troops immunity from prosecution beyond 2011.

Rick Brennan, a former top military adviser in Iraq, said the Iraqi military still lacks basic capabilities in areas such as communications, logistics and maintenance. He said it also lacks any significant air power, although Iraq is buying U.S. F-16 fighter jets and Apache attack helicopters.

"Over time, what's occurred is that the Iraqi army has no ability to defend itself with close air support once it starts to get overrun," Brennan said. "At the small-unit level, once they start getting hit, they are abandoning post, both Sunni and Shia, on a scale we never anticipated."

"What's a surprise is how rapidly it's been occurring and the degree to which you see total collapse of large elements of Iraqi forces, leaving behind probably hundreds of millions of dollars of equipment" in the hands of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, Brennan said.

"It's hugely frustrating," said Michael Barbero, a retired U.S. Army lieutenant general who oversaw the training of Iraqi troops from 2009 to 2011. "It's a fault of both Washington and Baghdad. We knew they had chinks in their armor, and we knew they weren't going to get better once we left. And yet we didn't try hard enough to get an agreement to keep some people there."

Barbero said that despite years of training and billions of dollars in U.S. time and equipment, Iraq's military is still a "check-point Army," more interested in manning roadblocks than devel-



AP

U.S. troops and Iraqi police officers guard the Bab al-Jadeed area of Mosul in 2009. The former top U.S. commander in northern Iraq defended the multibillion-dollar American effort to train Iraqi security forces despite this week's Sunni insurgent offensive.

oping intelligence and engaging in counterinsurgency missions.

He said U.S. trainers had stressed that intelligence-gathering was the key to disrupting insurgent networks active in Iraq. U.S. officials set up high-tech command-and-control centers, but Iraqi military leaders largely coordinate their operations by cellphone, he said.

"Our Army continuously trains; that wasn't in their DNA," Barbero said. "We set up all these training bases. We built ranges and encouraged them to do live fire. And it just didn't take, for whatever reason. I'm not saying we're stainless in this. Obviously we could have done some things better."

Barbero said he was in Iraq a month ago, and Iraqi military officials assured him that the threat from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria was contained. "I know no Iraqis saw this coming," he said.

The Americans also never anticipated that the Iraqis would face an enemy force as well-trained as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Throughout the U.S. occupation, the insurgents, fearful of U.S. air power, rarely attacked with a force larger than 100 to 200 men. Most attacks were launched by small teams of five to 15 fighters.

What's not yet clear is whether the damage to Iraq's army is limited to the units in the northern third of the country or whether it will extend to forces in Baghdad, causing the entire force to fracture.

The units in Mosul had been fighting a low-grade insurgency for months. Those units also included a high percentage of Sunnis, who are less loyal to the Shiite-led government. It's possible that the units in Baghdad will be more willing to fight.

"This could be as catastrophic as it looks, or it could be less," said

Douglas Ollivant, a retired U.S. Army colonel who still does business in Iraq. "There's no question it is bad. But we won't know for sure until we see how units from the south perform."

Other former military officials were less sanguine. "Once a fighting force in one area folds, it can become an epidemic very quickly," Dubik said. "The one positive aspect for the United States is that al-Maliki may now be willing to cooperate with former Sunni leaders in exchange for U.S. help."

"He knows he's facing an existential threat," Dubik said. "He has to realize that both his political life and his physical life are at risk."

In recent months, as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria started taking more and more territory, Iraqi military officials have made increasingly more urgent requests for U.S. military help, including drone strikes.

"You'd sit down with a general, and they literally thought we could make this go away with a push of a button. They had no grasp on reality," said a U.S. defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe discussions with the Iraqis.

Harvey, a former top intelligence adviser to David Petraeus, who served as commander of the allied forces in Iraq, said the military's problems are a symptom of a much deeper crisis in Iraqi society created largely by al-Maliki's mishandling of delicate sectarian tensions.

"The core of all this is political," Harvey said. "What we're facing today is not al-Qaida, and Prime Minister Maliki wants us to focus on ISIS as the primary threat. The vanguard is ISIS. The breadth and depth of this is basic Sunni Arabs who are fed up."

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IRAQ Spiral into chaos exposes many weaknesses

By **HEATH DRUZIN**
Stars and Stripes

Nearly three years after U.S. troops left, Iraq is heading for precisely what the U.S. administration claimed it was in the run-up to the 2003 invasion: a dangerous hub for terrorists that threatens the entire Middle East and perhaps the world.

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, an al-Qaida-inspired group, may not have weapons of mass destruction, as the Bush administration mistakenly believed Saddam Hussein possessed. But its fighters are steadily marching down the Tigris River toward Baghdad. And they already control a wide swath of the Euphrates Valley in a country whose life blood are those two rivers.

And the weaknesses exposed in the government and the country's military — both of which were eroded and cultivated and bolstered by the U.S. over many years — also have made the country more vulnerable to its influence-hungry neighbors, particularly U.S.-nemesis Iran.

Everything that the U.S. tried to build in Iraq appears to be unraveling — after an investment of \$1 trillion and more than 4,400 American lives. Any achievements in the U.S. could still claim in Iraq — a government of democratic forces, if not substance and a military that was at least holding militants at bay — are at risk with members of the Iraqi army fleeing or surrendering in droves to the militants. Gone is the hope of a reasonably stable Iraq, fueled by oil riches, that could serve as a buffer to Iranian political expansion to the west.

"At the moment, everything is in jeopardy and much is already lost, though, of course, Saddam and sons are still gone and the weapons of mass destruction programs are even more defunct than we knew them to be before," said Michael O'Hanlon, an Iraq expert at the Brookings Institution. "But that's small solace at this point."

What seemed to catch many by surprise was the rapid disintegration of parts of the Iraqi security forces, which the U.S. had spent years building and training.

Now, President Barack Obama is in a precarious position: Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has made a desperate plea for American air support, but few Americans want to see further U.S. military involvement in Iraq. If al-Maliki has to turn to Iraq to prevent collapse, it would weaken Tehran's power and prestige in case the gambit worked. That would in effect make Iran the big winner in the Iraq War.

"I'm not sure if there are any good policy options right now," said Ben Connable, a senior international policy analyst at RAND Corporation who served three tours in Iraq with the U.S. Marine Corps.

that have still not healed since the bloody civil war in the mid-2000s that pitted adherents of the country's two main branches of Islam — Shiite and Sunni — against each other.

Al-Maliki has mobilized some of the same Shiite militants accused of massacring Sunnis during the civil war to stand up against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, a Sunni group. Al-Maliki, a Shiite, has already alienated much of the country's Sunni minority through his policies and violent repression of Sunni protests. And many blame him for ethnic violence

ANALYSIS that continued to plague the country long after the Americans left in 2011.

"We left behind the biggest problem, and I'm not sure the U.S. could have ever solved it, and that is Sunni disenfranchisement, or the perception that they are disenfranchised," Connable said.

O'Hanlon said the Iraqi army still has a chance to push back the militants, but that al-Maliki's militia tactic is likely to further inflame tensions between the two religious groups.

"This is not the right way to go," he said.

Those splits have also affected the Iraqi army and some majority Sunni units reportedly surrendered to the militants without a fight, rather than risk their lives battling fellow Sunnis for the Shiite-dominated Baghdad government.

"What people didn't predict was that sectarian divisions in the army would be this sizeable and lead to fractures this quickly," Connable said.

A Center for Strategic and International Studies paper published Thursday by longtime military analyst Anthony Cordesman and Sam Khazai was critical of the American military's approach to training the Iraqi security forces.

"In fairness, part of the problems (the Iraqi security forces) faced after U.S. withdrawal were the result of the fact that the U.S. had tried to impose too many of its own approaches to military development on an Iraqi structure, and Iraq lacked the internal incentives — and checks and balances — necessary to make them function once U.S. advisors were gone," the pair wrote.

While Iraq and Afghanistan present starkly different situations in many ways, one lesson the U.S. can glean from the rapid demise of the Iraqi army is the danger of exaggerating the military capabilities of a country, said Ahmad Majidyar, a senior research associate at the American Enterprise Institute.

"We were hearing from militia officials, U.S. officials (at the end of the Iraq War), that the Iraqi army is almost perfect, ready to defend the country and that was not true," he said. "There are maybe some exaggerations about the Afghan forces, too."



American soldiers and Iraqi soldiers watch comrades detain men suspected of planting a roadside bomb in Mosul in 2010.

to beat back the militants and reclaim control of the country, sorting out what happens next is likely to be messy. The Peshmerga, the army of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish zone, is reported to have taken over the city of Kirkuk, which sits on one of the biggest oil patches in the world. The contentious question of whether that city was controlled by Baghdad or the Kurdish region was left undressed by U.S. forces when they occupied the country and the solution could be even murkier now that Kurdish troops, who in practice do not answer to Baghdad, effectively control Kirkuk.

This has evolved beyond a point

of pride for Baghdad: The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant is already threatening to take control of key oil fields, and if the Kurds end up controlling Kirkuk, their penchant for negotiating their own oil contracts without involving Baghdad could mean a further degradation of the central government's oil revenue, on which it depends heavily.

"If that is the case, the Kurds have accomplished what they said they wanted," Connable said. "Now that the Iraqi army has proven their incompetence in even defensive operations against lightly armed insurgents, I don't see them taking Kirkuk back

from the Peshmerga."

There are worrying international dimensions to the conflict, too. A Turkish consul and many more diplomats have been taken hostage by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant militants in Mosul. Of greater concern for the U.S. government, there are reports that Iran has sent Revolutionary Guard soldiers to Iraq to fight the militants, whom Tehran is already trying to defeat in Syria through support to the government of Bashar al-Assad.

"Iraq's government has little choice but to rely even more heavily on the Russians and Iranians, who are more willing to provide logistical, financial and immediate military assistance, as seen in Syria," according to a recent commentary by Haydar al-Khooi, a Middle East expert at the British think tank Chatham House.

Iraq's government is already close to its fellow Shiite-majority neighbor Iran, and this conflict threatens to put government leaders even more in debt to Tehran, which has proven more forthcoming in its offers of military assistance than the U.S., Majidyar said.

"Any help from Iran has not come just as a gift, and that's why we see that before al-Maliki requested any help from Tehran, he was asking Washington."

druzin.heath@stripes.com
Twitter: @Druzin_Stripes
Heath Druzin covered Iraq for Stars and Stripes from 2008 to 2010 and most recently reported from there in September.



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Return to the past

The recent fighting has laid bare the sectarian wounds in Iraq

A regional threat

Even if the Iraqi army is able

IRAQ

MAJOR PLAYERS IN THE IRAQ CONFLICT

By ROBERT H. REID ■ Stars and Stripes

A part from the Iraqi army itself, fighting in northern Iraq has drawn attention to a bewildering set of players who have either joined the fight or may do so if the conflict spreads closer to Baghdad. Here is a list of those who have joined the battle and those who may.

THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND THE LEVANT

Sometimes referred to as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, this group has emerged as the chief armed opponent of the Shiite-led Iraqi government after its sweeping victories in Mosul and elsewhere in the north. Operating in both Syria and Iraq, it is believed to have about 10,000 fighters in Iraq territory. Its stated goal is to establish an independent, Islamic state in Sunni areas of Syria and Iraq. It draws support inside Iraq from disaffected Sunni Muslims who feel the Shiite-run government in Baghdad has marginalized them. The group emerged in Iraq soon after the American invasion in 2003 and pledged allegiance to al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden. Known then as al-Qaida in Iraq, it was a key insurgent fighting the U.S.-led coalition until Sunni tribes in western Anbar province rebelled against its strict Islamic rule and brutality. Despite intense U.S. efforts, the core group survived huge setbacks, including the 2006 killing of its founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and rebounded in the north and west after U.S. troops withdrew from Iraq in 2011. It took advantage of the revolt against Syrian President Bashar Assad to expand operations into Syria, where it has been a conflict not only with the Syrian government but with other Syrian rebels as well. It has refused orders by the al-Qaida leadership to disband its Syrian wing and merge with other extremist groups. Its leader, known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is an Iraqi believed to be in Syria.

NAQSHABANDI ARMY

The Associated Press has reported that this small nationalist group has joined the Islamic State in fighting in the north. It is believed to be made up of members of Islam's Sufi sect but is led by former Saddam Hussein lieutenants. The Naqshabandi Army was organized after the U.S.-led invasion of 2003 by former officers of Saddam's army and Republican Guard and operated mostly in the north where it waged guerrilla warfare against U.S. forces. It maintained ties to al-Qaida and other insurgent groups and some of its members fought in the 2004 Battle of Fallujah. It was seen as an ongoing threat when the U.S. withdrew from Iraq.

PESHMARGA WAITING IN THE WINGS

These are Kurdish fighters who battled Saddam's forces after the 1991 First Gulf War and allied with U.S. forces in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The Peshmarga negotiated a deal under which it became the legal security force of the self-ruled Kurdistan area of northern Iraq. In return, the Peshmarga agreed to stay out of other areas of Iraq, such as the city of Kirkuk, which the Kurds believe is theirs but which the Iraqi government dispute. On Thursday, Kurdish forces took control of part of that disputed area around the city of Kirkuk, ostensibly to protect the population against the Islamic State. The Iraqi government may well have to turn to the battle-hardened Kurds for help in recovering Mosul and other parts of the north. That would be a bitter pill for the government to swallow because of Kurdish aspirations for more territory and full control of oil fields in the north.

KATAIB HEZBOLLAH WAITING IN THE WINGS

This pro-Iranian Shiite militia could be counted on to fight against the Islamic State if it moves south to Baghdad and Shiite areas of Iraq. Although not a part of the better known Hezbollah movement in Lebanon, its Iraqi members received training by Hezbollah cadres and fought against U.S. and Iraqi forces in Shiite areas of southern Iraq. If Iran wants to prop up the Iraqi government, Kataib Hezbollah could be counted on to join the fight.

ASA'IB AHL AL-HAQ WAITING IN THE WINGS

This group broke from the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr, which fought U.S. troops in Baghdad and elsewhere, and now gives its allegiance to an Iraqi Shiite cleric who lives in Iran. Its leaders were believed to be behind the January 2007 killing of five U.S. troops at a government building in Karbala by Shiite gunmen who posed as U.S. military officials to get past Iraqi guards. Since the end of the U.S. mission in 2011, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq has continued to oppose close ties with the United States. Although the group laid down its arms after the U.S. withdrawal, its organizational and command structure remains intact and would be expected to resist any move by the Islamic State into Baghdad and Shiite areas. According to a March 2014 report by Britain's Guardian newspaper, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq is controlled by Iran and operates under the supervision of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, of Iran's Quds Force.

BADR ORGANIZATION WAITING IN THE WINGS

The Badr Organization, formerly the Badr Brigades, was organized by the Iranians in the 1980s among young Shiite men who fled Iraq to escape a Saddam crackdown. Its members fought alongside the Iranian army against their fellow Iraqis during the eight-year Iran-Iraq War and returned to Iraq only after Saddam fell. Under intense U.S. pressure, the Badr Brigades supposedly laid down their weapons and rebranded themselves as a Shiite political movement. Many members joined the Iraqi parliamentary body and were believed responsible for some of the most brutal attacks against Sunnis during the sectarian conflict from 2005 until 2007. Like other Shiite groups, its members would be available to defend Baghdad and Shiite areas against the Islamic State.

PROMISED DAY BRIGADES WAITING IN THE WINGS

This is the successor to the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr that fought U.S. troops in Baghdad and southern Iraq until its leaders accepted a cease-fire with the Shiite-led government. Its allegiance to Iran is unclear and al-Sadr himself is a rival to Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki within the Shiite community. However, al-Sadr has called for the government to bolster forces around Shiite holy sites and his brigades would be available if the prime minister accepts the offer.

Reid.robert@stripes.com
@rhrheid

Amid turmoil, Kurdish region lays foundation for independent state

By BEN VAN HEUVELLEN
The Washington Post

ANKARA, Turkey — As security forces in northern Iraq crumble under the onslaught of Islamist militants, the autonomous Kurdistan region — a bastion of stability — is rapidly laying the groundwork to become an independent state.

Iraqi forces have continued to cede territory to an insurgency led by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, which is swiftly advancing toward Baghdad after capturing Mosul on Tuesday. Kurdistan's military forces, known as the Peshmarga (or "those who face death"), have taken over many of the northernmost positions abandoned by the national army, significantly expanding the zone of Kurdish control.

"As the Iraqi Army has abandoned its posts ... Peshmarga reinforcements have been dispatched to fill their places," Jabbar Yawar, secretary general of the Ministry

of Peshmarga Affairs, said in a statement.

The Kurds have also recently taken a big step toward economic independence by deepening a strategic alliance with the Turkish government. In late May, they began exporting oil via a pipeline through Turkey, with the revenue set to flow into a Kurdish-controlled bank account rather than the Iraqi treasury.

"This economic independence is vital for the Kurdistan region," Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani said in an address to the Kurdish parliament last month. "We will not stop here."

Since the beginning of the year, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has responded to Kurdish oil ambitions by cutting the monthly distribution of the region's share of the national budget. The Iraqi government has also filed an international arbitration claim against Turkey for facilitating the exports, which Baghdad characterizes as smuggling, and has threatened to



Kurdish policemen stand guard while refugees from Mosul head to the self-ruled Kurdish region outside Irbil, Iraq, on Wednesday.

sue anyone who buys the oil.

With relations badly strained, there is little appetite in the Kurdish capital of Irbil to provide any military support to Maliki.

"The Iraqi government has been holding the Kurds hostage, and it's not reasonable for them to expect the Kurds to give them any help

in this situation without compromising to Kurdish demands," said an adviser to the Kurdish government, speaking on the condition of anonymity to be candid.

The Peshmarga say they have not tried to displace ISIL from territory it now controls.

"In most places, we aren't both-

ering them [ISIL], and they aren't bothering us — or the civilians," said Lt. Gen. Shaukur Zibari, a Peshmarga commander.

In his statement, Yawar said, "There is no need for Peshmarga forces to move into these areas."

The United States has tried for several years to broker agreements to bring Irbil and Baghdad closer together, but the efforts have failed because the two sides have fundamentally different visions for the country. Whereas Maliki has pushed for centralized control — especially over the oil resources that provide 95 percent of state revenue — the Kurds have insisted that the constitution grants them almost total autonomy.

The conflict has been so tense recently that Kurdish leaders have obliquely suggested that, absent concessions from Maliki, they will hold a referendum on whether to declare independence — a measure that would almost certainly pass amid an upswell of Kurdish nationalism.



Provided by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Eight patrol boats were purchased for the Afghan government four years ago by the U.S. at a cost of about \$3 million and sit in a warehouse in Virginia, according to a watchdog group that monitors U.S. expenditures in Afghanistan.

\$3 million patrol boats for Afghanistan sit in warehouse, SIGAR says

By JON HARPER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Eight patrol boats purchased for the Afghan government four years ago are marooned in a warehouse in Virginia, according to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, a watchdog group that monitors U.S. government expenditures.

The vessels, intended for the Afghan National Police, cost American taxpayers about \$3 million. But their delivery was canceled without explanation in July 2011, nine months after they were ordered. They sit unused in a Navy warehouse at Naval Weapons Station, Yorktown, Va., according to SIGAR.

Afghanistan is a landlocked country in Central Asia, but does share a long river — the Amu Darya — with Uzbekistan. Plans called for the ANP to use the eight rigid-hulled, inflatable boats to patrol the waterway.

The U.S. military's record-keeping in the affair was found to be shoddy by SIGAR. In response to a SIGAR inquiry, Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan was unable find the following records:

- A concept of operations for employment of the boats was developed.
- Whether a feasibility review of the operational requirement was conducted.
- Documentation that the op-

erational requirement was approved in 2010.

- Justification for including the boats on the list of the ANP's organizational needs in 2010.

- The extent of involvement, if any, of the Afghan Ministry of Interior in the procurement process and the decision to cancel the delivery.

- The reasons and justification for canceling the delivery.

"The list of unanswered questions is particularly troubling given the fact — which CSTC-A acknowledges — that this program had been an important national security priority for the Afghan National Security Forces prior to its cancellation," SIGAR wrote in a June 6 letter to commanders in Afghanistan.

Army Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Colt, deputy commander for support of United States Forces-Afghanistan, said the lack of records makes it difficult to assess the situation.

"It is not clear, given the documentation at hand, that proper procedures to halt production and delivery of the boats were followed, but I have no evidence that CSTC-A's Security Assistance Office predecessors did not follow procedures," he wrote in a memorandum dated May 25.

The eight unused vessels will remain at Yorktown until the Navy decides what to do with them, according to CSTC-A.

harper.jon@stripes.com
Twitter: @HarperStripes

Marine prosecutor in office raids resigned

CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. — The senior Marine Corps prosecutor behind a raid on defense lawyers' offices at Camp Pendleton has been reassigned after a judge ordered him off several cases.

Maj. Ray Slabbekorn has been pulled from his post as senior trial counsel for Camp Pendleton and has been given a position with the Marines' complex trial team for the West Coast, the Marine Corps Times reported Thursday.

A Marine Corps survey after last month's unusual raid found that it did not compromise cases.

But on Tuesday, a military judge

decided the search was a case of "apparent unlawful command influence," meaning an observer would have reason to believe the government had unfairly interfered with the legal process.

The judge ordered Slabbekorn off some cases and placed other restrictions on him.

Camp Pendleton spokesman Jeffrey Nyhart said the limitations had made it impossible for Slabbekorn to do his job, so he was reassigned.

The Associated Press could not reach Slabbekorn for comment.

In the May 2 raid, military investigators said they were looking for a cellphone in a case involving drug use and gang activity.

From The Associated Press

As Afghan election nears, poll shows Ghani in lead

By KARTIKAY MEHROTRA
AND ELTAF NAJAFIZADA
Bloomberg News

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghans will elect a successor to President Hamid Karzai Saturday as their war-torn country strives to complete its first democratic transfer of power since the United States ousted the Taliban in 2001.

Abdullah Abdullah, who won the most votes in the first round of the election in April, is trying to stave off ex-finance minister Ashraf Ghani in a runoff. Ghani led Abdullah by seven percentage points in a survey this month of 2,800 voters conducted by research group Glevum Associates. It had a margin of error of 1.8 percentage points.

The winner faces the challenge of boosting growth in one of Asia's poorest economies while fighting Taliban insurgents as the U.S. reduces troops in the country. Abdullah survived a suicide attack last week in Kabul that killed six people, underscoring the dangers as the Taliban vow to disrupt the vote.

"There were no disputes or violence after April 5 because there was no winner," Abdullah Ahmadzai, deputy country representative in Kabul for the Asia Foundation and former chief of Afghanistan's election commission. "Now, that will not be the case, and we can only hope that

the losing party accepts the outcome of the election with responsible behavior."

The Taliban in a statement two days ago called for "nonstop" attacks on election day "so that the enemy is paralyzed and this process is aborted." Fresh elections must be held if a presidential candidate dies before the declaration of election results, according to the constitution.

Partial election results will start to be released from July 2 and final results are scheduled to be announced July 22.

Both Abdullah and Ghani have vowed to sign a security pact with the U.S. immediately after taking office. Karzai has delayed signing the deal, known as the Bilateral Security Agreement, which is needed to keep U.S. troops in the country beyond this year and to secure billions of dollars in pledged aid.

President Barack Obama said last month that U.S. forces in Afghanistan will be reduced to 9,800 by the end of this year, with only a small security assistance force at the embassy by the end of 2016, when he will be preparing to leave office.

Abdullah won 45 percent of more than 7 million votes on April 5, with Ghani taking 32 percent. Turnout was double the previous presidential election in 2009. A runoff was necessary because no candidate took more than 50 percent of votes.

Both Abdullah and Ghani picked up endorsements from other candidates after the first round and say they are confident of winning the runoff. Abdullah received the backing of three-place finisher Zalmay Rassoul, whose vice presidential candidate is backing Ghani.

"We are confident that victory is ours," Ghani said in a May 24 interview.

Abdullah, 53, is half Pashtun and half Tajik. As foreign minister under Karzai, he was a close aide to Northern Alliance commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, an ethnic Tajik seen by many Afghans as a national hero who fought against Soviet occupiers in the 1980s and the Taliban in the 1990s.

Ghani is an ethnic Pashtun who served as Afghanistan's finance minister from 2002-2004 and finished fourth in the 2009 election. He holds a doctorate in cultural anthropology from Columbia University in New York.

Pashtuns account for 42 percent of Afghanistan's 32 million people, while Tajiks make up 27 percent, according to the CIA World Factbook. Uzbeks and Hazaras account for 9 percent and other groups comprise the rest.

"Ethnicity plays a critical role in determining the fate of a candidate," Walullah Rahmani, executive director of the Kabul Center for Strategic Studies, said in a phone interview. "Votes could be split among ethnic lines."

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VA SCANDAL

Witness: VA care plan requires major red tape

By KELLY KENNEDY
USA Today

WASHINGTON — A new bill that allows veterans to seek private health care depends too much on bureaucratic red tape to be effective, a veterans advocate told the House Veterans Affairs Committee on Thursday.

Betsy McCaughey, the chairwoman of the Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths and former lieutenant governor of New York, said veterans would be required to seek a letter from the VA secretary proving that he or she had been waiting too long to receive a medical appointment.

"Good luck getting someone to write that letter," she said. "This is time that is critical to saving the lives of these vets."

And, McCaughey said, the VA already rolled out a similar program earlier this year at a cost of \$9.3 billion.

Other witnesses told the committee that

the VA has a culture of fears that fights off outside influences, is incapable of changing quickly and fails to put veterans first.

The hearing follows a series of scandals, including dozens of veterans who died while waiting for care, tens of thousands who had to wait more than three months for their first appointment and tens of thousands more who may have been denied appointments altogether.

"We own this; we're going to fix this," said Robert Jesse, the Veterans Health Administration's acting undersecretary for health. "We will do it with haste. We will do it with diligence."

He then said he was worried about all of the VA employees who "do the job right." "Their health and their well-being are very important," he said.

Both the House and Senate this week passed bills that allow veterans to go to civilian doctors for the next two years if they have been waiting more than 30 days for

an appointment or live more than 40 miles from a VA treatment facility. The Senate bill also provides funding to hire hundreds of new health care providers, as well as authorization for those who do their jobs badly to be fired immediately.

The Senate bill also expedites appeals' claims, which are backlogged as well. "I want to know why VA did not do a better job of planning strategically," said Rep. Mike Michaud, D-Maine.

The VA's problems represent a "failure of ethics," said Tim McClain, president of Humana Government Business. The agency's culture must be studied before its organization can be changed, he said.

"There is a pervasive attitude among some levels of management that preservation of the 'system' takes precedence over all other considerations, including veteran-centric health care," he said. "The result is an overall attitude that fears outside influence over VA health care."

New veteran health care bill introduced

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ
The Associated Press

HONOLULU — A new bill has been introduced in Congress that aims to offer relief to veterans that have had to pay for emergency health services.

Democratic Sen. Mazie Hirono, of Hawaii, and Republican Sen. Jerry Moran, of Kansas, co-introduced the bill Thursday.

The proposal would eliminate a rule that prevents veterans from being reimbursed for emergency care if they haven't been seen in a VA center for 24 months.

"This bill eliminates red tape that prevents veterans from being reimbursed for emergency care," Hirono said in a statement. "Veterans needing care shouldn't

be penalized because they live in rural communities or face outrageous wait times for appointments at VA medical facilities."

“Veterans should not be forced to bear the burden of emergency health care costs because of the dysfunctional, bureaucratic VA system.”

Sen. Jerry Moran
R-Kansas

The bill, called the Veterans Emergency Health Safety Net Expansion Act, would impact an estimated 144,000 veterans. It also would prevent

insurance companies from denying or limiting reimbursements based on the fact that the VA is not an in-network provider.

"Veterans should not be forced to bear the burden of emergency health care costs because of the dysfunctional, bureaucratic VA system," Moran said in a statement.

Under current law, veterans who have not been seen at a VA hospital in 24 months have to pay out of pocket if they receive emergency health care, and they are not reimbursed by the VA. This bill would shift that cost burden to the VA. The VA, in turn, would collect an estimated \$98 million in 2015, or \$1.1 billion over 10 years, from insurers who would no longer be able to list VA hospitals as out-of-network.

Hirono and Moran are members of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. That committee had passed a similar measure last year, but it was part of a larger bill that ultimately failed, said Katie Niederee, spokeswoman for Moran.

The Veterans Affairs Department released an audit this week showing that more than 57,000 veterans have had to wait at least three months for initial appointments. An additional 64,000 veterans who asked for appointments over the past decade never got them. Hawaii had the longest wait for new patients in the nation, with a reported 145-day delay to see a primary care physician.

"The horror stories that our veterans are dealing with are inexcusable," said Robert DeVinck, commander of the American Legion Post 8 on Maui. DeVinck does not seek care at the VA hospital because he can afford to go elsewhere, he said.

Outside VA, waits for doctors can vary widely

By LAURAN NEERGAARD
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — It's not just veterans who sometimes have to wait for health care. Depending on where you live and what kind of care you want, in parts of the country it's not always easy for new patients to get a quick appointment.

Need routine primary care? The average wait to see a family physician in the first time ranged from 65 days in Boston to just five days in Dallas, according to a survey in 15 large cities by health care consulting firm Merritt Hawkins.

And doctors are bracing for new demand from millions of people newly insured through the federal health care law.

"To say it's an easy solution to the VA problem — we'll just have them get care in the community — overestimates the capacity the community has to absorb these folks," said Dr. Yul Ejnes, of the American College of Physicians.

Vet waits made headlines

A government audit shows more than 57,000 veterans have been waiting at least three months for their first appointments at Veterans Affairs medical centers, and an additional 64,000 who enrolled for VA care over the past decade never got seen by a doctor. The longest waits for an initial primary care appointment ranged from 145 days in Honolulu to 73 days in Richmond, Va.

To help, Congress is moving to allow more veterans who encounter delays to seek VA care, temporarily, from a non-VA doctor. (The VA already had allowed some outside care, although veterans have complained that it's difficult to access and that it includes a series of bureaucratic hurdles that must be cleared.)

What's the civilian wait?

There are no national statistics. But Merritt Hawkins' survey, released earlier this year, illustrates there's variation around the country when it comes to choosing a new physician.

The longest waits overall were in Boston — an average of 45.4 days — while Dallas had the shortest at 10.2 days. But the kind of doctor you need makes a difference, the survey found.

The wait for a first-time appointment with a cardiologist averaged 32 days in the nation's capital but only 11 days in Atlanta.



SUE OSOROKI/AP

Charles Tipton lies under a Trilogy Linear Accelerator as he waits for radiation treatment at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Oklahoma City on Thursday. Tipton, a former sergeant in the Air Force, said "they are taking good care of me, they are good people," about his experience with VA medical service.

Got knee pain? Waits for an initial consultation with an orthopedic surgeon averaged 18 days in San Diego and five days in Philadelphia, Minneapolis and Houston.

For a well-woman visit, waits for a first-time OB/GYN appointment ranged from 46 days in Boston to 10 days in Seattle.

Those are averages. The longest reported wait time was a stunning 256 days for a particular Minneapolis dermatologist. You could wait 129 days for a certain Seattle family practice and 132 days for one San Diego cardiologist, the survey found.

But people frustrated by waits for one doctor often can seek another, depending on their insurance and how far they're willing to drive. Sure enough, Merritt Hawkins' survey showed that in multiple cities, there were physicians with appointments available in just one day even for a new patient.

That's not the only way to measure. The Massachusetts Medical Society's annual statewide survey found wait times ebb and flow. The wait for a first-time appointment with an internal medicine specialist was 50 days in 2013, up from 44 days the previous year. In contrast, the wait for a family physician dropped to 39 days from 45 in 2012, and the wait for a gastroenterologist was 33 days, 11 days shorter than the previous year.

Why the wait?

Partly, there aren't enough doctors. A graying population that needs more medical care was straining the system even before the new health care law opened the way for more people to start looking for a regular doctor. With older physicians retiring, too, there aren't enough new ones coming on board to meet growing demand.

Primary care physicians get the most attention, and nearly 20 million people live in areas officially designated in need of more, said Dr. Atul Grover of the Association of American Medical Colleges. But specialists can be hard to find, too, especially in rural areas and in parts of the country where new doctors haven't kept up with rapid population growth. That includes parts of the Southeast and Southwest, particularly Arizona, Nevada and Texas, he said.

The AAMC estimates that by 2020, there will be a shortage of 45,000 primary care physicians and 46,000 surgeons and specialists nationally.

Pending legislation calls for the VA to hire more doctors. Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, said Wednesday that "at the very minimum, there is a need for 700 new physicians in the VA."

NATION



DYLAN LOVAM/AP

Lynn Jones, left, takes a photo Wednesday of a 2001 Corvette that fell into a sinkhole at the National Corvette Museum in Bowling Green, Ky.

Gearheads, gawkers drawn to Corvette museum sinkhole

By BRUCE SCHREINER
The Associated Press

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. — For years, just enough hard-core classic car lovers and curious travelers wandered through the National Corvette Museum in Kentucky to keep the doors open. Now, after a massive sinkhole swallowed eight pristine models, attendance has skyrocketed.

Visitors are as eager to peer into the chasm as they are to see the 'Vettes, if not more so.

"The response to this has been bigger than anyone could have ever imagined," said Katie Frassinelli, a spokeswoman for the museum that sits just off Interstate 65 in Bowling Green. "On the one hand, we don't want to be known as the sinkhole museum. But on the other hand, it's bringing a lot of people that may not have otherwise come."

When the ether opened up in February, stunned museum officials first saw it as a devastating setback. The eight damaged cars

— with a total value believed to exceed \$1 million — toppled like toys amid rocks, concrete and dirt.

But in the months since, business has shifted into overdrive. Since reopening after a one-day closure, attendance is up nearly 50 percent from the same period a year ago; previously, the museum averaged about 150,000 visitors a year. Sign-ups for museum memberships also are rising fast. The merchandising has started, with sinkhole-related shirts, post cards and prints sold at the gift shop.

Museum officials say it's shaping up as the biggest prolonged surge in the attraction's nearly 20-year history.

"We would not have even stopped had it not been for the hole," said Luke Smith of Lima, Ohio, who visited with his family after touring nearby Mammoth Cave National Park.

The museum is an hour north of Nashville, Tenn., and less than two hours south of Louisville,

Ky. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$5 for children ages 6 to 16, with free entry for youngsters 5 and younger.

The museum first set up a webcam that allowed thousands of people to follow the painstaking work to retrieve the fallen cars and to reinforce the area around the sinkhole. Museum visitors got a glimpse from a distance, behind plexiglass.

But seeing the bonanza, the museum now gives tourists a much closer look at the 40-foot-wide, 60-foot-deep hole.

The damaged cars are displayed in a nearby room, where the mangled remains of some cars draw gasps amid quiet reverence.

Stephen Robb of Waterloo, Ontario, said he and his motorcycle buddies were drawn to the museum by the spectacle of the sinkhole on their way to Nashville for their yearly trip to the U.S.

"I can't believe the devastation to the cars. I don't see car accidents this bad," he said.

Front-runner, discontent rise in GOP upheaval

By DONNA CASSATA
AND ERICA WERNER
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — California Republican Kevin McCarthy secured a clear shot to becoming House majority leader on Thursday as his sole rival dropped his bid in a leadership fight that exposed deep fissures within the GOP.

Barring an unforeseen challenge, McCarthy is on a glide path to the No. 2 job in the House behind Speaker John Boehner, with elections slated for June 19. Earlier in the day, backers of the four-term congressman had spoken confidently about his prospects.

Texas Rep. Pete Sessions, in a statement late Thursday, said he had decided to abandon the race after it "became obvious to me that the measures necessary to run a successful campaign would have created unnecessary and painful division within our party."

Sessions, who serves as chairman of the House Rules Committee, has no plans to seek the No. 3 job of whip, said his spokeswoman, Torrie Miller. Three others are seeking that post.

Within 48 hours of Rep. Eric Cantor's lightning primary-election downfall, McCarthy and his deputies aggressively rounded up votes with a pitch to Southern Republicans and pointed private conversations on the House floor in a race that occasionally had the markings of a personality-driven contest for class president.

Republicans sought to project an aura of unity but failed to quiet conservative complaints that such quick party elections after Cantor's defeat gave them little time to rally around an alternative who better reflects the right's ideology and the emboldened tea

party.

The votes next Thursday for majority leader and whip may well not be the end of it. Several Republicans asserted that next week's action won't quiet ambitious lawmakers or factions in the GOP caucus, and leadership contests after November's national midterm elections could produce a brand new lineup.

Despite conservative discontent, Boehner's job does not appear to be in serious jeopardy. But some lawmakers noted there was a limit to his security.

"The speaker is speaker in 24-hour increments. Literally 50 guys can call a revolt," said Rep. Tom Cole of Oklahoma, a Boehner ally.

Cantor suffered a stunning defeat to little-known college professor Dave Brat in Tuesday's Virginia Republican primary, a race that underscored the rift within the GOP between pragmatic, establishment conservatives and farther-right contenders pressing for no-compromise ideological stances. But even Cantor's past positive comments on possible immigration changes as amnesty for those here illegally — a characterization Cantor heatedly rejected — and turned it into a defining issue in the race.

Cantor is the first House majority leader to lose his seat by being defeated in a party primary election since the post was created in 1899, according to Eric Ostermeier, research associate at the University of Minnesota's Center for the Study of Politics and Governance.

Cantor announced on Wednesday that he would step down as majority leader at the end of July. He endorsed McCarthy as his successor, and the House whip moved swiftly to secure the votes.

Calif. Man dies hours after being freed in jury mistake

By SCOTT SMITH
The Associated Press

FRESNO, Calif. — A jury's confusion over how to fulfill their duty must have felt like a ticket to freedom for Bobby Lee Pearson, who was cleared of a burglary charge and was set free.

Unable to reach a verdict, Pearson's jury mistakenly signed a not-guilty form Wednesday — despite the judge later learning jurors had actually deadlocked. After his release, Pearson, 37, went to a relative's house and within hours he was killed in a fight.

William Terrence, who prosecuted the case, said that despite the bizarre chain of events that led to Pearson's release, the man he tried sending to prison didn't deserve to die.

"There's not a death penalty on a burglary," Terrence said. "I'm not sitting here thinking he got what he deserved."

Pearson and a co-defendant, Terrell Minnieweather, were accused of burglarizing an apartment last year and stealing a video system and a gun. The homeowner allegedly caught the intruders



Pearson

and wrestled with one of them.

Jurors returned a guilty verdict against the two and the mistaken not-guilty verdict against Pearson before

lunch Wednesday. It was too late when the judge finally learned that the jury was unable to reach a verdict, stalling

on an 8-4 vote in favor of guilt. Prosecutors might have had an opportunity to retry Pearson, but by then, changing the verdict form would have exposed Pearson to double jeopardy.

After being released from jail, Pearson went to the home of his sister, Lasandra Jackson, to get some clothing and belongings. Fresno police Chief Jerry Dyer said Pearson apparently got into a fight with his sister's boyfriend, Wade Gray, 35.

The two had a history of problems, said Dyer, adding that in-

vestigators believe Gray killed Pearson, who was found dead in the street with a chest wound from a knife or a gun and a cut on his stomach. Investigators found a steak knife near the body, Dyer said.

Gray was arrested and was treated for injuries to his hands before being booked on suspicion of murder, said Dyer, adding that Pearson might still be alive if it weren't for the jury's "misphap." Pearson had a long criminal past, Dyer said.

NATION

For teens, it's not all sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — American teens are smoking less, drinking less and fighting less. But they're texting behind the wheel and spending a lot of time on video games and computers, according to the government's latest study of worrisome behavior.

Generally speaking, the news is good. Most forms of drug use, weapons use and risky sex have been going down since the government started doing the survey every two years in 1991. Teens are

wearing bicycle helmets and seat belts more, too.

"Overall, young people have more healthy behaviors than they did 20 years ago," said Dr. Stephanie Zaza, who oversees the study at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The results come from a study of 13,000 U.S. high school students last spring. Participation was voluntary and required parental permission, but responses were anonymous.

The study released Thursday showed fewer than 16 percent of

the teens smoked a cigarette in the previous month — the lowest level since the government started doing the survey, when the rate was more than 27 percent.

The survey did not ask about electronic cigarettes, which have exploded in popularity in the past few years.

Meanwhile, more than 23 percent of teens said they used marijuana in the previous month — up from 15 percent in 1991.

Other highlights:

■ Fights at school fell by half in the past 20 years.

■ Among teen drivers, 41 percent had texted or emailed behind the wheel in the previous month.

■ Fewer teens said they drank alcohol. Drinking of soda was down, too. About 35 percent said they had had booze in the previous month, down from 39 percent in 2011. About 27 percent said they drank soda each day, only a slight change from 2011.

■ The proportion of teens who had sex in the previous three months held steady at about 34 percent from 2011. Among them, condom use was unchanged at

about 60 percent.

■ The percentage who attempted suicide in the previous year held steady at about 8 percent.

■ TV viewing for three or more hours a day has stalled at around 32 percent since 2011. But in one of the largest jumps seen in the survey, there was a surge in the proportion of kids who spent three or more hours on an average school day on other kinds of recreational screen time. That number rose to 41 percent, from 31 percent in 2011.

Road closed for toads

The Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — It's rush hour in Philadelphia for thousands of baby toads as they hop across a busy residential street on a rainy summer night.

Why do toadlets cross the road? To get to the woods on the other side — where they will live, eat mosquitoes and grow up to be full-sized American toads (bufo americanus). After a couple of years, they'll make the reverse trek as adults — unless they get squashed by a car.

That's where the Toad Detour comes in.

The Schuykill Center for Environmental Education sets up a roadblock each year in the Roxborough neighborhood, rerouting cars so the amphibians can cross the two-lane street without fear of, um, croaking.

The cycle starts in early spring when adult toads, which can fit in the palm of your hand, emerge from the woods to breed. They cross Port Royal Avenue, scale a 10-foot-high embankment and then travel down a densely vegetated hill to mate in the abandoned Upper Roxborough Reservoir. Their offspring — each about the size of a raisin — make the journey in reverse about six weeks later.

So many baby toads were on the move Monday evening it looked like the road's muddier shoulder was alive. Volunteers scooped them up in plastic cups and deposited them on the habitat side of the street.

The detour program began in 2009 when a local resident noticed the toad-filled road.



MATT SLOCUM/AP

A baby toad gets a hand crossing the road.



ABOVE: JUAN DAVID GUERRA, US NAVY; BELOW: CHARLES COOLEY, ALL VETERAN PARACHUTE TEAM/AP



Bush jumps for joy on 90th birthday

Above: Sailors of the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush assemble in formation Thursday on the flight deck in honor of the ship's namesake's 90th birthday.

Left: Former President George H.W. Bush is tethered to Mike Elliott, a member of the All Veteran Parachute Team, on a jump from a helicopter as they celebrate Bush's 90th birthday in Kennebunkport, Maine.

Mother's act of forgiveness may help her daughter's killer

By DAVID OVALLE
The Miami Herald

MIAMI — Two years after her 13-year-old daughter was accidentally shot inside a South Miami-Dade school bus, Ady Guzman-DeJesus faced the girl's killer in court on Tuesday.

There was no anger or rage. Instead, she gave Jordyn Howe a tearful hug.

"I'm sorry," Howe, 16, stammered as she wrapped her arms around him, fighting back his own tears.

It was part of an extraordinary gesture of forgiveness from a grieving mother who also blessed

a plea deal that will allow Howe to avoid prison for the awful mistake that killed Lourdes "Jina" Guzman-DeJesus.

Instead, Howe will attend a youth camp for a year and agree to speak at schools about the dangers of guns — alongside the mother of the girl he killed.

"In 20 years, I've watched human tragedy unfold in this courtroom," Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Ellen Sue Venzler said. "I could have never imagined a victim's mother embracing her child's killer."

Guzman-DeJesus told reporters afterward that it's what she believes her daughter would have

wanted her to do.

"We can make a change to help other children," she said. "That was Jina's friend, too, and I know she wouldn't want the worst."

On Tuesday, Guzman-DeJesus — who has three other children — stood in court flanked by her lawyer, Ron Book, a high-profile lobbyist who also serves as a victim's advocate. He said the family had undergone intense therapy, and had come to realize the plea "meets the best needs of the community."

Lourdes Guzman-DeJesus attended Palm Glades Preparatory Academy, while Howe attended Somerset Academy Silver Palms.

But they rode the same bus to school.

One day in November 2012, Howe took his stepfather's pistol from his hiding place in the bedroom closet and brought it to school to show off to friends.

Howe and a few other students handled the gun without it firing. At one point, Howe took the gun, pointed it at the floor and pulled the trigger. No discharge. But then, with one hand, Howe lifted the gun toward Guzman-DeJesus and pulled the trigger.

The bullet struck the girl in the neck. Chaos erupted on the bus.

WORLD

Ukraine troops drive rebels out of southern port

BY MARKO DROBNJAKOVIC
AND DAVID MCHUGH
The Associated Press

MARIUPOL, Ukraine — Ukrainian troops attacked pro-Russia separatists Friday in the southern port of Mariupol, apparently driving them out of buildings they had occupied in the center of the city.

Mariupol is the second-largest city in the eastern Donetsk region that has declared independence from the government in Kiev. The key port sits along the main road leading from Russia to the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed in March from Ukraine.

About 100 soldiers emerged triumphantly Friday from the previously rebel-occupied buildings, shouting the name of their battalion, Azov, and singing the Ukrainian national anthem. They also

destroyed an armored vehicle and a heavy truck used by the separatists, leaving the vehicles scorched and riddled with large-caliber bullet holes.

Interior Minister Arsen Avakov said four government troops were wounded in what he called a successful operation. Witnesses said they saw troops capture at least four separatist fighters. There was no immediate word of casualties on the rebel side, and Associated Press journalists at the site were blocked from entering the buildings.

Ukraine and the West have accused Moscow of fomenting the unrest in eastern Ukraine and supporting the separatist fighters. Russia, however, has denied sending troops or weapons to Ukraine and has described the Russian citizens fighting with the separatists as volunteers.



SERGEI CHUZAKOV/AP

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko lifts his arms in greeting after the inauguration ceremony in Sophia Square in Kiev, Ukraine, on Saturday.

The renewed fighting Friday came as rebel leaders confirmed they now have three tanks.

Government officials say the tanks were part of a column of armored vehicles that crossed the porous border into Ukraine from Russia, but there has been no independent confirmation that they came from Russia.

Denis Pushilin, a leader of the separatist Donetsk People's Re-

public, told Russian state television Friday that they have the tanks but it was "improper to ask" where they had gotten them.

"They are in Donetsk and are the minimum that we have to defend the city," he said.

Both the U.S. State Department and NATO have said if the tanks did come from Russia, it would be a "serious escalation" of the crisis.

Poachers in Congo massacre elephants

BY PAUL SCHEMM
The Associated Press

RABAT, Morocco — At least 68 elephants, some 4 percent of the population of one of Africa's oldest parks, have been slaughtered by poachers over the last two months using chainsaws and helicopters, the nonprofit group managing the park has warned.

The Johannesburg-based African Parks group said that since mid-May, the 1,900-square-mile Garamba National Park in Congo, which was established in 1938, has faced an onslaught from several different bands of poachers.

One particularly sophisticated group is shooting the elephants with high-powered rifles from a helicopter and then taking off their tusks with a chainsaw. "They are removing the elephants' brains and genitals, as well.

African Parks, which runs seven parks in six countries in cooperation with local authorities, said the poachers also include renegade elements of the Congolese army, gunmen from South Sudan, and members of the Lord's Resistance Army, a militant rebel group whose fugitive leader, Joseph Kony, is an alleged war criminal.

"The situation is extremely serious," Garamba park manager Jean-Marc Froment said in the statement. "The park is under attack on all fronts."

A 2012 census found just 2,000 elephants in Garamba Park, down from 20,000 in the 1960s.

In one skirmish with poachers, park guards had to try to protect themselves against hand grenades thrown by Southern Sudanese poachers, some wearing military uniforms.

Proment singled out in particular elements of the LRA, which is notorious for kidnapping children and using them as soldiers, and has been active in the park.

In recent years, the U.N. has warned that armed groups in Africa have been turning to ivory poaching to fund their struggles. Many are also using the more sophisticated weapons that flowed from Libya after the fall of Moammar Gadhafi in 2011.

Conservationists say a thriving ivory trade market in Asia is helping fuel the worst poaching epidemic of African elephants in decades.

The Geneva-based Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora said Friday that 20,000 elephants were killed in 2013, but the overall poaching was on the decline due to better law enforcement.

Malaysia Airlines begins insurance payments

The Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — Malaysia Airlines has begun giving out \$50,000 in advance insurance payments to families of people aboard missing Flight 370, but many Chinese relatives have indicated they'll reject it.

The jet is thought to have crashed in the Indian Ocean on March 8 with 239 people aboard, but a search has found no trace. There were 153 Chinese passengers aboard.

Malaysian Deputy Foreign Minister Hamzah Zainuddin said Thursday that six Malaysian and one Chinese family had so far received payment. He said full payout would come after the plane is found or officially declared lost.

However, Steve Wang, a spokesman for some of the relatives, said Friday that families of 127 Chinese passengers indicated they'll reject the advance payment, part-

ly because they think Malaysia Airlines should provide economic assistance while the search continues.

“We are talking about this with the Malaysians and other countries who have got a key interest.”

Warren Truss

Australian transport minister and Australian officials discussed

cost-sharing this week in the Australian capital, but Australian Transport Minister Warren Truss

declined to say Friday whether the country was even considering an even split of the bill for a search that will take months, if not years, and cost tens of millions of dollars at a minimum. "I don't want to give any indication as to where it's likely to end up," Truss told The Associated Press. "We are talking about this with the Malaysians and other countries who have got a key interest."

The government expects to spend \$84 million on the search by July 2015. But the actual cost to Australia will depend on how quickly the plane can be found and how much other countries are willing to contribute. And a legal expert said Australia's obligations are murky because of the unprecedented nature of the plane's disappearance.

Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 veered off course during a flight from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia,

to Beijing on March 8 and is believed to have crashed into the Indian Ocean far off the west Australian coast. The search area has changed several times, but no sign of the aircraft or the 239 people aboard has been found.

Countries are continuing to negotiate on how to fund the next phase of the sonar search of almost 21,600 square miles of seabed beneath water up to 4.3 miles deep.

Countries involved in the search — including Malaysia, Australia, the United States, China, Japan, Britain, South Korea and New Zealand — have carried their own costs to date. But Malaysian government lawmaker Jaiilani Johari, chairman of Malaysia's Liaison, Communication and Media Committee, told reporters in Kuala Lumpur this week that future costs "will be shared 50-50" between Malaysia and Australia.

Mexico political boss resigns amid sex scandal

The Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — The local political chief for Mexico's ruling party in the capital resigned following reports that his office hired women to have sex with him and placed them on party payrolls, party officials announced Thursday.

Cuathtemoc Gutierrez had

taken a leave of absence as the Mexico City leader of President Enrique Pena Nieto's Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, in order to not obstruct an investigation.

PRI representative Manuel Andrade said Gutierrez resigned his post this week and that a replacement has already been named. MVS radio station in April

aired a story by an undercover reporter who recorded recruiters telling potential hires they would have to have sex with Gutierrez if given a job as secretaries or receptionists.

The report alleged he recruited women for the positions through newspaper ads for "women to work in government offices."

Gutierrez has called the report

"absolutely false."

The PRI has made a big comeback nationwide since losing its 71-year hold on the presidency in 2000, regaining the nation's top post in 2012, but Mexico City remains a weak point for the party. The capital's majority has been held by the leftist Democratic Revolution Party since 1997.

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EDITORIAL

Terry Leonard, Editorial Director
 leonard.terry@stripes.com
 Robert H. Reid, Senior Managing Editor
 reid.robert@stripes.com
 Sam Amrhein, Deputy Managing Editor
 amrhein.sam@stripes.com
 Tina Croley, Enterprise Editor
 croley.tina@stripes.com

BUREAU STAFF

Europe/Mideast
 Teddie Weyr, News Editor Europe/Mideast
 weyr.teddie@stripes.com;
 +49(0)631.3615.9310; cell
 +49(0)173.315.1881; DSN (314)583.9310

Pacific
 Paul Alexander, News Editor Pacific
 alexander.paul@stripes.com
 +81-3 6385.5377; cell (080)5883.1673
 DSN (315)225.5377

Washington
 Patrick Dickson, Washington Bureau Chief
 dickson.patrick@stripes.com
 (+1)(703)693.6957; DSN (312)223.6957
 Brian Bowers, Assistant Managing Editor, News
 bowers.brian@stripes.com
 Joe Gromelski, Assistant Managing Editor, Web
 gromelski.joe@stripes.com
 Sean Moores, Assistant Managing Editor,
 Sports, Features and Graphics
 moores.sean@stripes.com

CONTACT US

Washington
 (+1)202.761.0900; DSN (312)763.0900;
 fax: (+1)202.761.0890
 529 14th Street NW, Suite 350, Washington, DC
 20045-1301

Reader letters
 letters@stripes.com

Additional contacts
 stripes.com/contactus

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OPINION

Watch the World Cup, make a friend

By KELLY CANDAELE

This week sports fans around the globe will turn their attention to the most watched athletic event in the world — the soccer World Cup. In remote villages and urban centers, close to 1 billion fans will stop what they are doing and find the nearest accessible television set. Except in the United States. While the enthusiasm for soccer here has grown, its fan base pales in comparison to the Super Bowl, for instance.

The philosopher Paul Woodruff suggests that to be a good spectator, you need to know how to care about what you are watching. Here are some suggestions for developing a deeper appreciation of this monthlong competition.

If you are new to soccer — what the rest of the world calls football — familiarize yourself with some of the key players besides the two most famous stars, Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo and Argentina's Lionel Messi. Many great players play for club teams during the regular season in the top football leagues where the big money is made — Spain, England and Italy — but return to play for their national teams during the World Cup. Check out Eden Hazard and the dark-horse but talented Belgian team or the dynamic midfielder Luka Modric on Croatia's squad. If either of these two teams advances out of the initial stages, Hazard and Modric will be the primary reasons.

Get a sense of the skills that are required to play the game well. Watch for the players who display a great "first touch," the uncanny ability to stop and control a ball kicked at high velocity with the gentle touch of a foot. Hard-kicked balls career off the shoes of less artful players toward their opponents, diminishing their team's opportunities.

Pick a team to support before the tournament starts and stick with it. But whatever your choice, don't be a team jumper, hopping from one team to another depending on who is winning. Worldwide soccer tradition compels an early life decision about whom you are with. Once you've committed, you never walk away from your team.

Soccer is a game of Third World countries. OK so a few not so Third World countries love it also, like the English football hooligans. You need no special skill to play. Just a dirt field and a bag of rags. No bats, helmets, skates, courts, backboards. Any one who can run can play.

In Southern California, there are many restaurants where a given country's sup-

porters will gather to share food and triumph or suffer heartbreak and defeat with their team. Cheer on the American team at your local hamburger and beer joint. Then find places where "foreigners" gather and join them to watch their national squad. You'll be welcomed with open arms and regarded as a friend. In the process, you'll also find out where the Uruguayans, Ghanaians or Chileans like to eat.

Watch the matches with the understanding that the game itself is better than any one individual who plays it. Games worthy of playing can never be played perfectly. Difficult games — and soccer is one of the most difficult despite its simple rules — are examples of what the theologian John Dominic Crossan calls "experiments in disciplined failure." They are a way of acknowledging and preparing for the limits that life imposes on us. Develop empathy for the teams and individuals who fail, because the experience is universal.

And finally, despite the fact gambling syndicates are always attempting to reach corrupt players and referees, understand that the vast majority of these athletes desperately want

to win for their country and their team and will put their bodies in harm's way to succeed. The athletes are measured against the greatest practitioners of the sport.

I don't know who will win, but there is one prediction I can make with certainty. Watching the World Cup is an experience filled with the sheer delight of watching exquisite athletes perform. The ritual occurs every few four years. It is a sacred time that will be full of unpredictability, risk and audacity, elements that are at odds with so much of contemporary bureaucratic life.

A complete and satisfying ceremony requires witnesses who understand the rules and meaning of the performance, the social critic Christopher Lasch observed. Thoughtful spectators reinforce the value of sports for our culture, reminding us of the importance of discipline, hard work and exacting demands.

If you watch closely and with a sympathetic crowd, I'm convinced you will embrace the art and the battle that soccer embodies. In 90 minutes, the matches capture much of what is beautiful and joyous about life.

Kelly Candaele has produced documentaries about Real Madrid and FC Barcelona and the history and politics of soccer in Kolkata, India. This column first appeared in the Los Angeles Times.



Brazil's Oscar, left, and Croatia's Ivica Olic challenge for the ball during the World Cup opener in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on Thursday.

KIRSTY WIGGLESWORTH/AP

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OPINION

Extremists' gains in Iraq force US response

By JAMES M. DUBIK

The war in Iraq was not over when the United States withdrew from Iraq in 2011. We just pretended that it was. Like it or not, our departure left a diplomatic and security vacuum that contributed to the crisis unfolding there. The government of Iraq floundered in that vacuum, promulgating the wrong domestic policies and allowing the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to backslide to pre-2007 performance levels. The net result has been that al-Qaida in Iraq has not only reconstituted but expanded, drawing in many of those disenfranchised and disillusioned by Iraq's domestic policies. Worse, it has morphed into the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), whose stated ambition is to create a new Islamic state, absorbing parts of Syria and Iraq. As the past few days have amply demonstrated, ISIS is already more than capable of taking territory and governing.

In much of eastern Syria, ISIS serves as the de facto government. It is advancing rapidly into northern, central and western Iraq. In recent days it seized Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city; most of Baiji, home of one of the largest oil facilities in Iraq; and Tikrit. Now it is moving south toward Samarra and Baqubah, en route to Baghdad. It is already entrenched in Fallujah and Ramadi as well as in most of Iraq's western desert. Its terror campaigns are destabilizing Baghdad and threatening Salahuddin, Tamin and Diyala provinces, the territory between Mosul and Baghdad that it wants to seize next.

While we have been debating whether ISIS fits our definition of a threat, the on-the-ground realities have been passing us by. If ISIS achieves its goal, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Iran will have a radical, fundamentalist Islamic state on their borders. Iraq will be split in two, Israel threatened and the security of the United States and the rest of the West put at significantly greater risk. The ques-



FROM MILITANT VIDEO/AF

A militant stands on top of a tank at a military compound abandoned by the Iraqi military near Tikrit in Salah al-Din province, Iraq, in this image from video taken by militants on Wednesday

tion isn't whether ISIS is part of al-Qaida. Rather, the question for the United States and its allies is: Do we keep pretending that the war is over or acknowledge that events in Iraq are rapidly moving in a direction at odds with our security interests? What's our plan?

There is no use debating whether the present state could have been prevented if the United States left a sufficient residual force in place in 2011; neither Baghdad nor Washington could muster the domestic support for that. But the fact is that the Iraqis cannot succeed by themselves. If they could, the situation would not be as dire as it is.

So, what can we do now? Providing Iraq more "military stuff" isn't a real answer,

nor is the reintroduction of large numbers of U.S. or coalition troops. We have no easy options, but to start, the United States and its allies must commit to preventing an ISIS victory and assist the government of Iraq in halting and reversing ISIS' progress. Although the long-term solutions for Iraqi stability are diplomatic and political, unless the Iraqi government can stop the ISIS offensive, such actions will be moot.

Halting the offensive is Iraq's nearest-term objective. What is needed is a coordinated air and ground action consisting of both a heavy dose of precisely applied firepower and a sufficiently executed ground defense. The Iraqis are incapable of such action alone. The firepower will have to be delivered by United States and allied air-

craft augmented by Iraqi assets. The Iraqis will also need a small group of advisers to target air support correctly and to help identify or create capable, well-led units that are properly employed and backed by sufficient sustainment capacity. The advisory and support effort must be substantial enough to help the Iraqis conduct an initial defense and then plan and prepare a series of counter-offensive campaigns to regain lost areas. This will be a multi-year effort, but it cannot become a second surge.

These security actions must be taken within the context of an aggressive diplomatic and political effort. The United States and its allies must insist that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki dissolve the nefarious Office of the Commander-in-Chief, which has been one of the primary causes of the erosion of the ISF. The prime minister must also cease being the de facto ministers of defense and interior. Centralizing security ministries and running security operations from his office have all but ended development of both ministries, politicized the police and the military and reduced the performance of the ISF. Finally, the government of Iraq must change policies so that fewer Iraqis feel excluded. The failure to do so has helped create the crisis of confidence in Iraq's government.

But, again, unless the ISIS offensive campaign is stopped and reversed, none of this will matter.

These would be drastic actions, and they can succeed only if Iraq is convinced that it is facing an existential threat and must change course. The United States and its allies, too, must be convinced that an ISIS state poses a national security threat. No one likes the options before us, but we'll like even less what happens if we do nothing or take only ineffective action.

James M. Dubik is a retired Air Force lieutenant general and a fellow at the Institute for the Study of War. He commanded the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq from 2007 to 2008. This column first appeared in *The Washington Post*.

Al-Maliki's missteps have made a mess of Iraq

By DAVID IGNATIUS

WASHINGTON

The stunning gains in recent days by Iraq's Sunni insurgents carry a crucial political message: Nouri al-Maliki, the Shiite prime minister of Iraq, is a polarizing sectarian politician who has lost the confidence of his army and nation. He cannot put a split Iraq together again, no matter how many weapons the Obama administration sends him.

Al-Maliki's failure has been increasingly obvious since the elections of 2010, when the Iraqi people in their wisdom elected a broader, less-sectarian coalition. But the Obama administration, bizarrely working in tandem with the Sunni-led coalition that allowed al-Maliki to continue and has worked with him as an ally against al-Qaida. Al-Maliki's coalition triumphed in April's elections, but the balloting was boycotted by Sunnis.

Given al-Maliki's sectarian and authoritarian style, a growing number of Iraq experts are questioning why the Obama administration continues to provide him billions in military aid — and is said to be weighing his plea for lethal Predator drones. The skeptics include some who were once among al-Maliki's champions.

I believe that Maliki has never had the energy or intent to unify Iraq, says Derek Harvey, a professor at the University of

Nouri al-Maliki's sectarian political style has helped create this disaster. He has gutted the army of the commanders he suspected of plotting against him.

South Florida who advises U.S. Central Command and is one of the leading U.S. experts on Iraq. "He was a bad choice in the beginning and our embrace of him was an error," he says.

A retired U.S. four-star commander asks in an interview: "How in the world can you keep betting on this number (al-Maliki) given what's happened?" He believes al-Maliki is incapable of retaking the territory he has lost, and he wonders when Iran's Quds Force will intervene to rescue al-Maliki's collapsing army.

Al-Maliki's U.S.-trained army has suffered a series of crushing defeats, as Sunni insurgents from an offshoot of al-Qaida captured the northern Sunni cities of Mosul and Tikrit and swept toward Baghdad. Already the Sunni extremists control most of western Iraq.

The Shiite-led Iraqi military has crumpled in battle, fleeing the battlefield and leaving behind tanks, Humvees and other vehicles. In cities such as Fallujah, cleared by American troops at great cost, al-Qaida and its progeny are now dominant.

Al-Maliki's sectarian political style has

helped create this disaster. He has gutted the army of the commanders he suspected of plotting against him. One U.S. expert likens him to Soviet leader Joseph Stalin who purged the Red Army on the eve of World War II.

"He has replaced his generals with Shiite commanders who represent not competency, but political loyalty" to al-Maliki and his Dawa Party, says Harvey.

The victors belong to an extremist Sunni faction known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. These pitiless, battle-hardened fighters, remnants of what was known as al-Qaeda in Iraq, have attracted jihadists from around the world. One of their most effective commanders in Mosul is said to have been a Georgian-born Chechen known as Omar al-Shishani. The Chechen was also a key ISIS commander in recent battles around the Syrian city of Aleppo — an illustration of the group's potent cross-border reach.

ISIS forces have swept south along Highway 1 from Mosul, swelling their ranks by liberating between 2,000 and 3,000 jihadist fighters from a prison in Nineveh prov-

ince. The jihadists have captured so much U.S.-made equipment that it's reportedly hard to distinguish friend from foe along the chaotic highway south.

Al-Maliki's forces are said to be drawing their battle lines just above a huge arms depot at Taji, about 20 miles north of Baghdad, which was a key U.S. logistics base during the American occupation, from 2003 to 2010. By consolidating his forces so far south, al-Maliki is, in effect, conceding the northern cities. Harvey argues that only the pesh murga fighters of Iraqi Kurdistan are strong enough to retake Mosul, but some experts doubt they would launch such a battle unless it was a prelude to a fully independent Kurdistan.

As the fabric of the Middle East rips apart along sectarian lines, the United States and its allies face a fundamental strategic choice: Can they convene a regional peace conference — which would seek to reconcile Sunni and Shiite forces and their key backers, Saudi Arabia and Iran — in some new security architecture?

Re-stitching the fabric of Iraq and Syria may be Mission Impossible. But with its focus on counterterrorism and weapons supplies, the Obama administration seems to have decided to treat the region simply as a shooting gallery.

David Ignatius is a member of the Washington Post Writers Group.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police seek owners of items thought stolen

MO JACKSON — Police in a southeast Missouri town are looking for the rightful owners of a trove of goods believed to have been stolen from homes and storage units.

The items were discovered May 29 when police executed a search warrant at a home in Jackson.

Most of the items are power tools, including chain saws, air compressors and a leaf blower.

The list released by police Tuesday also includes hand tools, computer equipment, a home theater system and a cash register that had been pried open.

But some of the items likely have personal value, such as an award from the Red Cross, a gold U.S. Navy pin and a gold bracelet with the name "Nita."

Princess to change plea in cockfighting case

OR PORTLAND — Court documents show a change of plea hearing has been scheduled for Irina Walker, the Romanian princess accused of participating in a cockfighting ring in rural Oregon.

Federal prosecutor Stephen Peifer confirmed that Walker is scheduled to plead guilty, but declined further comment. Walker's lawyer, Per Ramfjord, was out of the office Thursday and didn't return a message.

Irina Walker has lived in Oregon for many years. She's the third daughter of former Romanian King Michael I.

Authorities say she and her husband, John, staged at least 10 cockfighting derbies between April 2012 and April 2013. They were charged with unlawful animal fighting, conspiracy to violate the animal welfare act and operating an illegal gambling business.

Yosemite National Park rescue caught on video

CA YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK — Park officials say a backpacker who narrowly avoided plunging to his death from a waterfall at Yosemite National Park was hoisted to safety by a helicopter rescue crew in an operation that was captured on video.

A video of the May 28 rescue shows the helicopter hovering over a gorge at the base of Upper Yosemite Fall. The video was released last week.

The backpacker is on a boulder that park officials say he was able to scramble onto after slipping and falling into the rapids.

A rescuer who was lowered down to the boulder is seen attaching a line. He and the backpacker are then hoisted up.

The backpacker was treated for hypothermia. Park officials say he would have died if he had not been able to get onto the boulder.

Third arrest made in flagpole thefts

IA CARROLL — Iowa authorities have arrested

THE CENSUS

\$583K

The amount of money New York City has agreed to pay to settle allegations that police wrongfully arrested a group of Occupy Wall Street protesters. The pact involves 14 demonstrators who said police ordered them to leave but prevented them from doing so and arrested them in lower Manhattan early on New Year's Day 2012.



DEVON RAVINE, NORTHWEST (FORT WALTON BEACH) FLORIDA DAILY NEWS/AP

Beach builder

Casey Fabianski with Beach Sand Sculptures puts the finishing touches on a sand castle at the beach in Destin, Fla., on Wednesday. Fabianski was giving sand castle-building lessons to tourists in the Florida Panhandle resort community.

a third man accused of stealing flagpoles from the Carroll American Legion during the Memorial Day weekend.

Jerard Wayne Reed, 18, of Lohrville, was arrested on Tuesday.

Authorities also have charged Christopher Lee Gay, 37, and Chance Abel Kenny, 20, both of Lake City.

Police said the men stole two trailers with an estimated 550 metal flagpoles and attempted to sell them at two local salvage yards. Legion members said the salvage-yard workers declined to buy them. The total value of the poles was estimated at \$16,500.

All three men face felony theft charges. They face up to 15 years in prison if convicted.

Truck dumps beer cans in highway median

SD SUMMIT — A semi-truck that rolled on Interstate 29 in South Dakota dumped a trailer full of beer cans into the highway's median.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol said that the driver fell asleep while heading north on Interstate

29 near Summit on Wednesday morning. He woke up and overcorrected, causing the truck to enter the median and roll.

Cases of beer that the semitrailer was hauling spilled through the trailer's broken roof into the median.

The Highway Patrol said the driver had not been drinking. He was wearing a seat belt but suffered serious, non-life-threatening injuries.

The crash remains under investigation.

Whale tagged with graffiti died of virus

NJ NEWARK — A marine mammal specialist says a dead whale that was tagged with graffiti after washing ashore on a New Jersey beach last month died of a virus.

Bob Schoelkopf of New Jersey's Marine Mammal Stranding Center said that the minke whale tested positive for morbillivirus.

The virus is the same one found in 135 dolphins that washed up on Jersey coast last summer and as many as 1,300 animals found dead along the coastline of Florida.

The dead whale was found May 1 below Atlantic City's Central Pier and had been tagged with Greek letters from a fraternity.

Schoelkopf said the whale found in New Jersey also had been struck by a ship, which may have happened after the animal was dead.

Nest of snakes found trapped in sewer pipe

WA WENATCHEE — A nest of snakes was discovered in a Washington state sewer pipe when a contractor ran a video camera down the line.

City Engineer Gary Owen said he thought there were a half-dozen snakes or more. It's hard to tell from the video, but Owen thinks they were bull snakes, possibly pet someone flushed down a toilet.

The snakes might have tried to exit the sewer through toilets, but Owen said the snakes were sealed off and entombed when a new liner was put into the sewer pipe.

The snakes were spotted May 15 in a recessed area of the pipe about 150 feet from a manhole.

Owen said there was no way they could have been rescued.

Police: Grave ransacked in search for 'real will'

NH COLEBROOK — Three people, including a daughter, are accused of ransacking the grave of a businessman in search of his "real will," only to find a pack of cigarettes in his hand.

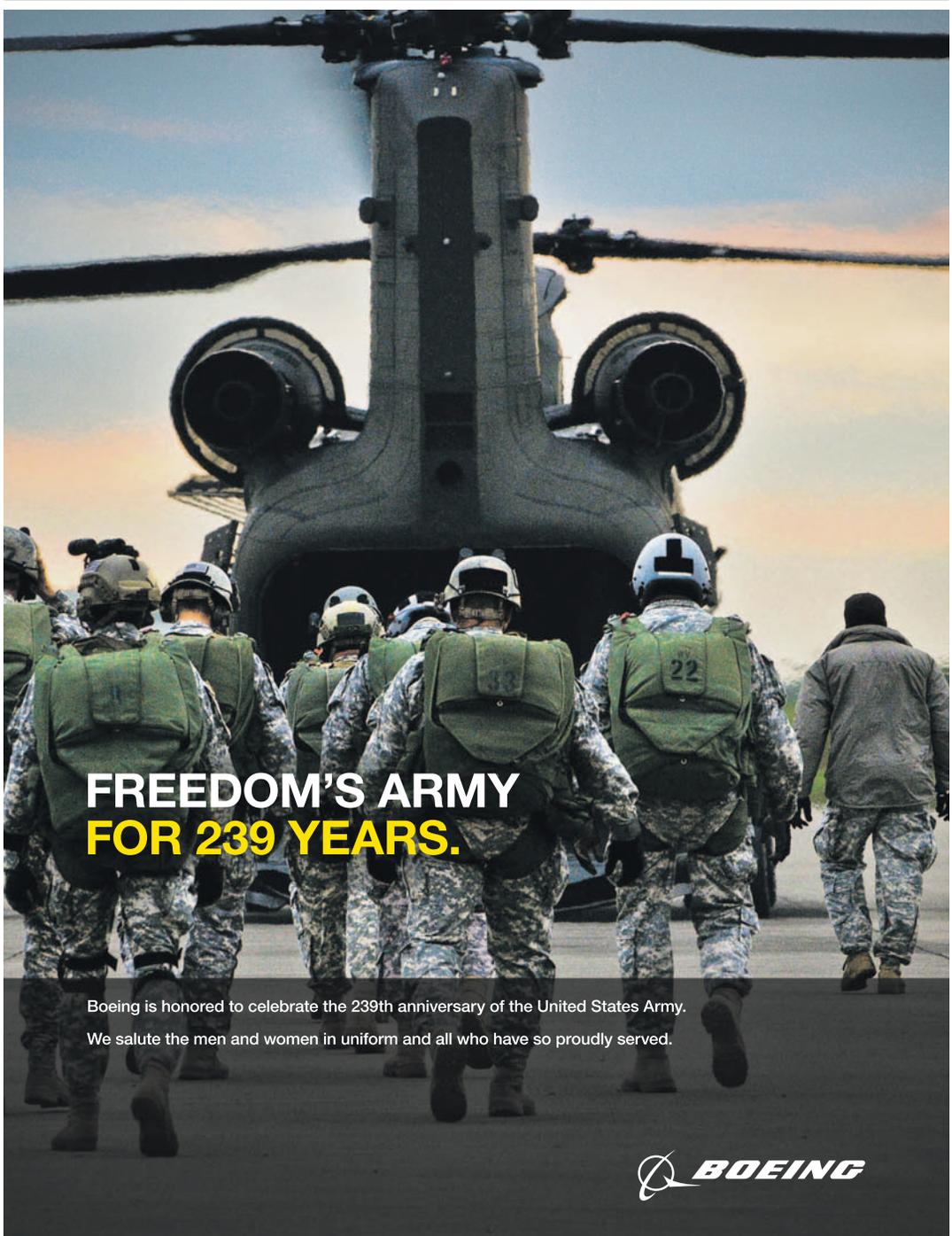
Eddie Nash died of a heart attack in 2004 at age 68. His cemetery vault in New Hampshire was found cracked last month, the casket opened and his remains searched. The body was left intact.

An arrest affidavit names Ginette Dowse, 71; Michael Day, 37; and Nash's daughter, Melanie Lynch, 52.

Lynch had made comments about her father being buried with "the real will," a police affidavit said.

Day was arrested Tuesday and was jailed on charges of interference with a cemetery and criminal mischief.

From wire reports



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MOVIES

In her film career and in her everyday life, Shailene stays true

BY COLIN COVERT
Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

In her latest film, based on the bestselling young adult novel "The Fault in Our Stars" by John Green, Shailene Woodley plays a teen with cancer who falls in love for the first time.

JOHN MINICILLO,
INVISION/AP

Shailene Woodley has gone from impressive newcomer to star at rocket-sock speed. She earned rave reviews for her film debut at 15 as George Clooney's bad-tempered daughter in "The Descendants." She won an acting prize at Sundance for her turn as a touchingly vulnerable smart girl in the indie hit "The Spectacular Now." She took the reins of a high-profile Hollywood franchise in "Divergent," based on the hit series of dystopian young-adult books by Veronica Roth.

Her next project puts the full weight of a serious studio film on her shoulders. She stars as Hazel, a teen with cancer who experiences her first love, in the adaptation of John Green's bestseller "The Fault in Our Stars."

Against all odds, the 22-year-old Californian seems to be keeping her head on straight. Her recent appearance on David Letterman's show became an extended teasing session as he grilled her about her high regard for organic living and herbalism, which includes eating clay. "Haven't you heard of Metamucil?" he asked. Blogs have poked fun at her wearing Vibram FiveFinger shoes to the Golden Globes, and setting the mood every morning by screaming "Exciting day! Exciting day!"

While she's acquired the image of being America's favorite moonbeam, Woodley has remained authentic and serenely good-humored through it all.

"I don't say the things I say for others. I say them because it's my truth," she said recently by phone from New York City. "I try to live by two things. A, it's none of my business what other people think about me. And B, you do you, I'm gonna do me, each and every day."

"I'm not going to position myself as being in any place to tell someone how to live their life. But if someone asks me a question, I am completely open to speaking my truth, with what works for me."

It probably helps her grounded disposition and her acting that both her parents are psychologists, she said.

"Growing up it was always, 'How does this make you feel? If this person hurt your feelings, why were your feelings hurt?' It helped me observe people, like to figure out what made them so sensitive to something that was said. What is the rhythm of their mind in getting offended by this or excited by this? Empathy and compassion were two things that were hard-core ingrained" in the household, she said.

That's one reason she's proud, amid all the summer blockbusters, to be in a film about rec-

ognizable humans.

"Even though there's no superpowers and whatnot, the truth of what these people are going through is so relatable."

Woodley plays Hazel, a bright girl who dislikes being reduced to a cancer diagnosis but withholds herself emotionally for fear of the pain her eventual death will cause.

"Not everyone can relate to the cancer, but we all know the feelings of being in love, being sad, grieving and being happy, celebrating life."

"It's not about cancer. It's about first love and

loss. It's about appreciating moments and not taking things too seriously because nothing is guaranteed in life. When there's a finite time line on your life, you're not worrying or stressing or feeling guilty about the small things in life that most people in the world are wasting their time on."

Woodley fell in love with Green's novel. "It changed the lives of millions and millions and millions of people," she said. She corresponded with the author to thank him for writing it and to say "it would be an honor to audition" to play his heroine. She chopped off her chestnut mane for the casting process and committed herself to the book's principle that sentimentalizing people because of their illness also dehumanizes them.

To portray a character with a terminal illness honestly, she said, "you pretend to be a normal human. Cancer doesn't define a person. For Hazel, I didn't think 'I'm playing a girl with cancer.' I thought, 'Oh, my God, I'm playing a girl who's falling in love for the first time.'"

“I don't say the things I say for others, I say them because it's my truth. I try to live by two things. A, it's none of my business what other people think about me. And B, you do you, I'm gonna do me, each and every day.”

STARS AND STRIPES.

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Birthday
June 14, 2014



ENTERTAINMENT

'The Last Ship' star Eric Dane weighs in on charting life, career

BY LUANNE LEE
McClatchy-Tribune News Service

He's battled some turbulent seas, but actor Eric Dane is at last in command. Professionally and personally, he's overcome the odds, which he demonstrates as the captain of the lone Naval destroyer adrift in a world stricken by a deadly virus in TNT's new series "The Last Ship."

Dane confesses he harbors a "love-hate" relationship with acting. "When I love it, I love it more than anything," he says. "And when I'm not feeling it, I have a deep disdain for it. I don't know if I can articulate exactly why, but I think with anything there's a balance, and you can't have an intense amount of love for something if you don't have the polar opposite of that for it."

Dane struggled for several years doing roles in "Gideon's Crossing," "Charmed" and "X-Men: The Last Stand," until he suddenly caused cardiac arrest as Dr. Mark Sloan in "Grey's Anatomy." He was signed for one episode, which turned into 140.

But Dane suffered a rough start. He lost his dad at 7. "He was a Navy man and ended up becoming an architect and interior designer. He was a troubled soul," he says.

"He died of a gunshot wound. My grandmother thinks it was an accident. Everybody's got a different opinion on it. My mother raised two kids." When asked what his mother did for a living, he shrugs, "My grandparents were OK (financially)."

Now the parent of daughters, 2½ and 4, he says he understands what effect his father's death had on him. "I never realized how cognizant and aware I was at the time until I had my own kids, and I see how cogent Billie is at the age of 4 and think, 'My God, this must have been devastating at the age of 7.' The awareness that I would've had at that age must've been devastating."

At first, Dane had no intention of acting. "I was a water polo player in high school and my season was short, and I ended up getting roped into playing Joe Keller in 'All My Sons.' Dead serious. And I fell in love with it. I was, like, this is the greatest feeling ever!"

In fact, he dropped out of high school a month before graduation in San Mateo, Calif., to try his luck in L.A. "I nervously had 40 bucks in my pocket and took about three or four acting classes a week and tried to figure out what it was about this thing that I liked so much. I don't know if it was a result of the studying — the studying I think made things a bit more complicated for me. I think, for me, if I can dummy things down it's easier for me to wrap my head around it, because I have a tendency to complicate things."

Early on he did complicate things, he says. "I used to party a lot when I was a kid, and cleaned up my act when I was 26 years old and I stayed a real good boy for a real long time," he nods.

"I got into a lot of trouble. I don't have a (criminal) mug shot, but I used to play around with some pretty serious stuff. I've been in rehab a couple of times."

Like his character on "The Last Ship," who's searching the globe for a vaccine, Dane was in pursuit of a cure for



Eric Dane stars in the new TNT series "The Last Ship."

COURTESY OF TNT/MCT

MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus), when he was felled by the disease and hospitalized. Tethered to a Dilaudid drip, he became addicted to painkillers and found himself in rehab again.

"It was sort of a behavioral modification center; it wasn't a stereotypical rehab," he says. "It wasn't a fancy rehab. It was rough. Friends put me there. It was a pretty interesting experience."

Dane is married to actress Rebecca Gayheart. "The gutsiest thing I did was propose to my wife over dinner and jump in the car and fly to Vegas that night to get married," he says.

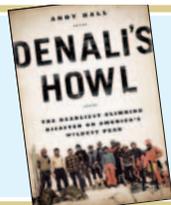
"I didn't want her to change her mind. Now that I've got her, 'Let's go,' she said yes, and she's been saying yes for the last nine years. She said, 'Yes,' and I said, 'Check. I love that woman.'"

Having his daughters has altered his perspective, he says. "Being a father changed the way I look at everything; the way I look at my work. There's a certain work ethic that comes along with being an actor, and there's a discipline that comes along with being an actor. It's not just sitting in front of a camera and saying lines... Every time I get maybe a little bogged down because of the process or the long hours, if I can't do it for myself, I can fall back on, 'I'm doing it for my kids,' and that carries me through."



TNT/MCT

Adam Baldwin, right, costars with Dane — the two are naval officers — on "The Last Ship."



In 1967, twelve young men set out to climb Alaska's Mount McKinley—known as Denali—one of the world's most popular and deadly mountaineering destinations. At nearly 20,000 feet, they endured winds of up to 300 miles an hour, freezing flesh solid in minutes. Only five survived.

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VIDEO GAMES



NINTENDO/EP

Mario and his buddies can grimace at each other as they pass, and employ many kart combinations such as the tire-glider, in "Mario Kart 8."

Driving off the wall 'Mario Kart 8' marks a high-definition return

By SAM LANEY
Stars and Stripes

The frantic and kinetic Mario Kart experience has always been a roller coaster of emotions. For every euphoric first-place finish, there are ever more struggles against last-minute red shells, banana peels that somehow anticipated your swerve and countless green shells mindlessly ricocheting off of weird angles to ruin your day. But with each new race, a blank slate. Time to forget and forgive.

The genius of "Mario Kart 8," a visually stunning high-definition iteration of the series for the Nintendo Wii U, is that it wipes away that last part. For the first time in the series, players can record and relive everything — from the miraculous 7th-to-1st-place recovery, to the agonizing 1st-to-4th-place defeat. You can even upload the videos to YouTube straight from the game, a way to forever remind friends of your complete blue-sparks dominance with a single link. Time to race with a vengeance.

And what a beautiful revenge it is. Like "Mario Galaxy" (an offshoot, but still) to really showcase

what the Wii U can do graphically. Unlike games such as "Pikmin 3" or "Super Mario 3D World," the perspective isn't contained to the immediate surroundings. In "Mario Kart 8," you can see far and wide: racers' faces turn to grimace as you pass, blimps high in the sky broadcast live streams of the race you're currently in, and track surfaces get smashed, twisted or bent as levels unfold during a race.

New tracks twist up into the sky, vibrant and highly detailed with neon colors and shiny metal surfaces. Older tracks are impressively remastered, with classics like Peach's Castle and Toad's Turnpike fully re-rendered and re-imagined with new paths and shortcuts. If all this sounds a little crazy, that's the idea. The tracks themselves are half the battle.

As wild a firecracker as the tracks are to race on, "Mario Kart 8's" major new mechanic, an anti-gravity mode, goes off like a dud. In anti-gravity areas, tires turn blue and players can glide up walls and ceilings. It

sounds daunting, but the player's perspective shifts along with the twist of the track, so you don't get disoriented during the race. Many times, it's only in the replay that you even realize you drove through an anti-gravity area. Once you're in one, anything you collide with actually gives a speed boost. This turns out to be a counterintuitive change, however, as players usually dodge each other because of the bevy of the items they're holding around them for defense.

Despite how fantastical these changes sound, when it comes to driving mechanics, "Mario Kart 8" is perhaps the softest iteration of the series. The rules are basically a mash-up of the previous two games, "Mario Kart Wii" and "Mario Kart 7." Collect coins, draft behind others and drift around corners for extra speed.

The hang-glider and jump-boost system from the 3DS iteration of the game also make a comeback. For the first time in more than a decade, players are limited to holding just one item at a time, but that is hardly a setback in a game as fast-paced as this. The few new items are very similar to old ones: a siren replaces the raccoon tail (but thankfully counters blue shells — a first for the se-

ries), a piranha plant replaces the chain chomp, and the Mario Kart 8 — an item that gives you eight swirling items at once — replaces the Mario Kart 7.

One pleasant surprise is the extent of the options away from the wheel. The game continues the kart customization of the last Mario Kart.

There are dozens, if not hundreds, of kart/bike/tire-glider combinations that change your driver's stats ever so slightly. The game also supports every conceivable control method for the Wii U — from classic controller to the vanilla Wii mote, as well as off-screen gaming on the Wii U's gamepad.

The game chugs along at a decent framerate in multiplayer, and allows up to four people to play in Grand Prix mode. Online mode allows only two players, but includes a ranking system and "tournament" mode for custom racing setups. Sadly, battle mode is just as lame as it's been for the past 15 years. For some reason, Nintendo just can't recapture the magic of battle mode from the SNES or N64 versions.

The best change by far is the ability to record the replay generated for every race. The game will automatically create high-

Overall grade: **B**

light reels that users can edit to focus on a particular player or type of mayhem. Better yet, players can reverse or fast-forward or slow down the action on a whim. It's a great way to mix up the action between races — or simply learn from your mistakes.

Though it takes a few minutes to upload, allowing players to share replays on YouTube is a great step forward into the social scene for a Nintendo game. Just a few weeks out, excellent Internet memes have cropped up due to this ability (just Google "Luigi death stare").

The addition of the replay is a stroke of genius akin to the Wii Sports or the 3DS' StreetPass functionality. It's just pure candy — easy to use and enjoyable to play around with.

Bottom line: B If you happened to miss out on either of the previous Mario Karts, this is a must-buy. It's the same old Mario Kart with a new shine, and that's never a bad thing.

Platform: Wii U
Online: mariokart8.nintendo.com



HEALTH & FITNESS



PHOTOS BY CARLINE JEAN, (FORT LAUDERDALE, FLA.) SUN SENTINEL/MCT

Cervifit creator Alan Philipson demonstrates how the device is used. Philipson developed the portable neck-strengthening device that some doctors say can make all the difference in preventing concussions and other injuries.

Don't put your neck on the line

Cervifit strengthening device aims to prevent concussions

By NICOLE BROCHU
(Fort Lauderdale, Fla.)
Sun Sentinel

Alan Philipson is tackling the problem of head injuries from a different angle — by working out the neck.

Influenced by studies showing a link between concussions and neck strength, the entrepreneur has created the Cervifit, a portable device that uses small weights to build up neck muscles.

Made of tough ABS plastic, the Cervifit works as a fulcrum, with a set of small, 4- and 5-pound iron weights stacked at the top.

Strapped to the head, it creates up to 40 pounds of resistance when the wearer performs a series of neck lifts and other exercises.

Among its first clients: Fort Lauderdale racecar driver Ryan Hunter-Reay, who won his first Indianapolis 500 in May.

"I think it definitely has a lot of potential. With G-forces up to four times (normal weight) in an Indy car on turns, it definitely helped strengthen my neck," said Hunter-Reay, adding that he used the Cervifit to prepare for this spring's Indy season.

NFL agent Jonathan Kline, based in southern Florida, said he saw such potential in the Cer-



Cervifit creator Alan Philipson, top left, helps Rodney Lamar, a football player at Northern Michigan University, use the device. In addition to neck strengthening, Cervifit, above, is also recommended for improving balance and treating head and neck pain.



vifit that he ordered eight devices to give to player clients, including Willie Snead, who just signed with the Cleveland Browns, and Derrick Strozler, who joined the New Orleans Saints this month. A local high school football coach ordered six for his football team after seeing one of his players — the son of Philipson's girlfriend — using a prototype during workouts, Philipson said.

"The concussion issue is a huge issue in the NFL, and at all levels of football," Kline said, adding that "if my guys like it, a couple use it and achieve some level of success with it," it could catch on with "everyone, who worries about concussions."

Philipson created the Cervifit — now available to the general public for \$129.99 at a2fit.com — out of a longtime fascination with medical devices. A walk-on full-back for Florida State University in 1989, he suffered two concussions during his youth, he said.

He began playing with the Cervifit concept as a marketing project while pursuing his master's in business administration. A fitness buff who worked as a personal trainer while making his way through school, Philipson said he realized there was no portable, affordable equipment to help those wanting to strengthen their neck muscles, outside of weight machines found in gyms.

With a \$75,000 investment from Philipson's mother, the Cervifit was patented and went into production in November, he said.

Though he has no medical training, Philipson's first flirtation with innovation came when he designed a double-cuff exercise device that worked out the injured and dominant limbs simultaneously, to reduce overcompensation. Called the Aztec, the device was patented but never went to market.

"I've always had an inventive side of me," said Philipson, whose father holds a number of product patents. "I think it's just in my DNA."

The device is not just for football players or racecar drivers negotiating G-force turns. Two Florida doctors who advised Philipson on the Cervifit are also recommending it to patients to improve balance, prevent falls and treat head and neck pain.

"For me, it's a nice, non-medical way to help patients with chronic neck pain," as well as those suffering migraines or hoping to avoid a repeat concussion, said Dr. Jeffrey Steinberg, a neurologist who helped Philipson and his company, Anatomical Archi-

facts, fine-tune the Cervifit.

Biomechanics experts have long zeroed in on the neck's implication in head injuries, theorizing that girl soccer and lacrosse players suffer more concussions than boys because of inferior neck strength. Last year, a Colorado School of Public Health study bolstered that idea, finding that of 6,704 young athletes followed during the 2010-11 and 2011-12 academic years, those who suffered concussions were more likely to have a smaller neck circumference, less overall neck strength and a smaller neck-to-head ratio.

The theory goes that the neck acts as a shock absorber of sorts for the head. The stronger the neck, the better it can control the head in abrupt movements and prevent the brain from sloshing around in the skull, a violent force that causes concussions.

One independent expert agrees the concept "makes sense," given the body of research on concussions and neck strength. He noted, however, that there are no empirical studies that take the theory a step further to show neck-strengthening devices — or even helmets, for that matter — reduce concussions.

"Strengthening the neck in contact sports is a great idea," said Dr. Evan Peck, a sports medicine physician at Cleveland Clinic Florida, declining to comment specifically on the Cervifit because he was unfamiliar with the device. "But I don't know if we can make the leap yet that it prevents concussions."

Because the device is still new, extensive research has not yet been conducted on its effectiveness. One is planned in the next six months. In the meantime, it is advised that anyone using the device should be trained on its proper, safe use by an experienced professional such as a doctor or personal trainer.

The Cervifit works as a fulcrum, with a set of small, 4- and 5-pound iron weights stacked at the top. Strapped to the head, it creates up to 40 pounds of resistance when the wearer performs a series of neck lifts and other exercises.

MUSIC



Jack White
Courtesy of Nasty Little Man.

JACK WHITE WITH A TWANG

Consider the wonder and magic of conjuring a song from the ether: Creating from a mix of oxygen, blood, water and energy a few minutes of something real, something melodically memorable, something as durable as the architecture surrounding us and the technology enveloping us.

"Temporary Ground," off Jack White's new solo album, "Lazaretto," is an insta-classic ode to the fleeting beauty of life, delivered through fiddle, acoustic guitar, piano, pedal steel, voice and heart. It opens with a couplet that with precision and poeicism describes the earth and the "drifting continental shelf" upon which we toil.

"On a floating lily island / Moving over slowly sideways / Rest the temporary / creatures / Spending all their days." A meditation on impermanence, not long ago the song was a bud hidden within a spring-time branch. Now it's hard to imagine the world without it.

The same could be said of "Lazaretto," a confident, brash, inventive collection featuring songs that lock into the psyche after only a few listens, the White-produced creation is lyrically and musically challenging and filled with many fresh avenues of exploration, even as it nods to key tones and ideas from throughout the history of pre-rap American music.

"Lazaretto" is the closest thing to a pure Nashville record that White's ever done, accomplished in large part by harnessing the talent of a few female foils in the artist's creative life: fiddle player and vocalist Lillie Mae Rische, whose instrument adds delicate melodic texture, and background singer Ruby Amanfu, a member of the all-female band the Peacocks that often backs White on tour and on half of "Lazaretto."

On "Alone in My Home," a piano-driven ode to the allure of the hermetic life, Rische echoes White every second line, creating this beautiful counterpoint momentum pushed along by rhythm and a hard melody. "All alone in my home nobody can touch me," he sings, thematically echoing Alex Chilton's great "Big Black Car" on the numbing joys of isolation.

Each measure on "Lazaretto," in fact, could be footnoted: here an ascendant melody that kinda-sorta sounds like the Rolling Stones' "She's So Cold," there a belting-out of "Lawdy lawd!" stolen from Blind Willie McTell's "Broke Down Engine Blues."

The album's opening measures feel more like a "Maggot Brain"-era Funkadelic jam than a Jimmy Page-inspired rock riff.

On "Just One Drink," White alludes to unsung hero of proto-rock 'n' roll Rick McGehee with the line "you bust your lip on my wine spodie-odie." Echoes of Ry Cooder's wicked guitar playing for Captain Beefheart permeate "Lazaretto," while enough ivy of the Nashville sound twines around verses to confirm that the ideas of his adopted home continue to exert their influence.

"Lazaretto" is at times explosive, pensive and defiant. White sings of three different women to open, "red, blonde and brunet," celebrating and pondering single life minus any weak-kneed apologies. "I'm lonely at night, but I stay up until the break of day," he sings, bragging like How-



Jack White
Lazaretto (Third Man)

lin' Wolf before turning inward: "How come I gotta have these women to chase my blues away?" Later in the song he responds to would-be critics: "Well these women must be getting something / Because they come see me every night."

Such geeky academia,

though, diminishes the central success of "Lazaretto," which is that it's a hell of a lot of fun to listen to. The instrumental "High Ball Stepper" is a raucous work tailor-made for live performance featuring a wild White siren-scream and a stop-start rhythm suggesting the spirit of the Surfaris' "Wipe Out."

"That Black Bat Licorice" daringly rhymes the phrase "black castrum doloris" with "Nietzsche, Freud and Horus" to open, and then dives into a weird internal world featuring references to the Christian comic tracts of Jack Chick, a "wit of the staircase with atomic clock precision" and a closing couplet that rhymes TV detective Columbo with Walt Disney's flying elephant Dumbo.

"Want and Able" closes the record. The second part of a three-song narrative that began with the White Stripes song "Effect and Cause" from "Lucky Thump," it features the artist on guitar and piano and is the sparsest of the 11 songs. Opening with the caw of crows and the hiss of a weathered LP, the song's a parable that pits desire against action: "Like I want to see you, lie next to you / And touch you in my dreams / But that's not possible / Something simply will not let me be."

It's not the best lyric on "Lazaretto," but that's all relative. Out of all that mess combined, all those wildly divergent but logically connected sounds live so many sticky moments even the lesser ones will endure as part of this confident whole.

—Randall Roberts
Los Angeles Times

KNOWLEDGE

IS POWER.

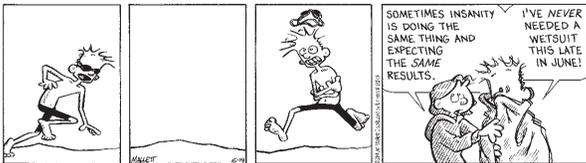


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Frazz



Dilbert



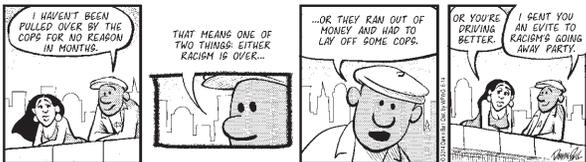
Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



Candorville



Get Fuzzy



Doonesbury



Fort Knox



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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ACROSS

- 1 Take to the floor
- 6 "Loves me (not)" determinat
- 11 One-dimensional
- 12 Critter
- 14 Cameron movie
- 15 Turnip look-alike
- 16 Auction action
- 17 Wanderer
- 19 Sharp turn
- 20 Pindaric pieces
- 22 Hasty escape
- 23 Recent (Prof.)
- 24 Send money
- 26 Eastern temples
- 28 Meadow
- 30 Weep loudly
- 31 Ornamental flower
- 35 Lawn
- 39 Mars' counterpart
- 40 Roulette bet
- 42 Car
- 43 Sun Yat—
- 44 "Barnaby Jones" star
- 46 Jockey Turcotte
- 47 Weakness cause
- 49 Greeting the villain
- 51 Affectionate
- 52 Stoves

DOWN

- 53 Grows
- 54 Winning
- 25 X rating?
- 27 — and Magog
- 29 Car-safety devices
- 31 — metabolism
- 32 Earlier
- 33 Swiss metropolis
- 34 DDE opponent
- 35 Morris or Flynn
- 36 Charioteer constellation
- 37 Thru rocks at
- 38 Crooner's repertoire
- 41 Winger or Messing
- 44 "— Kleine Nachtmusik"
- 45 2014 Crows role
- 48 Blend
- 50 Inseparable

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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| V | O | C | A | L | P | A | W | O | W | E |
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6-14

CRYPTOQUIP

B T F W I L E W B Y X B N B M B A Y
 A T Y F R D A Q U I B V D L W X W Y
 W Y B E W J J F W X F Q , R A C J X

V L F D G F V L F T B N F G C Q Q A M ?
 Yesterday's Cryptquip: I'D VENTURE TO SAY THAT YOUNG BROTHER AND SISTER TREES PROBABLY HAVE A SAPLING RIVALRY.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: T equals F

COLLEGE WORLD SERIES/SPORTS BRIEFS



GERALD HENBERT/AP

If anyone has a chance to hit a home run out of cavernous TD Ameritrade Park, it's Mississippi infielder Sikes Orvis, center. Orvis hit 14 of his career 18 home runs with the Rebels this season.

10 things to know

No clear favorite in Omaha

No. 3 Virginia, No. 7 TCU only national seeds remaining

By ERIC OLSON
The Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — The College World Series begins Saturday, and predicting a winner is as hard as hitting a ball out of the cavernous TD Ameritrade Park.

Of the eight teams that made it to Omaha, only No. 3 Virginia and No. 7 TCU are national seeds. UC Irvine and Texas Tech are the surprise teams that undoubtedly will be favorites of the local fans who love to cheer for underdogs. Here are 10 things to know as you try to figure out which two teams will make it to the finals:

1 Bravo, Big 12: Three of the Big 12's nine baseball-playing members reached the CWS. Texas is in Bracket 1 and Texas Tech and TCU, which meet Sunday, are in Bracket 2. The only other year the Big 12 had three teams in the CWS was 2005 (Baylor, Nebraska, Texas). It's the first time the Lone Star State has had three teams in Omaha in the same year.

2 Homer haven't it's not: If you and your buddy are making a friendly bet on the number of CWS home runs, take the "under" if the over-under is set in double digits. Only 22 have been hit in three years at TD Ameritrade, including three in 2013, and no one has cleared the fence in center field.

3 If the ball does go out: Mississippi appears to be the team best-suited to knock it out of the park. The Rebels have hit six homers in six NCAA tournament games, and their total of 42 is the most among CWS teams. Junior first baseman Sikes Orvis has hit 14 of his 18 career homers for the Rebels this season. UC Irvine, on the other hand, has gone deep just 12 times.

4 Yes, that's Roger's kid: Kacy Clemens, son of seven-time Cy Young Award winner Roger Clemens, is Texas' starting first baseman. The freshman is batting .220 with one homer and 18 RBIs. He wears No. 42, double the now-retired No. 21 his dad wore for the Longhorns when they won the 1983 national championship.

5 Yes, that's Calvin's kid: Lukas Schiraldi, son of former big-league pitcher Calvin Schiraldi, is in the rotation for Texas. Calvin was the Most Outstanding Player of the 1983 CWS

and was teammates with Roger Clemens, not just at Texas but with the 1986 Boston Red Sox. Calvin was the hard-luck loser against the New York Mets in Games 6 and 7 of the '86 World Series. Lukas, drafted in the 15th round by the Texas Rangers, is 7-3 with a 4.08 ERA.

6 Future pros: The highest draft pick in Omaha is Vanderbilt pitcher Tyler Beede, who went 14th overall to the Giants. Beede had a school-record 14 wins last year but enters the CWS 8-7 with a 3.58 ERA. Other first-rounders are pitchers Brandon Finnegan of TCU (17th, Royals) and Nick Howard of Virginia (19th, Reds).

7 Welcome back, Coach: If Virginia coach Brian O'Connor feels at home at the CWS, it's not just because it's his third appearance in six years. He grew up in neighboring Council Bluffs, Iowa, and went to college a few blocks away at Creighton. O'Connor pitched on CU's 1991 CWS team, and he was an assistant on Notre Dame's 2002 team that reached Omaha.

8 Redemption tour: Louisville, the only returning team from 2013, hopes to leave town in better spirits this time. The Cardinals went two-and-out a year ago, losing 2-0 to Indiana and falling behind 10-0 on their way to an 11-4, four-error loss to Oregon State.

9 Red Raiders strong-armed: The pitchers deserve lots of credit for leading Texas Tech to its first CWS. In six NCAA tournament games, the Red Raiders have scored a total of nine runs and are batting .208 with one homer. Seven pitchers, however, have combined for an 0.65 ERA in 55 innings, with opponents batting .166.

10 Been there, done that: Two members of the UC Irvine coaching staff were on the 2007 CWS team that infested Omaha with "Anteater Fever" by winning two extra-inning games in final at-bats. Pitching coach Daniel Bibona was a freshman on that team who was Big West pitcher of the year in 2009 and '10. Assistant Ben Orloff was a sophomore shortstop who was 2009 Big West player of the year.

Briefly

Hoyer 'securely' ahead of Manziel

Wire reports

BEREA, Ohio — Browns coach Mike Pettine says Brian Hoyer is "securely ahead" in the quarterback competition, but his lead over Johnny Manziel isn't "insurmountable."

Manziel, the 2012 Heisman Trophy winner from Texas A&M, was drafted in the first round by Cleveland. Pettine, however, says Hoyer is the starter entering next month's training camp. Manziel has shown progress but is still learning the playbook.

Pettine says it's difficult to completely assess Hoyer, who has been kept out of 11-on-11 drills as a precaution while he recovers from offseason knee surgery.

The coaching staff has been judging the two quarterbacks during practice, but Pettine says "at this point, we really weren't keeping score. We'll be much more apt to do that once we get to training camp."

In other NFL news: ■ Oakland Raiders running back Maurice Jones-Drew is being sued in Florida, accused of punching a bouncer at a St. Augustine restaurant.

The suit was electronically filed May 30 in St. Johns County.

Bouncer Kasim Howard is suing Jones-Drew, saying the former Jacksonville Jaguars star punched him May 26, 2013, at the Punch House Restaurant. Howard accuses Jones-Drew of intentionally causing injury and emotional distress. Howard is seeking a judgment for injury resulting in "pain and suffering, loss of capacity for enjoyment of life, expense of hospitalization, medical expenses (past and future), inability to perform his work as a professional boxer, mental and emotional pain, humiliation, inconvenience, lost wages, legal expenses and other general and specific damages."

Testimony focuses on NCAA athletes' rights

OAKLAND, Calif. — As the antitrust trial against the NCAA wore into its fourth day Thursday, dueling experts disagreed on whether student-athletes have a legal right to be paid for their names, images and likenesses being used in live telecasts of college games.

A key issue is whether such so-called NIL rights even exist for purposes of live broadcasts.

The NCAA's legal expert, consultant and former CBS Sports president Neal Pilson, said that while "name, image and likeness is a term that at times is included in contractual language, in his experience it was never valued separately, and in negotiating billions of dollars in broadcast deals he never heard specific discussion of whether rights of individual athletes — amateur or professional — had been obtained." Pilson also testified that the be-



MARK DUNCAN/AP

Cleveland head coach Mike Pettine says quarterback Brian Hoyer is "securely ahead" of rookie Johnny Manziel, pictured, in the Browns' QB competition.

lieves college sports would lose public support if athletes were paid.

During cross-examination, Pilson was shown a 2011 email from former longtime NCAA policy adviser Wally Renfro to incoming President Mark Emmert that wrestled with the rising perception of "commercial exploitation" by the 108-year-old association.

"It's a fairness issue and along with the notion that athletes are students is the great hypocrisy of intercollegiate athletics," Renfro wrote.

Asked whether that assessment changed his view of student-athletes playing for the love of the sport and as a result winning admiration from the viewing public, Pilson said no.

"Maybe I'm naive, but I still believe — notwithstanding Mr. Renfro — that the public has a different view of student athletes," Pilson said, "and that if we go down the road of paying student-athletes all will be lost."

The antitrust trial is being heard without a jury.

Source: Donald Sterling hires investigators

LOS ANGELES — A person with knowledge of Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling's legal strategy says his team of lawyers has hired four private investigation firms to dig up dirt on the NBA's former and current commissioners and its 29 owners.

The individual, who wasn't authorized to talk publicly, says investigators were given a six-figure budget over the next 30 days to examine the league's finances, allegations of previous discriminatory conduct and compensation to past commissioner David Stern and current commissioner Adam Silver. They're also looking into whether other owners ever made any off-color jokes, or racist or sexist remarks.

MLB SCOREBOARD

American League

Table with columns: Team, East Division (W, L, Pct, GB), Central Division (W, L, Pct, GB), West Division (W, L, Pct, GB). Rows include Toronto, Baltimore, New York, Boston, Tampa Bay, Detroit, Kansas City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Minnesota, Oakland, Los Angeles, Seattle, Texas, Houston.

National League

Table with columns: Team, East Division (W, L, Pct, GB), Central Division (W, L, Pct, GB), West Division (W, L, Pct, GB). Rows include Washington, Tampa Bay, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Colorado, San Diego, Houston.

Thursday's games

Table listing Thursday's games with columns: Home Team, Visitor, Score, Innings.

Friday's games

Table listing Friday's games with columns: Home Team, Visitor, Score, Innings.



Reds' shortstop Zack Cozart, left, tags out the Los Angeles Dodgers' Yasiel Puig as he tries to steal second base during the fifth inning of Thursday's game in Cincinnati.

Reds 4, Dodgers 1

Scoreboard for Reds 4, Dodgers 1. Includes batting order, pitching stats, and fielding notes.

Rockies 10, Braves 3

Scoreboard for Rockies 10, Braves 3. Includes batting order, pitching stats, and fielding notes.

Pirates 4, Cubs 0

Scoreboard for Pirates 4, Cubs 0. Includes batting order, pitching stats, and fielding notes.

Brewers 5, Mets 1 (13)

Scoreboard for Brewers 5, Mets 1 (13). Includes batting order, pitching stats, and fielding notes.

Astros 5, Diamondbacks 4 (10)

Scoreboard for Astros 5, Diamondbacks 4 (10). Includes batting order, pitching stats, and fielding notes.

Phillies 7, Padres 3

Scoreboard for Phillies 7, Padres 3. Includes batting order, pitching stats, and fielding notes.

Thursday Tigers 4, White Sox 0

Scoreboard for Thursday Tigers 4, White Sox 0. Includes batting order, pitching stats, and fielding notes.

Red Sox 5, Indians 2

Scoreboard for Red Sox 5, Indians 2. Includes batting order, pitching stats, and fielding notes.

Yankees 6, Mariners 3

Scoreboard for Yankees 6, Mariners 3. Includes batting order, pitching stats, and fielding notes.

Giants 7, Nationals 1

Scoreboard for Giants 7, Nationals 1. Includes batting order, pitching stats, and fielding notes.

Orioles 4, Blue Jays 2

Scoreboard for Orioles 4, Blue Jays 2. Includes batting order, pitching stats, and fielding notes.

T-252, A-20,626 (40,615).

T-259, A-17,403 (45,971).

MLB

NL roundup

Rockies batter Braves, Laird as tempers flair

The Associated Press

DENVER — Corey Dickerson hit Atlanta catcher Gerald Laird with his backswing and tempers quickly flared, setting off a tense sequence and leading to several ejections Thursday as the Colorado Rockies beat the Braves 10-3.

The Rockies led 8-3 in the eighth inning when Dickerson knocked off Laird's facemask with his swing — Dickerson said it was an accident.

Laird was down for several minutes before walking off and being replaced by Evan Gattis. With his next pitch, Atlanta reliever David Carpenter hit Dickerson in the thigh and was ejected.

Rockies manager Walt Weiss bolted from the dugout and began yelling at Carpenter, as well as in the general direction of Braves manager Fredi Gonzalez.

Weiss was held back by plate umpire Jordan Baker before being ejected. When he returned to the dugout, Weiss smashed a bat against the wall.

In the ninth, Rockies reliever Nick Masser hit Gattis in the hip with a pitch. Both Masser and Rockies bench coach Tom Runnels were immediately tossed.

Jhoulys Chacin (1-4) pitched seven scoreless innings. Ervin Santana (5-3) took the loss.

Giants 7, Nationals 1: Tim Hudson threw seven strong innings and left with a major league-best 1.81 ERA as host San Francisco avoided a four-game sweep and beat Washington.

Michael Morse got three hits and scored twice for the Giants, who had a five-game winning streak before Washington came to town. The Nationals have lost



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Braves catcher Gerald Laird, left, gets hit in the face by the bat of Colorado's Corey Dickerson in the eighth inning of the Rockies' 10-3 victory in Denver on Thursday. Laird had to leave the game and the play was the catalyst for the ejection of Rockies manager Walt Weiss, who argued after Dickerson was hit by the next pitch thrown by Braves relief pitcher David Carpenter.

just twice in 10 games.

Hudson (7-2) allowed one unearned run and six hits. The Giants are 7-0 in games he has started at home.

Reds 4, Dodgers 1: Todd Frazier hit a two-run homer off Zack Greinke, who lost his perfect record at Great American Ball

Park, and Cincinnati beat Los Angeles for a split of their four-game series.

The Reds won the last two games to finish a 5-5 homestand that left them stuck closer to the bottom of the NL Central than the top.

Alfredo Simon (9-3) gave up

seven singles in eight innings, joining the Cardinals' Adam Wainwright as the NL's nine-game winners.

Phillies 7, Padres 3: Pinch-hitter Reid Brignac lined a tie-breaking, two-run double in the sixth inning. John Mayberry Jr. hit a three-run homer and host

Philadelphia beat San Diego in a steady rain to complete a three-game sweep.

Brignac, whose three-run homer in the ninth gave the Phillies a 3-0 victory a night earlier, hit a drive off Dale Thayer for a 4-2 lead.

Mayberry connected an inning later off Alex Torres. Making a spot start for Ryan Howard, Mayberry also doubled twice.

Brewers 5, Mets 1 (13): Jonathan Lucroy hit a tiebreaking homer in a four-run 13th inning for visiting Milwaukee in a game that had an unusual rain delay that lasted all of 3 minutes.

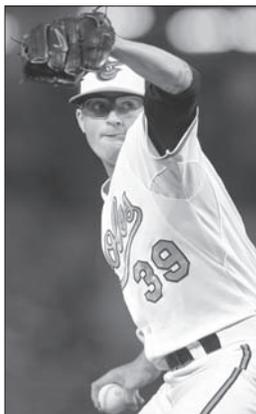
Aramis Ramirez homered and finished with three hits for the Brewers (40-27) who completed a 5-3 road trip with their 10th victory in 15 games overall, matching a season high at 13 games above .500.

The Mets stranded seven runners from the ninth through the 11th and blew a bases-loaded opportunity with a chance to win. They lost for the eighth time in nine games and fell a season-worst eight games under .500 at 29-37.

Pirates 4, Cubs 0: Andrew McCutchen had two doubles and two RBIs to help host Pittsburgh beat Chicago.

Russell Martin also doubled twice for the Pirates and rookie Gregory Polanco got a hit in the third straight game since his call-up. Edinson Volquez (4-5) pitched seven innings to win for the third time in his last five starts.

McCutchen, the reigning National League MVP, broke it open with a two-run double in the fifth off Jeff Samardzija (2-6). McCutchen is batting .428 (18-for-42) with 15 extra-base hits in June.



PATRICK SEMANSKI/AP

Orioles starting pitcher Kevin Gausman was sharp in a win over the Blue Jays on Thursday in Baltimore.

AL roundup

Orioles pick up game on Blue Jays

The Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Kevin Gausman gave up one run over six innings and Delmon Young homered for Baltimore in a 4-2 victory over division rival Toronto.

Nick Markakis had two hits and an RBI for the Orioles, who moved within 3½ games of first-place Toronto in the AL East.

Gausman (2-1) allowed five hits, walked three and struck out three in his second consecutive solid outing.

Zach Britton worked the ninth for his sixth save.

Mark Buehrle (10-3) yielded four runs and eight hits in 6½ innings to lose his second straight start following a six-game winning streak. The left-hander allowed three runs or fewer in 12 of his previous 13 starts.

Toronto has lost three straight.

Tigers 4, White Sox 0: Max Scherzer tossed a three-hitter in his first career complete game, and Victor Martinez hit his 16th homer to lead visiting Detroit.

Scherzer (8-2) was back in his 2013 Cy

Young form, striking out eight and walking three while outdueling Chicago starter Chris Sale (5-1). Only three times did the White Sox have men in scoring position.

Sale was nearly as sharp as Scherzer. He struck out 10 — all swinging — to match a season high and allowed five hits in seven innings.

Martinez hit a solo shot into the left-field bullpen to lead off the fifth and Miguel Cabrera drove in two runs for Detroit. Bryan Holiday drove in an insurance run in the ninth.

Red Sox 5, Indians 2: Jon Lester worked into the eighth inning and David Ortiz hit a two-run homer to lead struggling host Boston.

Brock Holt hit a two-run double and Daniel Nava had three hits as the Red Sox won for just the third time in their last 10 games, a dismal stretch that began with a three-game sweep by the Indians last week.

Coming off his shortest start of the season, Lester (7-7) allowed two runs — one earned — on eight hits and a walk with

four strikeouts in 7½ innings.

Koji Uehara pitched a perfect ninth for his 14th save.

Yankees 6, Mariners 3: Derek Jeter had a memorable final regular-season appearance in Seattle with three hits, two runs scored and two RBIs, and New York completed its first three-game sweep of the season.

Jeter was honored by the Mariners before the start of the series, then helped jump start the Yankees. Jeter had a singles in his first two at-bats off Seattle starter Roenis Elias (5-5), then greeted reliever Dominic Leone with a two-run single in the fourth that gave the Yankees a 6-1 lead.

Jeter finished the series with seven hits.

Interleague

Astros 5, Diamondbacks 4 (10): Chris Carter homered leading off the bottom of the 10th inning for host Houston.

Carter, who homered twice on Wednesday, hit his 13th homer of the season into the Crawford Boxes in left field off J.J. Putz (1-1).

STANLEY CUP FINALS/AUTO RACING



BRUCE BENNETT/AP

New York Rangers center Derek Stepan (21) reaches to move the puck away from the goal line during the third period of Game 4 of the Stanley Cup finals Wednesday in New York.

Stepan's save crucial for Rangers to avoid sweep

By GREG BEACHAM
The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES Although Derek Stepan's goal-line save happened in a frantic blur, the New York Rangers center had a few chances to marvel at the replay in the ensuing 24 hours.

"And I was looking right into the camera when they took it," he said Thursday, laughing about the inside-the-net camera that captured him knocking the puck underneath Henrik Lundqvist. "So it was good timing."

Everything about Stepan's heady play was perfectly timed, but he politely declined credit for saving the Rangers' season in Game 4 of the Stanley Cup finals. He's just glad he helped to prevent a possible sweep by the Los Angeles Kings, who could have tied the game and likely forced overtime with the goal.

The Rangers survived for another trip to Staples Center and Game 5 on Friday night with major help from two fantastic plays by Stepan and defenseman Anton Stralman, who knocked another puck off the line in the first period of Game 4.

Stepan came through with 1:11 left while the Kings pressed desperately for an equalizer. After the puck trickled underneath Lundqvist and came to rest on the goal line, Stepan dived with his knees, knocking it away and then underneath his goalie.

"Most of it is just reaction," Stepan said. "You don't have

NHL scoreboard

Stanley Cup finals

(Best-of-seven; x-if necessary)
Los Angeles 3, N.Y. Rangers 1
Los Angeles 3, N.Y. Rangers 2, OT
Los Angeles 3, N.Y. Rangers 4, OT
N.Y. Rangers 2, Los Angeles 1
Fridays at Los Angeles
x-Monday; at NY Rangers
x-Wednesday; at Los Angeles



Stanley Cup finals
Game 6, if necessary
Los Angeles at N.Y. Rangers
AFN-Sports
2 a.m. Tuesday CET

much time to think in a situation like that. It's just instinct and reaction."

Stepan even had the wherewithal to use the side of his glove so he wouldn't close his hand on the puck in the crease, which would have resulted in a penalty shot.

"It was a fortunate bounce for us," Stepan said. "I got very lucky pushing it under the goaltender. A lot of times, you push it into the back of your goalie, or you push it to one of their guys."

Dan Girardi also deserved credit for knocking Anze Kopitar out of the play and preventing the Kings' leading scorer from get-

ting a rebound opportunity. The Kings actually weren't near the motionless puck until Jeff Carter took a belated hack at it, but Stepan took care of it.

Stralman made an equally astonishing play in the first period, sweeping a stopped puck off the goal line with his stick while simultaneously preventing Carter from jabbing it home.

Lundqvist made 40 saves in Game 4, but relied on his teammates for two more. After three games of bad bounces and late-game struggles, the Rangers got most of the breaks.

"A couple of times (Wednesday) night, we had that luck that you need in a tight game," Lundqvist said. "Sometimes you say it (and) maybe not mean it 100 percent, but that factor of luck in a series against a good team, you're going to need it to win games. You can't rely on it all the time, but there are moments in games where the difference is so small, that little extra push might help you to get the win."

A few optimistic Rangers fans jumped onto Twitter after Game 4 and compared Stepan's play to Dave Roberts' steal of third base for the Boston Red Sox in the ninth inning of Game 4 of the 2004 ALCS, catalyzing their comeback from an 0-3 series deficit to the New York Yankees.

Stepan knows this optimism is a week premature. The Rangers would have to win four straight games to become the fourth team in NHL history to rally from an 0-3 deficit — just the second in the finals.

Around the track

SPRINT CUP

This week: Quicken Loans 400 at Brooklyn, Mich.

TV: AFN-Xtra, 7 p.m. Sunday, Central European Time.

Track: Michigan International Speedway (oval, 2.0 miles).

Race distance: 400 miles, 200 laps.

Last year: Greg Biffle raced to his second straight Michigan victory, holding off Kevin Harvick after Jimmie Johnson hit the wall in the final laps.

Last week: Dale Earnhardt Jr. won at Pocono for his second victory of the year. Brad Keselowski was second.

Next race: Toyota-Save Mart 350, June 22, Sonoma Raceway, Sonoma, Calif.

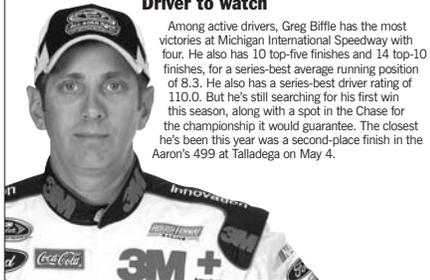
Online: nascar.com

Driver standings

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| 1. Jeff Gordon | 498 |
| 2. Matt Kenseth | 482 |
| 3. Dale Earnhardt Jr. | 476 |
| 4. Jimmie Johnson | 475 |
| 5. Brad Keselowski | 448 |
| 6. Kyle Busch | 448 |
| 7. Carl Edwards | 441 |
| 8. Denny Hamlin | 420 |
| 9. Joey Logano | 418 |
| 10. Kyle Larson | 417 |
| 11. Ryan Newman | 411 |
| 12. Kevin Harvick | 403 |
| 13. Brian Vickers | 392 |
| 14. Greg Biffle | 385 |
| 15. Austin Dillon | 385 |
| 16. Clint Bowyer | 383 |
| 17. Paul Menard | 380 |
| 18. Tony Stewart | 368 |
| 19. Aric Almirola | 366 |
| 20. AJ Allmendinger | 360 |

Driver to watch

Among active drivers, Greg Biffle has the most victories at Michigan International Speedway with four. He also has 10 top-five finishes and 14 top-10 finishes, for a series-best average running position of 8.3. He also has a series-best driver rating of 110.0. But he's still searching for his first win this season, along with a spot in the Chase for the championship it would guarantee. The closest he's been this year was a second-place finish in the Aaron's 499 at Talladega on May 4.



CAMPING WORLD TRUCK

This week: Drivin' for Linemen 200 at Madison, Ill.

Track: Daytona Motorsports Park (oval, 1.25 miles).

Race distance: 200 miles, 160 laps.

Last year: Inaugural race.

Last week: Matt Crafton raced to his second victory of the season, running the final 61 laps at Texas Motor Speedway on one tank of fuel.

Next race: UNOH 225, June 26, Kentucky Speedway, Sparta, Ky.

Online: nascar.com

VERIZON INDYCAR

Next races: Grand Prix of Houston, June 23 and 29, Streets of Houston, Houston.

Last week: Owner-driver Ed Carpenter won at Texas Motor Speedway, holding off Team Penske's Will Power in a two-lap shootout.

Online: indycar.com

NHRA MELLO YELLO DRAG RACING

This week: Thunder Valley Nationals at Bristol, Tenn.

TV: AFN-Xtra, 5 a.m. Monday, Central European Time.

Track: Bristol Dragway.

Last year: John Force raced to the first of his four 2013 victories en route to a record 16th season title. Steve Torrence won in Top Fuel, and Rodger Brodgin in Pro Stock.

Last event: Australia's Richie Crampston won the Summernationals on June 1 in Englishtown, N.J., for his first Top Fuel victory. Cruz Pedregon won in Funny Car, Jeg Coughlin in Pro Stock, and Andrew Hines in Pro Stock Motorcycle.

Next event: New England Nationals, June 19-22, New England Dragway and Motorsports Park, Epping, N.H.

Online: nhra.com

OTHER SERIES

WORLD OF OUTLAWS

Sprint Car: Friday, Jackson Speedway, Jackson, Minnesota; Saturday, Knoxville Raceway, Knoxville, Iowa.

Online: worldofoutlaws.com

Series capsules
by The Associated Press

FORMULA ONE

Next race: Austrian Grand Prix, June 22, Red Bull Ring, Spielberg, Austria.

Last week: Red Bull's Daniel Ricciardo won the Canadian Grand Prix for his first F1 victory, ending Mercedes' season-opening winning streak at six.

Online: formula1.com

WORLD CUP

Scoreboard

| First round | | | | | | At Belo Horizonte, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|----|----|-----|----------------------------------|---|---|----|----|-----|---------|---------------|---|----|----|-----|---|---|---|----|----|-----|---|
| GROUP A | | | | | | GROUP E | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | L | T | GF | GA | Pts | W | L | T | GF | GA | Pts | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Brazil | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | Ecuador | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cameroun | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | France | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mexico | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Honduras | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Croatia | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 | Switzerland | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Thursday, June 12 | | | | | | Sunday, June 15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Sao Paulo | | | | | | At Brasilia, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Brazil 3, Croatia 1 | | | | | | Switzerland vs. Ecuador | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Natal, Brazil | | | | | | At Porto Alegre, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mexico vs. Cameroon | | | | | | France vs. Honduras | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Tuesday, June 17 | | | | | | At Salvador, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Fortaleza, Brazil | | | | | | Switzerland vs. Ecuador | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Brazil vs. Mexico | | | | | | At Curitiba, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Wednesday, June 18 | | | | | | Ecuador vs. Honduras | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Manaus, Brazil | | | | | | Wednesday, June 25 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Croatia vs. Cameroon | | | | | | At Manaus, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Monday, June 23 | | | | | | Switzerland vs. Honduras | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Brasilia, Brazil | | | | | | At Rio de Janeiro | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Brazil vs. Cameroon | | | | | | Ecuador vs. France | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Recife, Brazil | | | | | | GROUP F | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Croatia vs. Mexico | | | | | | Argentina | | | | | | W | L | T | GF | GA | Pts | | | | | | | |
| GROUP B | | | | | | Bosnia-Herzegovina | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | |
| Australia | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Chile | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Netherlands | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Spain | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Friday, June 13 | | | | | | Sunday, June 15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Salvador, Brazil | | | | | | At Rio de Janeiro | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Culaba, Brazil | | | | | | Argentina vs. Bosnia-Herzegovina | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Chile vs. Australia | | | | | | Monday, June 16 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Wednesday, June 18 | | | | | | At Curitiba, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Rio de Janeiro | | | | | | Iran vs. Nigeria | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Spain vs. Chile | | | | | | Saturday, June 21 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Porto Alegre, Brazil | | | | | | At Belo Horizonte, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Netherlands vs. Australia | | | | | | Argentina vs. Iran | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Monday, June 23 | | | | | | Saturday, June 21 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Curitiba, Brazil | | | | | | Bosnia-Herzegovina vs. Nigeria | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Spain vs. Australia | | | | | | Wednesday, June 25 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Sao Paulo | | | | | | At Salvador, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Netherlands vs. Chile | | | | | | Bosnia-Herzegovina vs. Iran | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| GROUP C | | | | | | GROUP G | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Colombia | | | | | | W | L | T | GF | GA | Pts | Germany | | | | | | W | L | T | GF | GA | Pts | |
| Greece | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Ghana | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ivory Coast | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Portugal | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Japan | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | United States | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Saturday, June 14 | | | | | | Monday, June 16 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Belo Horizonte, Brazil | | | | | | At Salvador, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Colombia vs. Greece | | | | | | Germany vs. Portugal | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Recife, Brazil | | | | | | At Natal, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ivory Coast vs. Japan | | | | | | Ghana vs. United States | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Thursday, June 19 | | | | | | Saturday, June 21 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Brasilia, Brazil | | | | | | At Fortaleza, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Colombia vs. Ivory Coast | | | | | | Germany vs. Ghana | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Natal, Brazil | | | | | | Sunday, June 22 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Greece vs. Japan | | | | | | At Manaus, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Tuesday, June 24 | | | | | | Thursday, June 26 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Curitiba, Brazil | | | | | | At Recife, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Colombia vs. Japan | | | | | | Germany vs. United States | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Fortaleza, Brazil | | | | | | At Brasilia, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Greece vs. Ivory Coast | | | | | | Portugal vs. Ghana | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| GROUP D | | | | | | GROUP H | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Costa Rica | | | | | | W | L | T | GF | GA | Pts | Algeria | | | | | | W | L | T | GF | GA | Pts | |
| England | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Belgium | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Italy | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Russia | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Uruguay | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | South Korea | | | | | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Saturday, June 14 | | | | | | Tuesday, June 17 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Fortaleza, Brazil | | | | | | At Belo Horizonte, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Uruguay vs. Costa Rica | | | | | | Belgium vs. Algeria | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Manaus, Brazil | | | | | | Belgium vs. Russia | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| England vs. Italy | | | | | | Russia vs. South Korea | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Thursday, June 19 | | | | | | Sunday, June 22 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Sao Paulo | | | | | | At Rio de Janeiro | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Uruguay vs. England | | | | | | Belgium vs. Russia | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Friday, June 20 | | | | | | At Porto Alegre, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| At Recife, Brazil | | | | | | Algeria vs. South Korea | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Costa Rica vs. Italy | | | | | | Thursday, June 26 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Tuesday, June 24 | | | | | | At Sao Paulo | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Uruguay vs. Italy | | | | | | Belgium vs. South Korea | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | At Curitiba, Brazil | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | Algeria vs. Russia | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Brazilians jam in front of TVs all over country

BY JOSHUA GOODMAN AND JENNY BARCHFIELD
The Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO — TV sets were on in scruffy bars tucked into shantytowns, clubs for the elite and the living rooms of countless homes across the expanse that is Brazil. Whether it was an old black-and-white model on a remote Amazon catch ranch or a mammoth high-tech screen at the beach, all eyes were glued on the World Cup's opening game.

Brazil's national team is chasing a sixth world championship and few of their countrymen missed the home squad defeat Croatia 3-1 on Thursday, starting soccer's biggest tournament off on a month-long run.

Not that there weren't some anxious moments for the home fans.

At Rio de Janeiro's Jockey Club, where the moneyed elite watched the game on giant screens while sipping on wine underneath the gaze of the iconic Christ the Redeemer statue, the crowd let out a collective screech when Brazil's Marcelo scored an own goal, giving Croatia an early 1-0 lead.

But anguish turned to delight minutes later, when superstar striker Neymar slipped a ball past a diving Croatian goalkeeper to even the score.

"This is what always happens with Brazil," said Eduardo Almeida, a consultant who paid \$55 entrance fee at the club. "We're nervous and screw things up at first, but then we get loose and confident and we kick but."

At the other end of Brazil's



SILVIA IZQUIERDO/AP

Brazil fans celebrate their team's goal against Croatia as they watch the game Thursday inside the FIFA Fan Fest area on Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro. Brazil won 3-1.

highly stratified income ladder, in the Santa Marta slum, a group of mostly black residents sent beers flying and jumped in place ecstatically after the tying goal.

The loudest celebration, aside from the 61,000 fans at Itaquera stadium in Sao Paulo, could be heard on Copacabana beach. There, fans dressed mostly in the yellow and green of Brazil's flag began lining up around breakfast time, eight hours before kickoff, for the chance to watch the game on an imposing 1,615-square-foot

television screen.

The FIFA Fan Fest at Copacabana got started early, with Brazilians having a good laugh watching their newfound foreign friends try out samba steps and shake their rear ends to the gyrating, lustful rhythms of Rio's trademark funk music. As night fell after the game, a bright full moon rose from the sea, hundreds more who couldn't find a spot on the sand crowded onto Copacabana's black and white stone mosaic sidewalk.

Opener: Game turns on penalty, leaves Croatians outraged



FRANK AUGUSTIN/AP

Croatia's Dejan Lovren, left, and teammate Ivan Rakitic, center, complain to referee Yukihiro Nishimura after Nishimura issued a penalty against Croatia during Thursday's match in Sao Paulo.

FROM BACK PAGE

The game turned on a controversial penalty awarded by Nishimura in the second half after striker Fred went down inside the area under minimal contact from defender Dejan Lovren. Neymar scored from the spot in the 71st minute, getting his 33rd goal with Brazil. Croatia goalkeeper Stipe Petrkosa nearly saved Neymar's shot, but it was struck hard enough to deflect into the net.

The Croatians were furious. "If that was a penalty, we should be playing basketball. Those kinds of fouls are penalized there," Croatia coach Niko Kovac said. "That is shameful, this is not a World Cup referee. He had one kind of criteria for them and another for us. The rules were not the same," Kovac said.

Lovren said referee Yukihiro Nishimura's decision was a "big shame" and that "if it is like this, then we can give the World Cup directly to Brazil."

"Of course I am angry. I want to cry now but what can you do?" he told reporters. "If you look at the game I think you saw everything. So I don't need to explain."

Midfielder Ivan Rakitic added: "This was a great game by both teams and it's a pity it was spoiled by a bad referee decision."

As Croatia searched desperately for an equalizer, Oscar added to the lead in the first minute of injury

time with a toe poke from just outside the penalty area.

Other members of Croatia's team said they were pleased with the way they played but were angry about the officiating.

Defender Vedran Corluka described the penalty as "embarrassing."

"I think that when it was 1-1 in the second half we were quite in control of the game and after he gave the penalty it changed the game," he said. "I congratulate Brazil, but I don't think they deserved to win today."

FIFA's head of refereeing declined to criticize the penalty — but says everyone makes mistakes.

Massimo Busacca said Friday that "we are human" and that "there is not one human in life that has not committed a mistake."

Busacca said Nishimura "had a very good position" to make the call. He showed reporters one still frame of the incident, but did not show a video replay of the disputed penalty sequence.

Japanese football fans took to social media to express regret and shame over referee Nishimura's contentious calls.

Earlier in the game, Nishimura showed Neymar a yellow card in the 26th for elbowing Croatia player Luka Modric. Some critics thought the punishment should have been harsher.

U.S. OPEN

Scoreboard

First round
Thursday
At Pinehurst Resort and Country Club

Pinehurst, N.C.
No. 2 Course
Purse: \$1.6 million in 2013
Yardage: 7,562; Par: 70 (35-35)

First Round
a-denotes amateur

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------|----|
| Martin Kaymer | 34-31-65 | -5 |
| Kevin Na | 34-34-68 | -2 |
| Graeme McDowell | 34-34-68 | -2 |
| Brendon De Jonge | 34-34-68 | -2 |
| Fran Quinn | 34-34-68 | -2 |
| Brandt Snedeker | 31-34-69 | -1 |
| Henrik Stenson | 35-34-69 | -1 |
| Matt Kuchar | 32-37-69 | -1 |
| Brendon Todd | 34-35-69 | -1 |
| Jordan Spieth | 36-33-69 | -1 |
| Hideki Matsuyama | 34-35-69 | -1 |
| Dustin Johnson | 34-35-69 | -1 |
| Harris English | 34-35-69 | -1 |
| Keegan Bradley | 33-36-69 | -1 |
| Francesco Molinari | 36-33-69 | -1 |
| Henrik Norlander | 35-36-70 | 0 |
| Lucas Bjerregaard | 35-35-70 | 0 |
| Marcel Siem | 34-34-70 | 0 |
| Ian Poulter | 35-35-70 | 0 |
| Phil Mickelson | 37-33-70 | +2 |
| Joost Luiten | 36-34-70 | 0 |
| Russell Henley | 34-36-70 | 0 |
| Rickie Fowler | 35-36-70 | 0 |
| Aaron Baddeley | 38-32-70 | 0 |
| Brooks Koepka | 33-37-70 | 0 |
| Mark Wilson | 35-35-70 | 0 |
| Jimmy Walker | 34-36-70 | 0 |
| Victor Dubuisson | 35-35-70 | 0 |
| Steve Stricker | 35-35-70 | 0 |
| Charl Schwartzel | 34-34-70 | 0 |
| Paul Casey | 37-33-70 | 0 |
| J.B. Holmes | 36-34-70 | 0 |
| Jamie Donaldson | 35-35-70 | 0 |
| Seung-Yul Noh | 33-37-70 | 0 |
| Danny Willett | 36-34-70 | 0 |
| Pablo Larrazabal | 37-34-71 | +1 |
| Patrick Reed | 35-36-71 | +1 |
| Boo Weekley | 36-35-71 | +1 |
| Webb Simeon | 35-36-71 | +1 |
| Rory McIlroy | 36-35-71 | +1 |
| Zach Johnson | 33-34-71 | +1 |
| a-Matthew Fitzpatrick | 37-34-71 | +1 |
| Chris Kirk | 35-36-71 | +1 |
| Billy Hurley III | 35-36-71 | +1 |
| a-Oliver Goss | 35-36-71 | +1 |
| Garth Mulvey | 34-37-71 | +1 |
| John Senden | 38-33-71 | +1 |
| Louis Oosthuizen | 35-36-71 | +1 |
| Zac Blair | 35-37-72 | +2 |
| Daniel Berger | 35-37-72 | +2 |
| Adam Scott | 35-37-72 | +2 |
| Scott Langley | 38-34-72 | +2 |
| Chesson Jones | 35-37-72 | +2 |
| Justin Rose | 33-39-72 | +2 |
| Nicholas Lindheim | 37-35-72 | +2 |
| Graciano Storm | 37-35-72 | +2 |
| Nicolas Colsearts | 37-35-72 | +2 |
| Bill Haas | 37-35-72 | +2 |
| Stewart Cink | 38-34-72 | +2 |
| Gary Woodland | 38-34-72 | +2 |
| Jason Dufner | 33-39-72 | +2 |
| Bernard Wiesberger | 36-36-72 | +2 |
| Toru Taniguchi | 36-36-72 | +2 |
| Bo Van Pelt | 36-36-72 | +2 |
| Kevin Tveit | 34-38-72 | +2 |
| Simon Griffiths | 35-37-72 | +2 |
| Adam Long | 35-37-72 | +2 |
| Sergio Garcia | 37-36-73 | +3 |
| Jason Day | 36-37-73 | +3 |
| Stephen Gallacher | 36-37-73 | +3 |
| David Tom | 39-34-73 | +3 |
| Thongchai Ladkai | 37-36-73 | +3 |
| Jeff Maggert | 37-36-73 | +3 |
| Shiv Chawrasia | 36-37-73 | +3 |
| Shayleek Kauffman | 37-36-73 | +3 |
| Clayton Kask | 34-39-73 | +3 |
| Alex Cejka | 38-35-73 | +3 |
| Joe Ogilvie | 35-38-73 | +3 |
| Jim Furyk | 35-38-73 | +3 |
| Shane Lowry | 35-38-73 | +3 |
| Adam Scott | 36-37-73 | +3 |
| Retief Goosen | 38-35-73 | +3 |
| Graham Clark | 33-39-73 | +3 |
| Hyun Jung Kim | 35-38-73 | +3 |
| Rod Pambling | 36-37-73 | +3 |
| Chang-Ho Lee | 39-34-73 | +3 |
| Ryan Blum | 36-37-73 | +3 |
| Chad Rios | 35-37-74 | +4 |
| Kyung-Ho Lee | 35-39-74 | +4 |
| Rubén Castro | 37-37-74 | +4 |
| Matt Jones | 37-37-74 | +4 |
| Angel Cabrera | 37-37-74 | +4 |
| Keim | 35-39-74 | +4 |
| Craig Barlow | 35-39-74 | +4 |
| Thongchai Ladkai | 37-37-74 | +4 |
| Matt Dobson | 37-37-74 | +4 |
| Chang-Ho Lee | 35-39-74 | +4 |
| Oliver Eickholt | 37-37-74 | +4 |
| Casey Wittenberg | 36-38-74 | +4 |
| Andres Echavarría | 37-37-74 | +4 |
| Ernie Els | 37-37-74 | +4 |
| Hunter Mahan | 35-39-74 | +4 |
| Ryan Palmer | 35-39-74 | +4 |
| Jim Remmer | 40-34-74 | +4 |
| Chris Doak | 40-34-74 | +4 |
| Rod Oppenheim | 39-36-75 | +5 |
| Franz Scharf | 36-39-75 | +5 |
| Andrea Pavan | 36-39-75 | +5 |
| Kevin Kisner | 36-39-75 | +5 |
| Lee Westwood | 37-38-75 | +5 |
| Billy Horschel | 36-39-75 | +5 |
| Kevin Sutherland | 39-36-75 | +5 |
| Justin Thomas | 41-38-75 | +5 |
| Chang-Ho Lee | 38-37-75 | +5 |
| Ken Duke | 37-39-75 | +5 |
| Justin Leonard | 38-37-75 | +5 |
| Y.E. Yang | 35-40-75 | +5 |
| Darrin Blount | 38-38-75 | +5 |
| Graham DeLaet | 37-38-75 | +5 |
| Kevin Streelman | 36-39-75 | +5 |
| Chang-Ho Lee | 36-39-75 | +5 |
| Matt Evers | 37-39-76 | +6 |
| Ryan Brehm | 38-38-76 | +6 |
| Nick Watney | 38-38-76 | +6 |
| Maximilian Kiefer | 36-40-76 | +6 |
| Chang-Ho Lee | 38-38-76 | +6 |
| Steven Alker | 35-41-76 | +6 |
| Nicklas Ekblom | 38-38-76 | +6 |
| Hudson Swafford | 38-38-76 | +6 |
| Bubba Watson | 38-38-76 | +6 |



CHARLIE REEDER/AP

Martin Kaymer watches his tee shot on the 17th hole during the second round of the U.S. Open golf tournament in Pinehurst, N.C., on Friday. Kaymer birdied three of the final five holes to take a three-shot lead after Thursday's opening round.

Kaymer holds lead after first day

Fresh off Players Championship victory, German looking to win again

By PAUL NEWBERRY

The Associated Press

PINEHURST, N.C. — Now that he's learned how to win again, Martin Kaymer wants more. Another major title would do nicely.

The 29-year-old German rode the confidence from his victory at the Players Championship last month to a stellar performance in the opening round of the U.S. Open.

With three birdies in the final five holes at surprisingly inviting Pinehurst No. 2, Kaymer grabbed a three-shot lead with a 5-under 65 Thursday.

"It's a good round of golf. I wasn't expecting it. I'm not freaky out about it," he said. "A good start, but that's it. There's nothing more than that. If for other people want to make more out of it, it's fine. For me, it's just a great start into one of the most important weeks of the year."

Kaymer joined the exclusive major club with his victory at the 2010 PGA Championship, but a swing change shortly after the biggest win of his career took longer to take hold than expected. He went through a winless drought that eventually stretched to 29 tournaments over 18 months. He finished 38th in the U.S. Open last year.

At TPC Sawgrass, where he tied the course record with an opening 63 and held off one of the strongest fields of the year to capture a title that brings nearly as much prestige as a major championship.

"I needed a win," Kaymer said. "Whether it was The Players or a regular PGA Tour event, I just needed it for my confidence, for all the hard work I've put in the last couple of years."

Pinehurst played easier than expected, with 15 golfers shooting in the 60s — the most since there were 24 at Olympia Fields in 2003.

Here's five things to look for heading into Friday's second round:

1 Wire-to-wire: The last time a player opened with a 65 was Rory McIlroy in 2011. Like Kaymer, he had a three-stroke lead heading to the second round — and pulled away from there. With four straight rounds in the 60s at rain-soaked Congressional, McIlroy finished with a 16-under score that gave him an eight-stroke victory. But it's rare when a first-round leader goes on to win the tournament. McIlroy, in fact, is the only player in the last 11 years to accomplish the feat.



Mickelson

2 Keep an eye on Lefty: Phil Mickelson's pursuit of a career Grand Slam got off to a solid start.

Using the "claw" grip to steady his shaky putting stroke, Lefty opened with an even-par 70 that gave him plenty of confidence heading to the second round. Also, Mickelson got good news of the course when a report in The New York Times said federal authorities found no evidence he had traded in the stock of a company that is part of an insider-trading probe.

3 Who's that? There always seems to be a first-round surprise at the major championships. This time, it was a downright shocker. Playing late in the day, 49-year-old Fran Quinn shot 3-under 68 to join Kevin Na, Graeme McDowell and Brendon de Jonge at three shots off the lead.

Quinn's only shot on the PGA Tour was 1992, when he missed the cut in 12 of 18 events and faded back to various minor-league circuits. He has

played only one tournament this year, on the Web.com Tour, and hasn't won any event since 2010.

4 Making the cut: While plenty of players were putting up red numbers, some big names will go into Friday mainly concerned with making it to the weekend. The world's top-ranked player, Adam Scott, struggled to a 73. Masters champion Bubba Watson sprayed shots all over the course on the way to an ugly 76. Ernie Els, Jim Furyk and Sergio Garcia also had some work to do if they wanted to play all the way to the end.



Rose

5 The champ is here: Defending champion Justin Rose faces a daunting deficit in his bid to become the U.S. Open's first repeat champion since Curtis Strange in 1988-89. The Englishman put himself in a big hole with four bogeys on his first nine holes, though he did recover somewhat for a 72. That left him seven shots behind Kaymer heading to Friday.

NBA FINALS

Scoreboard



NBA Finals

(Best-of-seven, if necessary)

San Antonio 3, Miami 1

San Antonio 110, Miami 95
 Miami 88, San Antonio 96
 San Antonio 111, Miami 82
Thursday: San Antonio 107, Miami 86
Sunday: at San Antonio
Tuesday, June 17: at Miami
Friday, June 20: at San Antonio

Thursday

Spurs 107, Heat 86

SAN ANTONIO — Leonard 7-12 5-6 20, Duncan 4-10 2-2 10, Diaw 3-6 2-4 8, Parker 8-15 3-4 19, Green 3-5 0-0 9, Ginobili 2-4 2-3 7, Splitter 3-4 0-0 6, Bonner 1-1 1-2 3, Mills 5-8 0-0 14, Joseph 1-1 0-0 2, Belinelli 2-3 0-0 4, Bynnes 1-1 0-0 2, Arroyo 0-0 3-4 3, Totals 40-70 18-25 107

MIAMI — L. James 10-17 4-6 28, Lewis 1-4 0-0 2, Bosh 5-11 2-2 12, Chalmers 2-6 0-0 4, Wade 3-13 4-8 16, Allen 3-6 0-0 8, Andersen 1-4 3-4 5, Battier 0-1 0-0 0, Cole 2-2 0-0 4, Douglas 0-1 0-0 0, Haslem 1-2 0-0 2, Jones 4-4 0-0 11, Oden 0-0 0-0 0, Totals 32-71 13-20 86.

San Antonio 26 29 26 26 107
Miami 17 19 21 29 86

Three-Point Goals — San Antonio 9-21 (Mills 4-6, Green 3-5, Ginobili 1-2, Leonard 1-3, Belinelli 0-1, Duncan 0-1, Diaw 0-1, Parker 0-2), Miami 9-22 (L. James 4-8, Jones 3-3, Allen 2-4, Battier 0-1, Bosh 0-1, Douglas 0-1, Chalmers 0-2, Lewis 0-2).

Fouled Out — None. Rebounds — San Antonio 48 (Leonard 14, Miami 25 (L. James 8), Assist — San Antonio 23 (Diaw 8), Miami 13 (Chalmers 5). Total Fouls — San Antonio 19, Miami 25. Technicals — Andersen, A — 19,900 (19,600).

By the numbers

25

San Antonio's largest lead in both Games 3 and 4. Miami never led by more than 2 points in either blowout loss.

101

Assists dished out by the Spurs, compared to just 61 by the Heat. San Antonio forward Boris Diaw leads all players with 23.

158

NBA-record postseason double-doubles for Spurs forward Tim Duncan, passing Lakers Hall of Famer Magic Johnson.

0-31

Record of teams that have fallen behind three games to one in the NBA Finals. The Heat rallied from a 3-2 deficit in last year's Finals.

Spurs blitz Heat, take 3-1 lead

San Antonio puts Miami on hot seat

BY TIM REYNOLDS
 The Associated Press

MIAMI — Gregg Popovich called Game 3 of the NBA Finals an anomaly.

He couldn't use the same word to describe Game 4. It was a repeat show of dominance, one that put the San Antonio Spurs one win away from ending the Miami Heat's reign as NBA champions.

Kawhi Leonard scored 20 points and grabbed 14 rebounds, Tim Duncan set a pair of playoff records and the Spurs controlled play throughout on the way to a 107-86 win over the Heat in Game 4 of the NBA Finals on Thursday night. San Antonio leads the series 3-1, and can capture its fifth NBA championship by winning at home Sunday night.

"They're playing beautiful basketball," Miami's Chris Bosh said.

"We're playing Spurs basketball," San Antonio's Tony Parker said.

Different sentences, same meaning. The Spurs' game is the beautiful one right now, and the way they came into Miami and frustrated the Heat not once but twice was simply remarkable.

"Now we've got to go back home and play as well — or better," said Popovich, the Spurs' coach.

Hard to imagine them playing much better.

In Game 3, the Spurs' biggest lead was 25, while Miami never led by more than two.

In Game 4, the Spurs' biggest lead was 25, while Miami never led by more than two.

"Eerie and telling, all at the same time."

"No," Duncan said, "we didn't plan on that."

The similarities didn't end there. San Antonio shot 59 percent from the field in Game 3, and 57 percent in Game 4. The Spurs were 9-for-20 from three-point range in Game 3; 9-for-21 from beyond the arc in Game 4. They led by 21 at halftime of Game 3; they led by 19 at halftime of Game 4.

Add it all up, and the only numbers that matter are the win totals: Spurs 3, Heat 1, and Miami is well aware that's a deficit no team has ever overcome in NBA Finals history — in 31 previous tries.

"We put ourselves in a position where it is about making history," said Miami's LeBron James, who led the Heat with 28 points. "But all we can do is worry about Game 5. We've got to worry about Sunday first. Try to go up there in a hostile environment, where we were able to steal one in Game 2, and try to get another one and go on from there. Obviously, I do know the numbers. It's never



WILFREDO LEE/AP

San Antonio Spurs forward Tim Duncan blocks a shot by Heat center Chris Bosh during the first half of Game 4 of the NBA Finals on Thursday in Miami. The Spurs won 107-86 to take a 3-1 series lead.

been done before, but we're still a confident bunch."

The Heat rallied from 3-2 down against the Spurs in the finals last season, though it would be futile to draw too many parallels from that, primarily because Miami played the last two games of that series at home — and now have to win twice more in San Antonio in order to capture a third straight crown.

Daunting, sure. But Heat coach Erik Spoelstra conceded nothing.

"Our group has been through everything you can possibly be through except for this circumstance," Spoelstra said. "So why not? Why not test ourselves right now collectively, our championship resolve that we've proven, time and time again?"

James was his typically brilliant self, making 10 of 17 shots and added eight rebounds. But Dwyane Wade struggled, shooting 3-for-13 and scoring only 10 points. Bosh scored 12 and one

of the few offensive highlights for Miami came after most of the 19,900 people in the sellout crowd departed — James Jones scored 11 points off the Heat bench in the span of 93 seconds as the game was winding down.

"We're not even giving ourselves a chance," Bosh said. "Sometimes they're going to score on us when we do things, and we just have to be a lot tougher to get this job done. We're here now. There's nothing we can do about it."

SPORTS



Simply dominant
Spurs whip Heat again, close in on crown | NBA Finals, Page 31

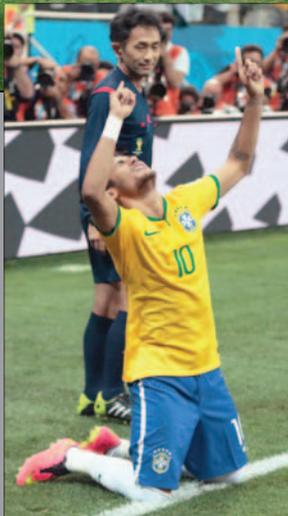
WORLD CUP



Nervous start

THANASSIS STAVRAKIS/AP

Above: Brazil's Fred, right, falls after making contact with Croatia's Dejan Lovren during the opening match of the World Cup on Thursday in Sao Paulo. The play resulted in a controversial penalty kick which Brazil's Neymar, left, converted into the goal that put the hosts ahead to stay on the way to a 3-1 victory.



Brazil rallies, survives opener

By TALES AZZONI
The Associated Press

SAO PAULO — Neymar showed why he is carrying Brazil's hopes at the World Cup, scoring twice on Thursday to help the underwhelming hosts escape a disappointing start to the tournament.

With Brazil struggling and down a goal against a spirited Croatian team, Neymar came through to lead his team to a 3-1 win in the opening match, scoring one in each half. The killer goal to make the score 2-1 was a hotly contested penalty awarded by Japanese referee Yuichi Nishimura.

"Things weren't going well," he said. "The first match is always difficult, we were anxious, we were nervous. I'm glad I was able to get the goals we needed at the time we needed them."

"He is a special player and we know that," Brazil

coach Luiz Felipe Scolari said. "And he needs to know that we know that."

Brazil got off to a slow start in its home tournament.

Defender Marcelo found his own net while trying to clear a low cross by Ivica Olic in the 11th minute, stunning the crowd of more than 62,100 packing the Itaquerao Stadium.

But Neymar equalized in the 29th, firing a perfectly placed low shot that went in off the post. He said he didn't hit the ball perfectly, "but it went in, it's all that matters."

"It's important to start these tournaments on the right foot, with a victory," said Neymar. "I'm happy that I got to score, but the entire team deserves credit. We maintained our calm and showed we could battle back."

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