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AFGHANS LOOK TO CHART OWN COURSE AFTER BLOODIEST YEAR SINCE 2001



A hope for change

By **LYNNE O'DONNELL**
The Associated Press

WHEN Graeme Smith arrived in Afghanistan in 2005, he drove across the country from Kabul south to the Taliban's former capital, Kandahar, on a newly paved road that cut traveling time from a bone-rattling 14 hours to just six.

Today, 13 years after the U.S.-led invasion toppled the Taliban's brutal regime, and after billions of aid dollars flowed into one of the world's

poorest countries, making that same 300-mile trip would be like signing his own death warrant, said Smith, Afghanistan analyst with the International Crisis Group, an independent conflict resolution organization.

"That journey is back up to being a treacherous 11-hour slog because of all the explosions that have damaged the route and because

you're frequently stopped at Afghan security forces checkpoints and Taliban checkpoints. So it is completely suicidal for a foreigner like me to drive on that road now and will probably remain so for a long time as the insurgency rises," he said.

With U.S.-led forces shifting to a supporting role at the end of this month, Afghanistan will have to chart its own course after the country's bloodiest year since the 2001 invasion, a year which saw record casualties among Afghan civilians and security forces alike.

SEE AFGHANS ON PAGE 4

INSIDE

Taliban attack targets civic, cultural life in Afghan capital

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Afghan soldiers carry out a mock attack on an enemy stronghold using colored flares for cover during an exercise in October at the Kabul Military Training Center in Afghanistan. AP

Living conditions crumbling in Islamic State

By **LIZ SLY**
The Washington Post

GAZIANTEP, Turkey — The Islamic State's vaunted exercise in state-building appears to be crumbling as living conditions deteriorate across the territories under its control, exposing the shortcomings of a group that devotes most of its energies to fighting battles and enforcing strict rules.

Services are collapsing, prices

are soaring and medicines are scarce in towns and cities across the "caliphate" proclaimed in Iraq and Syria by the Islamic State, residents say, belying the group's boasts that it is delivering a model form of governance for Muslims.

Slick Islamic State videos depicting functioning governing offices and the distribution of aid fail to match the reality of growing deprivation and disorganized, erratic leadership, the residents say. A

trumpeted Islamic State currency has not materialized, nor have the passports the group promised. Schools barely function, doctors are few and disease is on the rise.

In the Iraqi city of Mosul, the water has become undrinkable because supplies of chlorine have dried up, said a journalist living there, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to protect his safety.

SEE CONDITIONS ON PAGE 6

'Life in the city is nearly dead, and it is as though we are living in a giant prison.'

Journalist living among Islamic State militants in Mosul, Iraq

QUOTE
OF THE DAY

"When I went back to vote, I had to cross the exact spot where I was attacked. If I could face that, I can face anything."

—Shukria Barakzai, a liberal member of Afghanistan's parliament, discussing her defiance of the Taliban in the wake of an attack

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WORLD

N. Korea responds to Web outages

Official statement compares Obama to monkey, blames US for shutting down Internet

The Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea has compared President Barack Obama to a monkey and blamed the U.S. for shutting down its Internet amid the hacking row over the movie "The Interview." The North has denied involvement in a crippling cyberattack on Sony Pictures, but has expressed fury over the comedy, which depicts the assassination of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Sony Pictures initially called off the release of the film, citing threats of terror attacks against U.S. movie theaters. Obama criticized Sony's decision, and the movie opened this past week.

On Saturday, the North's powerful National Defense Commission, which is led by Kim and is the country's top governing body, said Obama was behind the release of "The Interview." It described the movie as illegal, dishonest and reactionary. "Obama always goes reckless in words and deeds like a monkey in a tropical forest," an unidentified spokesman at the commission's Policy Department said in a statement carried by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency.

It wasn't the first time North Korea has used crude insults against Obama and other top U.S. and South Korean officials. Earlier this year, the North called U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry a wolf with a "hideous" lantern jaw and South Korean President Park Geun-hye a prostitute. In May, the North's official news agency published a dispatch saying Obama has the "shape of a monkey."

The defense commission also blamed Washington for intermittent outages of North Korean websites this past week, which happened after the U.S. had promised to respond to the Sony hack. The U.S. government has declined to say if it was behind the shutdown.



COLUMBIA PICTURES-SONY/AP

Actor Randall Park, center, portrays North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in "The Interview."

'Interview' a case study for releases

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — "The Interview" was never supposed to be a paradigm-shifting film. But unusual doesn't even begin to describe the series of events that transpired over the past few weeks, culminating in the truly unprecedented move by a major studio to release a film in theaters and on digital platforms simultaneously.

Sony is in uncharted waters now with the film, which earned \$1.04 million from 331 locations on Thursday, according to studio estimates, in addition to the untold VOD grosses.

"Considering the incredibly challenging circumstances, we are extremely grateful to the people all over the country who came out to experience 'The Interview' on the first day of its unconventional release," said Rory Bruer, president of worldwide distribution for Sony Pictures in a statement.

For a film that would have just come and gone in the usual 3,000 theaters without much fanfare, the \$40 million comedy has now become an accidental case study in the world of day and date releases. The industry is watching closely to see just where audiences will choose to place their dollars in the coming days and weeks. The big question is whether or not this strategy could be viable for major releases in the future.

While a \$3,142 per-theater average and sold-out showings when audiences had the option to watch the film from the comfort of their own home is nothing to scoff at, analysts agree that it probably doesn't signal the beginning of a significant change in how Hollywood does business.

Day and date releases are nothing new, for one. Independent distributors have embraced this strategy for years,

making titles available both in theaters and for digital rental simultaneously. But those are generally small films with even smaller budgets — ones that can't afford a more traditional, widespread marketing campaign.

Theater chains depend on exclusive first run content to survive. If audiences were given the choice to just rent anything from a mid-budget comedy to a \$200 million blockbuster on the day of its release, theaters would undoubtedly suffer. Also, "The Interview" is an imperfect case. Patriotism, free speech, pure curiosity and even the desire to be part of the nationwide conversation have all played in to why audiences flocked to theaters on Christmas Day to see the movie.

Long-term prospects for "The Interview" at the box office remain a mystery. BoxOfficeGuru.com editor Gitesh Pandya believes that theatrical grosses will be frontloaded, and that's at least partially attributable to the quality of the film.

"The movie is mediocre," he said. "If it were a brilliant film, the word of mouth would carry it week to week." He predicts a dramatic drop off when the holidays end.

Also, the public may never know how the movie fared on the digital platforms. Smaller distributors like Radius-TWC, who released "Snowpiercer" on demand while it was still in theaters, have started pulling back the veil on VOD financials, but it's unlikely that Sony will ever give the public a peek into "The Interview's" success or failure online.

"I'm sure they're not that impressive," said Pandya. "The Interview" might now forever be in the history books, but it probably won't change the way audiences see new movies. For the big movies, theatrical will always come first, said Paul Dergarabedian, a senior media analyst for box office tracker Rentrak.

There was no immediate reaction from the White House on Saturday.

According to the North Korean commission's spokesman, "the U.S., a big country, started disturbing the Internet operation of major media of the DPRK, not knowing shame like children playing tag." DPRK refers

to the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The commission said the movie was the result of a hostile U.S. policy toward North Korea, and threatened the U.S. with unspecified consequences.

North Korea and the U.S. remain technically in a state of war

because the 1950-53 Korean War ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty. The rivals also are locked in an international standoff over the North's nuclear and missile programs and its alleged human rights abuses. The U.S. stations about 28,500 troops in South Korea as deterrence against North Korean aggression.

DODDS SPORTS

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MILITARY

'Freak occurrence' carried loud booms far into Florida

By HOWARD ALTMAN
The Tampa (Fla.) Tribune

TAMPA, Fla. — The military calls it "Whiskey 470," a roughly 200-rectangular-mile patch of airspace over the Gulf of Mexico about 30 miles northwest of Tampa. It's a busy place where pilots learn how to fly one of the newest and most sophisticated fighters in the Air Force inventory.

Few people outside of military and aviation circles have heard about Whiskey 470. But recently, folks as far inland as Gainesville, Fla., began reporting loud booming noises likely emanating from it.

"People are saying that their houses are shaking and windows rattling," according to a post on the Citrus County sheriff's website.

The noises were tied to military exercises run out of Tyndall Air Force Base in Panama City that were taking place in airspace over the Gulf, said Aaron Gallaher, spokesman for the state's Division of Emergency Management.

The atmospheric conditions were "right" so that the sound carried very far inland," said Gallaher. "It was a freak occurrence."

Still, the division put out a notice to the public because the exercises continued through the end of last week.

Whiskey 470 is part of a much larger area called the Gulf of Mexico Complex, stretching to about 20 miles east of the Louisiana coastline. Like much of the U.S., Florida is surrounded by restricted airspace. South of Whiskey 470 is Whiskey 100, from just north of Tampa around the Florida Keys. The Federal Aviation Administration considers these "warning areas," where the military trains and civilian aircraft can enter only after coordinating with the military.

A lot of coordination is required

for these areas. The FAA controls the airspace in warning areas, and civilian aircraft fly through the areas on direct routes when the airspace is not in use by the military, according to the FAA, which has formal agreements with the Pentagon over airspace use. While

'The atmospheric conditions were right so that the sound carried very far inland.'

Aaron Gallaher
Florida's Division
of Emergency
Management

allows the FAA to resume using the airspace when it cannot reroute flights around the warning areas due to severe weather. And there is also the Holiday Airspace Release Program, allowing commercial flights to transit special-use airspace to give airlines a more efficient routing during busy travel periods, according to the FAA.

The Gulf complex is hopping these days, said Herman Bell, Tyndall's spokesman.

Tyndall is home to the 43rd Fighter Squadron, the nation's only F-22 Raptor training unit, and pilots routinely fly through the warning area practicing aerial combat, he said.

There is also a major training exercise taking place in Whiskey 151, to the west of Whiskey 470, said Bell. Called a Weapons Systems Evaluation Program, the exercise involves about 30 jets from various bases in the region, including F-15 Eagles, F-16 Falcons



PENNY SNOOZ/Courtesy of the U.S. Air National Guard

Oregon Air National Guard members from the 173rd Fighter Wing finish preflight checks on an F-15 at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla. Exercises from the base created loud booms that startled residents.

and Raptors. During the exercise, which takes place about 150 miles off the coast, jets fire air-to-air missiles at small, jet-powered drones called Freebees and at remotely piloted Phantoms for target practice.

In 2013, there were 10 such exercises. More than 330 air-to-air missiles were fired during those exercises, Bell said. The current exercise is the 12th this year, but no finally tally has yet been made of how many missiles have been fired in 2014.

Given the timing of the calls about the booms, Bell said the most likely cause was noise produced by the Raptors, which can fly at up to 1,500 mph, or about twice the speed of sound. Shock waves are created in front of an aircraft traveling at the speed

of sound, or about 750 mph, and sonic booms are created when aircraft fly faster than the speed of sound and break through the shock waves.

But the booms could also have been caused by the Eagles, which have a top speed of 1,875 mph, or by Falcons, with a top speed of 1,345 mph, engaging with the Raptors during dog fights in Whiskey 470, or while on the way to the training mission in Whiskey 151, said Bell.

The noise complaints, which caused sheriff's offices in Hernando, Citrus and Gilchrist counties to get calls from concerned citizens, are unprecedented, said Bell.

"This is the first time we had many people talking about the booms," said Bell. "We do [the exercises] all the time."

Muslim group suing Navy

By BOB EGELKO
San Francisco Chronicle

A Muslim civil rights group has sued the government on behalf of a former Navy enlistment man from Northern California who says he was the target of ethnic slurs, was reassigned to a menial job and was later denied re-enlistment after seeking permission to wear a beard for religious reasons.

Jonathan Berts, of Fairfield, applied to wear a beard in January 2011, but Defense Department policy did not allow religious exemptions from grooming requirements. The Pentagon relaxed its policy in January, allowing accommodations for an individual's religious beliefs, but it came too late to help Berts, said his lawyers at the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

After his request for a religious accommodation was turned down, Berts, an African-American Muslim who had enlisted in 2002, was denied a previously recommended promotion and was subjected to "a barrage of derogatory terms, anti-Islamic slurs, and inappropriate lines of questions about his religious beliefs and loyalty to the United States," said the lawsuit, filed last week in U.S. District Court in Sacramento.

The supervisor who had rejected Berts' promotion to first class petty officer called him names like "camel jockey" and "towel head," his lawyers said. They said Berts, a barracks instructor who taught military history and physical education to recruits at the Great Lakes naval base in Illinois, was soon transferred to an "abandoned, roach-infested building" where he spent his days in isolation guarding piles of old office equipment.

Berts agreed to an honorable discharge in December 2011 and has applied unsuccessfully for re-enlistment several times since, the suit said. He manages low-income apartment buildings in Fairfield but still serves in the Naval Reserves with high evaluations, said attorney Brice Hamack, the Muslim group's Northern California civil rights coordinator.

Hamack said Berts was allowed to wear a beard during his first four years in the Navy for medical reasons because of a skin condition, and was turned down only when he later asked to wear one because of his Islamic faith.

Full-sized drone helicopter flies from Navy ship at sea

By MIKE HIXENBAUGH
The (Norfolk, Va.) Virginian-Pilot

NORFOLK, Va. — For the first time ever, the Navy has flown a full-sized, unmanned helicopter from the deck of a ship at sea.

Earlier this month off the coast of Virginia, engineers from Northrop Grumman practiced taking off and landing the MQ-8C Fire Scout from the deck of the guided missile destroyer Jason Dunham.

From a control room aboard the ship, civilian pilots completed 32 takeoffs and landings with the new drone helicopter over several days before wrapping up the sea trials Tuesday. The Navy also ran three full-scale test flights, which involved maneuvering the heli-

copter a significant distance away from the ship.

The goal, according to the Navy, was to assess the drone's capabilities in different wind conditions and to see how well it could land on a ship moving at different speeds.

The Navy has been using the unmanned helicopter since 2009 for surveillance missions, but it had never been flown from a ship. The helicopter tests are part of a broader move toward unmanned systems. In 2013, the Navy launched an unmanned, automated fighter jet from the deck of an aircraft carrier.

In the coming years, the service hopes to launch a fleet of unmanned underwater robots to patrol harbors and clear mine fields.



Courtesy of Northrop Grumman

The MQ-8C Fire Scout prepares to land on Dec. 16 off the Virginia coast on the guided missile destroyer USS Jason Dunham for the first time.

WAR/MILITARY

Afghans: Expert says challenges country faces in 2015 'will be immense'

FROM FRONT PAGE

There is cause for measured optimism — a new president has vowed to overhaul the government, to root out corruption and to mend ties with neighboring Pakistan, where the Taliban is long believed to have enjoyed safe haven. But President Ashraf

Ghani faces a monumental challenge in trying to reform the notoriously corrupt government and security forces, and the Taliban have vowed to keep fighting until the last foreign soldier departs.

The U.S. and NATO are set to withdraw most combat forces from Afghanistan on Dec. 31. From a peak in 2010 of 140,000 troops, they are leaving behind 13,500 for training and battlefield support.

They are also leaving behind a war as hot as it has been at any time since 2001. This past year was the deadliest for Afghan civilians since the insurgency began soon after the Taliban were removed from power. Civilian casualties for this year are on course to hit 10,000 for the first time since the U.N.'s Afghanistan mission started keeping figures in 2008.

Nicholas Haysom, the top U.N. envoy in Afghanistan, said that in the 11 months leading up to Nov. 30, there were 9,617 civilian casualties in Afghanistan — 3,188 deaths and 6,429 injured. Taliban attacks are believed to have caused 75 percent of the casualties.

With U.S. and NATO forces no longer going on the offensive, the insurgents are seizing territory across the country, re-drawing battle lines through towns and villages and putting civilians at heightened risk, according to Emanuel Nannini, program coordinator in Kabul with the international aid agency Emergency.

Afghan security forces also are falling in record numbers as they take on a greater role in the fighting, with some 5,000 killed this year alone — compared with some 3,500 foreign forces, including at least 2,210 U.S. soldiers, killed during the past 13 years.

Efforts to roll back the Taliban could receive a powerful boost from a thaw in relations with neighboring Pakistan. Afghanistan and Pakistan were bitterly divided during much of the 13-year rule of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, with each accusing the other of supporting insurgent groups operating along the porous border.

Ghani has sought a reset in relations, hoping that Pakistan can contribute to ending peace talks with the Taliban. His efforts received a powerful boost in the wake of the school massacre this month in the Pakistani city of Peshawar, which brutally underscored the shared threat posed by the Taliban and its Pakistani offshoot, which claimed the attack.

The day after the massacre, in which more than 140 people were killed — many children — Ghani met Pakistan's army chief, Gen. Raheel Sharif, in Kabul and committed to join hands against the Taliban.



An Afghan soldier inspects a damaged bus Dec. 13 at the site of a suicide attack by the Taliban in Kabul, Afghanistan.

RAHMAT GUL/AP



Afghan friends and colleagues of Zubair Hatami, a 22-year-old videojournalist for a local TV station who died from injuries sustained in a Taliban attack, mourn over his coffin during his funeral Dec. 21 in Kabul.

MASSOUD HOSSAINI/AP

Both Ghani and Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif have insisted there would no longer be distinctions made between good and bad insurgents, a tacit reference to what analysts describe as a longtime Pakistani policy of battling its own insurgents while turning a blind eye to the Afghan Taliban.

"There will be a moment of truth for both leaders," a Western diplomat said. "It would be very unfortunate if they cannot agree to something — if they can, it will be a step forward; if they can't it will be a step backward. There's no neutral ground here."

The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal Afghan affairs.

Afghanistan's troubles go far beyond the insurgency. This year's protracted election heightened uncertainty and slowed investment, with the local currency sinking from about 50 afghanis to the dollar at the start of the year to about 58 today.

The cost of living has risen as the country relies on imports, and economic growth that was in double digits just two years ago has plummeted with the cut in aid money that has accompanied the military draw-down. The U.S. Congress cut civilian assistance to Afghanistan to \$1.12 billion for this fiscal year, less than half the \$2.29 billion spent last year. President Barack Obama has requested \$1.59 billion for 2015.

Nader Nadery, the head of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, an independent think tank, said that by the end of the year, gross domestic product growth will have plunged to below zero. "This is a very, very worrying indicator," he said.

The trajectory of the past decade has not been all downhill, however.

The World Bank says that in the decade leading up to 2012, GDP per capita rose from \$186 to \$688 and primary school enrollment rose from 19 percent to 72 percent. Maternal mortality nearly halved and life expectancy rose significantly.

"No one seriously disputes that today, a woman in Afghanistan is less likely to die giving birth to a child, that the child is more likely to reach the age of 5 years old, and having reached the age of 5, that child is far more likely to have a chance to go to school," Smith said.

But there is still a long way to go. Afghans must travel abroad for complex medical care, Nadery said, and the skills needed for sectors with economic potential, such as the mining industry, will lag behind the rest of the world for at least another five years.

The U.S. has spent \$100 billion on reconstruction alongside the \$1 trillion war. But due in large part to astonishing levels of waste and graft, Afghanistan's government will end the year strapped for cash. It relies on foreign largesse to pay civil servants' salaries as well as to maintain the army, the paramilitary and police forces.

Nadery said the challenges in 2015 "will be immense."

"But taking into account all the foundations there are for the Afghan National Security Forces, one could be cautiously optimistic that they will be able to keep the Taliban at bay and to not allow them to take over."

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WAR/MILITARY

Attacks threaten Kabul's civic life

Recent bombing of French Cultural Center was Taliban warning against Western-backed culture

By PAMELA CONSTABLE
The Washington Post

KABUL, Afghanistan — The play was meant to be an abstract, artistic meditation on violence, performed in the French Cultural Center for an audience of high school students and invited guests. It was called "The Silence After the Explosion."

Partway through the production, ominous music surged and half a dozen actors collapsed slowly on the stage, moaning faintly and calling to each other. Sounds of an explosion and shattering glass tore through the theater, followed by a brief silence.

For a split second, Faiqa Sultan, a young artist in the audience, thought it was part of the play. Then she started screaming.

"I stumbled outside and there were bits of flesh and blood on my clothes," Sultan, 21, recounted recently. "Now I am afraid to be alone. When I hold a glass of water, my hand shakes. When I have to cross the street, I run."

As for the cultural center, she added, "I don't think anyone will dare go back there now."

The Dec. 11 suicide bombing, in the prestigious center at an elite high school near the presidential palace, was a Taliban warning against Western-backed cultural and civic movements in the Afghan capital. Four people were killed instantly and dozens wounded. A fifth victim died in a hospital Saturday.

The Soviet conflict and civil war of the 1980s and '90s shattered Kabul's civic life, and when the Taliban took power in 1996, it shut schools and attempted to destroy many historic artifacts, simply because they were not Islamic. Now, as insurgents attempt a comeback, they have proclaimed all Western civilization as an enemy to be crushed along with foreign troops.

In a statement, the Taliban denounced the play as an "insult to Islamic principles" and "propaganda against jihad, especially martyrdom operations." The group vowed to continue targeting media and civil society activists who "broadcast against Islamic values and are busy in immorality."

The strike at the capital's best-known foreign cultural institution came as a shock, even after weeks of attacks and shootings across the city, aimed at guest houses and foreign compounds, police buildings and military convoys, and agencies and civilian politicians. Despite the chilling effect of those attacks, though, civic leaders scoff at the notion that the Taliban can roll back the revival of international culture and democratic ideals.

"Historically, Afghanistan was always a moderate Muslim

society, and today its people are against Talibanism," said Abdul Hamid Mobarez, a prominent writer, commentator and former minister of culture and information who lived in France as a refugee during the civil war and Taliban eras. "They have no chance of succeeding."

On the surface, city life has gone on as usual, with constant traffic jams and cart vendors shouting in crowded bazaars. In poorer districts, the main security concerns are a surge in street crime and a growing narcotics trade.

But in affluent residential and business areas, the wave of targeted terror has created a spookier feeling. Uniformed and plainclothes police guard almost every intersection, and everyone has a story about the friend who was en route to a building that came under siege, or whose house was a block from an explosion.

"The sense of terror is absolutely present now across the city," said an Afghan official of a U.N. agency who asked not to be named. "People have a new feeling of coming together against a common enemy, but they are also angry at the lack of security and leadership. They feel if we had a proper government in place, this wouldn't be happening."

Some of the blame is focused on President Ashraf Ghani, who since taking office Sep. 29 has failed to name new heads of the national intelligence police or the defense and interior ministries, nor has he named the rest of his Cabinet. Critics say this has left a dangerous void in combating crime and terrorism, especially as NATO forces finalize their withdrawal from the country.

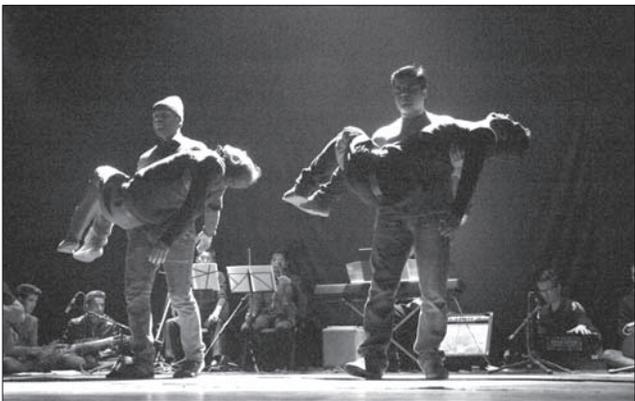
Ghani has repeatedly promised to begin naming top officials, but his aides said it has taken time for Ghani and his former rival, chief executive Abdullah Abdullah, to put together a team that balances ethnic, political and professional demands.

But some analysts said that a new bureaucracy was unlikely to put a serious dent in the Taliban's aggressive campaign.

"The enemies of Afghanistan

"People have a new feeling of coming together against a common enemy, but they are also angry at the lack of security and leadership. They feel if we had a proper government in place, this wouldn't be happening."

unnamed Afghan official



Afghan actors perform in a play moments before a suicide bomber attacked during the performance at the French Cultural Center in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Dec. 11.



JOSH SMITH/Stars and Stripes

Afghan security forces guard the scene of the bombing at the French Cultural Center in Kabul.

are doing this on purpose to give a bad name to the new government," said Moeen Marastial, an independent politician who served on Ghani's campaign team. He said the wave of attacks is mainly a response to the security agreement signed between the U.S. and Afghan governments this fall, allowing 10,000 U.S. forces to stay through next year.

Yet although their principal target remains Afghan and foreign troops, the Taliban clearly intends to keep attacking civilians involved in liberal and artistic pursuits, which they view as immoral activities imported from abroad. Most newspapers, galleries, musical and academic programs in Kabul have international backing.

"From now on," the Taliban declared after the theater bombing, "people who are on the payroll of Westerners and are trying to implement Western cultural goals ... will be seen the same as Western military invaders and will be targeted."

As the list of civilian assaults grows, the response from victims and activists has been a mixture of fear, camaraderie and defiance. Several people involved in producing "The Silence After the Explosion" have gone into seclusion. A pioneering cafe where

Barakzai, 42, is a liberal member of parliament and an outspoken supporter of democracy and women's rights. On Nov. 16, a suicide car bomber rammed into her armored vehicle as she was being driven to work, and the blast killed three bystanders. She survived with burns on her head and hands and is now recovering in a high-security police hospital.

"I thought it was a dream until I felt my scarf and my clothes burning," Barakzai said from her hospital bed last week. "They used some explosive chemical, and my vehicle was totally destroyed. It is only by magic that I survived."

Though she still needs help walking, Barakzai said she refuses to be cowed by the assassination attempt. She insisted on returning to parliament for several important meetings, which included casting her vote for the U.S.-Afghan security agreement.

"When I went back to vote, I had to cross the exact spot where I was attacked," she said. "If I could face that, I can face anything."

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WAR/MILITARY

Conditions: Sustainability of larger militant ambitions doubtful

FROM FRONT PAGE

Hepatitis is spreading and flour is becoming increasingly scarce, according to the journalist. "Life in the city is nearly dead, and it is as though we are living in a giant prison," he said.

In the Syrian city of Raqqa, the group's self-styled capital, water and electricity are available for no more than three or four hours a day, garbage piles up uncollected and the city's poor scavenge for scraps on streets crowded with sellers hawking anything they can find to sell, residents say.

Videos filmed in secret by an activist group show desperate women and children clamoring for handfuls of food, while photographs posted on the Internet portray foreign jihadists eating lavish spreads, a disparity that is starting to stir resentment.

Much of the assistance that is being provided comes from Western aid agencies, who discreetly continue to help areas of Syria under Islamic State control. The United States funds health care clinics and provides blankets, plastic sheeting and other items to enable the neediest citizens to weather the winter, a U.S. official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject.

The government workers who help sustain what is left of the crumbling infrastructure — in Syria as well as Iraqi cities — continue to be paid by the Syrian government, traveling each month to collect their pay from offices in government-controlled areas.

"ISIS doesn't know how to do this stuff," said the U.S. official, using an acronym for the group. "When stuff breaks down, they get frustrated. It doesn't have a whole lot of engineers and staff to run the cities, so things are breaking down."

Crumbling morale

There are also signs of falling morale among at least some of the fighters whose expectations of quick and easy victories have been squashed by U.S.-led airstrikes. A notice distributed in Raqqa this month called on fighters who were shirking their duties to report to the front lines, and a new police force was created to go house to house to root them out.

There is no indication that the hardships are likely to lead to rebellion, at least not soon. Fear of draconian punishments and the absence of alternatives deter citizens from complaining too loudly, the residents said in interviews conducted while they were on visits to neighboring Turkey or over the Internet.

But the deterioration is undermining at least one important aspect of the Islamic State group's self-proclaimed identity — as a



Demonstrators chant pro-Islamic State group slogans in June as they carry the militant group's flags in front of the provincial government headquarters in Mosul, Iraq.

state, dedicated to reviving the 7th-century caliphate that once ruled the Muslim world. Governing is as central to that goal as the military conquests that occurred as Islamic State fighters swept through much of Syria and Iraq over the past year.

The group's momentum on the battlefield has been slowed by the U.S.-led air campaign, which has helped reverse or stall Islamic State offensives on numerous fronts, from the tiny town of Kobane in northern Syria to the farmland south of Baghdad.

That the group is also failing to deliver services in the areas it does control calls into question the sustainability of its larger ambition.

The Islamic State group "is not this invincible monster that can control everything and defeat everyone," said an activist in the eastern Syrian city of Deir al-Zour who also spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe the ineffectual delivery of services there. "The whole idea that it is well organized and an administrative entity is wrong. It is just an image."

The Raqqa experiment

It is in Raqqa, the first major city to fall under Islamic State control more than a year ago and the cradle of its governance experiment, that the discrepancy is perhaps most conspicuous. A Raqqa businessman who traveled to Mosul

recently said the Iraqi city is in far better shape than his own city in Syria, where people are being driven away by the specter of hunger and devastating government bombing raids that have killed mostly civilians.

The bombardments have played a big role in straining the infrastructure. U.S. airstrikes, aimed at Islamic State targets, have also contributed, forcing the group to abandon many of its government buildings. American attacks on the small, makeshift oil refineries that many citizens relied on for income have deepened the deprivation, leaving many people without income and sending prices soaring.

Whether the Islamic State group's administration was ever as capable as it has been portrayed appears to be in doubt, Syrians say. Those who could afford to flee areas controlled by the group have done so, disproportionately including the professionals and technocrats whose skills are needed to run government services.

Syrians say the Islamic State's administration is overseen by a network of shadowy emirs or princes. Lower-level positions are occupied by Syrians or foreigners who often lack administrative or technical skills.

"ISIS has become too big to control itself," said a Syrian aid worker who regularly interacts with Islamic State officials and



THE WASHINGTON POST

who did not want to be identified in order not to compromise his dealings with the group. He finds them willing and cooperative, "but they're not smart, and they're not capable. They have no expertise."

Enforcing tough laws

For most citizens, the main interaction with the Islamic State group is with its ubiquitous police and security agencies, including the notorious Hesbah, which patrols the streets in quest of those transgressing the group's harsh interpretation of Islamic law.

Those rules continue to be rigidly enforced. Shopkeepers shut their stores five times a day for prayer. Smokers have quit for fear of the obligatory three-day jail sentence for a first offense — and a month for a second. Public executions for theft, blasphemy and dissent are on the rise. A new punishment, for homosexuality, in which the accused is thrown off a tall building, has been implemented twice in recent weeks.

Meanwhile, crime has plunged, and for many residents the order

is a welcome alternative to the lawlessness that prevailed when more moderate Syrian rebels were in charge. Syrians who lived for decades under the regime of President Bashar Assad are accustomed to obeying orders, and many have adapted to the new rules, said a government employee in the former tax department who collects his salary from the government, even though he is no longer working.

"Daesh are not as cruel as the regime was," he said, using an Arabic name for the jihadists. With the Islamic State group in charge, "if you don't do anything wrong — according to their standards, not ours — they will not bother you."

The strict enforcement of rules sometimes undermines efforts to deliver services, however. When electricity workers raced to repair cables damaged by government shelling in the town of Deir al-Zour, the Islamic State group detained and lashed them for violating the prohibition on working during prayer time, said the Deir al-Zour activist.

There is no indication that the Islamic State group's income, estimated at \$12 million a month, is suffering. Syrians continue to sign up because there are no other jobs available, residents say.

Islamic State functionaries also continue to exact payments, going door to door to collect taxes from shopkeepers and fees for electricity and telephones.

"If the regime did not supply telecommos and salaries, I don't think ISIS could survive," said Hassan Hassan, a Syrian analyst with the Abu Dhabi-based Delma Institute. "It charges people for things the regime is providing. But it's not viable as a state."

“The whole idea that it is well organized and an administrative entity is wrong. It is just an image.”

Syrian activist
anonymous

NATION



JOHN MINICILLO/AP

Police officers turn their backs as New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio speaks Saturday at the funeral of New York city police officer Rafael Ramos in the Glendale section of Queens in New York.

Police turn backs on mayor at slain NY officer's funeral

By JONATHAN LEMIRE AND MIKE BALSAMO
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Hundreds of officers outside the church where a funeral was being held for a policeman killed along with his partner in an ambush shooting turned their backs on New York's mayor as he spoke during Saturday's service.

The reaction from officers watching Officer Rafael Ramos' funeral on giant TV screens outside the church follows comments from police union officials who said Mayor Bill de Blasio contributed to a climate of mistrust toward police amid anti-police protests.

Inside Christ Tabernacle Church in Queens, however, mourners gave de Blasio polite applause before and after his speech.

The mayor said hearts citywide were aching after the shootings that left Ramos and his partner dead.

Police union officials have said de Blasio contributed to a climate of mistrust toward police amid protests over the deaths of two unarmed black men, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., and Eric Garner in the New York borough of Staten Island, who were killed by white officers.

At a hospital after the Dec. 20 shooting of the two New York officers, the police union's president, Patrick Lynch, and others turned their backs on the mayor in a sign of disrespect. Lynch blamed the mayor then for the officers' deaths and said he had blood on his hands.

Weeks before the shooting, Lynch suggested that officers

sign a petition requesting that the mayor not attend their funerals were they to die in the line of duty.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan and others had tried since to temper the rhetoric.

De Blasio followed Vice President Joe Biden and Gov. Andrew Cuomo on the roster of speakers eulogizing Ramos.

Officers watching the funeral service outside joined those inside in applauding when Biden called De Blasio the finest in the world.

"When an assassin's bullet targeted two officers, it targeted this city and it touched the soul of an entire nation," the vice president said.

Cuomo called the daylight shootings of the officers as they sat in their cruiser on a Brooklyn street "an attack on all of us."

The attack shook the city and put a halt to large-scale, local protests criticizing police over a series of high-profile deaths of unarmed black men.

Funeral plans for Ramos' partner, Officer Wenjian Liu, have yet to be announced.

When the Ramos family arrived, the eldest son — wearing his father's NYPD jacket — was hugged by a police officer.

Ramos was described Friday during an eight-hour wake as a selfless, caring and compassionate man.

"What happened to my father was a tragedy," Ramos' son, Justin, said in a tearful eulogy viewed by hundreds of officers in the street who watched on giant television screens outside the crowded church. "But his death will not be in vain."

Ramos, 40, a married father of two, was studying to become a pastor and kept Bible study books in his locker, his commanding officer said.

Officer Dustin Lindaman of the Waterloo Police Department flew from Iowa to attend Ramos' funeral.

"He's one of our brothers, and when this happens, it affects everyone in law enforcement — it absolutely affects everyone," he said. "We wanted to show our support."

After the death of the officers on a street in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant section, the gunman, Ismaaiyl Brinsley, killed himself. Police said he was troubled and had shot and wounded an ex-girlfriend in Baltimore earlier that day.

In online posts shortly before the attack, Brinsley referenced the killings of two unarmed black men — Michael Brown and Eric Garner — by white police officers.

De Blasio has stood firmly by the police since the shooting, calling on the demonstrators to temporarily halt their protests until after the officers' funerals and praising officers after the police department announced the arrest of a seventh person since the shooting for making threats against police.

There was no noticeable reaction from police outside the church when de Blasio arrived Saturday about a half-hour before services.

A block from the church, though, retired NYPD Officer John Mangan held a sign that read: "God Bless the NYPD. Dump de Blasio."

Death penalty states unmoved by botched execution

By SEAN MURPHY
The Associated Press

MCALISTER, Okla. — Oklahoma's last execution went so badly that the state tried to cancel it before it was over. With the inmate writhing while the lethal drugs seeped into his body, his executioners drew the viewing gallery curtains, concealing what the warden later described as "a bloody mess."

The botched execution of Clayton Lockett in April and other troubling ones this year in Ohio and Arizona gave capital punishment opponents a flicker of hope that areas of the country that most enthusiastically support the death penalty might have a change of heart. They didn't.

Although Gov. Mary Fallin suspended further executions so that Lockett's death and Oklahoma's methods could be reviewed, the state held what amounted to a ribbon-cutting ceremony for its overhauled death chamber only months later and is scheduled to resume killing inmates in mid-January. And rather than causing states to question whether capital punishment is just or worth the risk of subjecting someone to a potentially agonizing death, the prolonged executions and problems states have had securing lethal injection drugs have led them to explore new, old and more efficient ways of killing, including gassing inmates.

"I think we had a little flash of hope that it would help our cause, but all it did was generate a lot of

conversation about it," said Lydia Polley, a longtime member of the Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. "It just led to people thinking of better ways to kill them."

Lockett's execution did little or nothing to dampen support for the death penalty in deeply conservative Oklahoma, which has killed more inmates than any other state except Texas since the 1976 reinstatement of the death penalty. In October, officials gave media tours of the renovated execution unit at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary, which got a \$104,000 overhaul after Lockett's death and now stands in sharp contrast to the rest of the shabby, 106-year-old facility.

Not content with just the upgrades to the prison and lethal injection equipment, though, Oklahoma's Republican-led House conducted a study on the use of nitrogen gas to execute inmates and is expected to consider legislation early next year that would make Oklahoma the first state to adopt hypoxia by gas — the forced deprivation of oxygen — as a legal execution method.

Other conservative states also are exploring alternatives to lethal injection because of the problems securing the drugs. U.S. states have had to buy made-to-order execution drugs from compounding pharmacies in recent years because the pharmaceutical companies they used to buy their drugs from refuse to sell them for use in lethal injections.



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NATION

Poll: Most feeling good about 2015

BY EMILY SWANSON AND
JENNIFER AGIESTA
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Americans are closing out 2014 on an optimistic note, according to a new Associated Press-Times Square Alliance poll. Nearly half predict that 2015 will be a better year for them than 2014 was, while only 1 in 10 think it will be worse. There's room for improvement: Americans give the year gone by a resounding "me-h."

What Americans thought of 2014.

■ **Gains at home, slips abroad:** On a personal level, about a third (34 percent) think 2014 was better than 2013, while 15 percent say 2014 was worse and half see little difference. Slightly fewer feel their year was a step down from the previous one than say so in 2013. In an AP-Times Square poll found 20 percent thought 2013 was worse than 2012.

Americans are slightly more likely than they were a year ago to believe that the current year was better than the last for the United States — 30 percent say so this year, while 25 percent said so in 2013. On the other hand, Americans are more likely than in the 2013 poll to say this year was worse than last for the world as a whole, with 38 percent saying so now after 30 percent said so a year ago.

■ **Three stories share top spot:** Americans are divided on the most important news event of 2014, with the rise of the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria, protests over the killings of black men in police custody and the Brown and Eric Garner by police officers, and the Ebola outbreak each named by about 1 in 10 Americans. In a separate Associated Press survey of news directors and editors, the killings of unarmed men by police ranked more clearly as the top story, with 22 of 85 respondents choosing it as the top news, about twice as many as the Islamic State or Ebola stories.

Among the public, Democrats are most likely to name the unrest over Brown and Garner's deaths as most important (14 percent),

while Republicans are most likely to list the rise of the Islamic State (16 percent). Nonwhites are more apt to cite the protests around Brown and Garner's deaths than whites (14 percent among nonwhites, 8 percent among whites).

Asked separately to rate the importance of 10 key stories, majorities call the expansion of the Islamic State militant group, the Ebola outbreak and the U.S. midterm elections extremely or very important stories. Nearly half rate immigration as that important, while 43 percent say so of the Michael Brown and Eric Garner stories. Only a third think the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, the situation between Russia and Ukraine, or the rising number of states with legal same-sex marriage were deeply important stories.

■ **The year in pop culture:** Few Americans rate this year's crop of pop culture events as memorable, with one big exception: The death of Robin Williams, and the ensuing discussion of mental health issues. About two-thirds think that a memorable event.

Slightly more say it was more memorable (39 percent) than forgettable (34 percent) that CVS stopped selling cigarettes, and that they drafted into the NFL, is rated forgettable by about half. Whether the ubiquitous ice bucket challenge was memorable (37 percent) or forgettable (37 percent). Thirty percent say the pitching performance of Mo'ne Davis, the first female pitcher to win a Little League World Series game, was memorable, while 41 percent say it was forgettable. Women are more likely than men to see Davis's performance as memorable, 33 percent of women say so versus 26 percent of men.

Another sports first: Michael Sam becoming the first openly gay player drafted into the NFL, is rated forgettable by about half.

Events rating as forgettable by a majority of Americans include the leak of hacked celebrity photos on Reddit, Ellen DeGeneres' selfie at the Oscars, Taylor Swift going pop, and the marriages of George and Alno Clayton and Kim Kardashian and Kanye West.

tential Republican contender will leave his advisory role with British banking giant Barclays by Dec. 31.

Bush's ties to Tenet, as well as other financial firms, could complicate a potential campaign. The health care giant supported and promoted President Barack Obama's health care law, which remains deeply unpopular among the conservative activists who play an outsized role in presidential primaries.

Bush, however, has been a vocal opponent of the health care measure, calling it "flawed to its core."

From The Associated Press



CHARLES REX ARBOGAST/AP

Last-minute Christmas shoppers are reflected in a store's window as they walk through Chicago's Loop on Wednesday.

In 2014, economy started out shaky, but finished strong

BY JOSH BOAK
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. economy flexed its old muscles in 2014.

More than five years removed from the Great Recession, worries had taken hold at the start of the year that perhaps the world's largest economy had slid into a semi-permanent funk.

But consumers, businesses and investors, after enduring a brutal winter, showed renewed vigor as the year wore on and set the United States apart from much of the world.

Stocks repeatedly set record highs — and did so again Friday, with the Dow Jones industrial average rising modestly to a new peak. Employers were on pace to add nearly 3 million jobs, the most in 15 years. Sinking oil prices cut gasoline costs to their lowest levels since May 2009. Auto sales accelerated. Inflation was a historically low sub-2 percent.

The U.S. economy proved it could thrive even as the Federal Reserve ended its bond-buying program, which had been intended to aid growth by holding down long-term loan rates.

All told, the United States remained insulated from the financial struggles surfacing everywhere from Europe and Latin America to China, Japan and Russia.

So what explained the U.S. economy's resilience this year?

Economists say it largely reflected the delayed benefits of finally mending the damage from the worst downturn in nearly 80 years. Unlike past recoveries that enjoyed comparatively swift rebounds, this one proved agonizingly slow. It took 6½ years to

regain all the jobs lost to the recession — 8.7 million — far longer than during previous recoveries.

"It was a healing process from a severe recession and the financial crisis," said Richard Moody, chief economist at Regions Financial, a bank based in Alabama.

The healing isn't complete. Wage growth remains sluggish and has barely outpaced extremely low inflation. Home building has been tepid.

But worries earlier this year that the economy might be trapped indefinitely by sluggish growth have largely faded. Here are the economic highlights of 2014:

■ **Hiring boom:** Employers added 2.65 million jobs during the first 11 months of the year, and the unemployment rate sank to 5.8 percent from 6.7 percent. When the government announces the December job data next month, the 2014 job total is expected to be just shy of 3 million — the most since the dot-com era in 1999. Compared with recent years, those gains have been less concentrated in lower-paying industries such as retail, food service and temp agencies.

"We're finally entering that virtuous cycle phase of the expansion," when more jobs lead to higher incomes, which generates more consumer spending and growth, said Brett Ryan, an economist at Deutsche Bank.

Though average wage growth has been modest, the number of people with paychecks — and the ability to spend — has soared. If you exclude the economy's winter-induced 2.1 percent annual contraction in the first quarter of the year, annualized growth has averaged 4.4 percent in four of the past five quarters.

■ **Stocks surge:** Stocks ex-

tended their bullish stampede of nearly six years. The Standard & Poor's 500 index climbed about 13 percent this year, hitting record highs more than 50 times. If you bought the index at a market bottom in March 2009, you've basically tripled your money. Corporate mergers helped drive this year's gains, along with major companies buying up \$400 billion-plus of their own stock.

■ **Oil prices plunge:** In a gift for U.S. consumers, energy got significantly cheaper. Crude oil prices were essentially cut in half from this year's high. The slowing economies in Europe and Asia curbed demand, while production remained steady. The price decline trickled down to gasoline pumps. Average prices nationwide dropped to \$2.32 per gallon, down roughly a dollar from a year ago, according to AAA. Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen noted that the falling prices resemble a tax cut, generating savings for consumers that can be spent elsewhere to drive economic growth.

■ **Auto sales up:** Far more Americans splurged on new cars after having held onto aging vehicles during the recession and the slow, early stages of the recovery. Sales were on track to increase 6 percent this year, with 16.5 million new vehicles on the road, according to Cars.com. That would be the best sales pace since 2006.

■ **Interest rates drop:** Even as the economy has strengthened — usually a sign that interest rates will rise — it's become easier to borrow. More loans mean more spending and faster growth. Rates have declined even though the Fed ended its program to stimulate growth by buying billions of dollars in Treasury and mortgage bonds each month.

NATION

Ostracized baby gorilla moving to yet another zoo

The Associated Press

CINCINNATI — A baby gorilla raised by human keepers wearing hairy vests is ready to be placed with other gorillas and will move to the Columbus Zoo, the Cincinnati Zoo said Friday.

Kamina, a young, female Western lowland gorilla, was born in August at the zoo in Oklahoma City but was shunned by her mother, so she was sent to Cincinnati in September. The human surrogates taught her to act like a gorilla and then placed her with two female gorillas.

When they didn't bond with her, keepers decided Kamina's best option was moving to Columbus, Ohio. The Cincinnati Zoo's curator of primates said the rejection was surprising, but such introductions are delicate and don't always work out.

"Kamina has learned all of the behaviors she needs to know in order to be successful in a gorilla group," Ron Evans, primates curator, said in a statement. "Unfortunately, neither of the adult females that we hoped would bond with her did."

Officials are working out details of her transfer to the Columbus Zoo, which has previous experience with surrogacy placements.

After Kamina arrived at the Cincinnati Zoo in September, 17 volunteers, nearly all zoo workers, took turns holding the baby around the clock, teaching her how to be a gorilla.

Volunteers wore hairy vests to give Kamina something to cling to, bottle-fed her and crawled on their hands and knees so Kamina could practice abdominal and back riding. They used low grunting sounds to soothe her and coughing sounds to discourage behaviors.

A previous surrogacy at Cincinnati worked out a little better,



JENNER D'AGOSTINO, COURTESY OF THE OKLAHOMA CITY ZOO/AP

Kamina, a Western Lowland gorilla who was born Aug. 16 at the Oklahoma City Zoo, was rejected by her mother and moved to the Cincinnati Zoo.

“Unfortunately, neither of the adult females that we hoped would bond with her did.”

Ron Evans

Cincinnati Zoo primates curator

with keepers successfully raising “Gladys,” a gorilla baby that came to Cincinnati in February 2013 from Brownsville, Texas, and was eventually incorporated into the zoo’s gorilla troop.

Columbus also has a long history of caring for gorillas. The first gorilla born in captivity, Colo, was born at the Columbus Zoo and celebrated her 58th birthday last week.

’90s TV actor ‘Screech’ charged in bar stabbing

By KYLE POTTER

The Associated Press

Dustin Diamond, who played Screech on the 1990s TV show “Saved by the Bell,” was charged Friday with stabbing a man during a bar fight on Christmas.

Diamond, 37, faces felony second-degree recklessly endangering safety charges, disorderly conduct and carrying a concealed weapon.

According to the criminal complaint, Diamond told police that he and his fiancée went out to several bars Thursday night in Port Washington, about 30 miles north of Milwaukee. The couple, who live in Port Washington, got into a tussle with two men and another woman at the Grand Avenue Saloon, the complaint said.

Port Washington police say they

responded at 11:15 p.m. Thursday to a report of a stabbing at a bar. When police caught up with their SUV down the road from the bar, Diamond told police he had a “pen” in his hand when he grabbed one of the men, according to the complaint.



Diamond

Port Washington police found in the car a switchblade, the point of which was covered in what appeared to be blood.

Diamond later told police he accidentally stabbed the man while trying to defend his fiancée, according to the complaint.

The man had been stabbed under the armpit, and police said he was not seriously injured.

Diamond appeared Friday afternoon in Ozaukee County court, where bail was set at \$10,000. His next hearing is scheduled for Dec. 29. His fiancée, Amanda Schutz, 27, also faces a disorderly conduct charge.

Diamond’s agent declined comment Friday morning, and no attorney was listed in court records.

Since his decade-long run at Boyside High, Diamond has been sued several times for delinquent taxes and in foreclosure proceedings for missing mortgage payments. He has appeared on reality TV shows, made a sex tape and, most recently, produced a tell-all documentary on Lifetime TV called “The Unauthorized Saved by the Bell Story.”

Study: Colorado pot use on rise

The Associated Press

DENVER — Colorado emerged as the state with the second-highest percentage of regular marijuana users as it began legalizing the drug, according to a new national study.

The Denver Post reported that the study by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health found about 1 out of 8 Colorado residents older than 12 had used marijuana in the past month. Only Rhode Island topped Colorado in the percentage of residents who reported using pot as often, according to the study.

The study averaged state-specific data over two-year periods. It found that for the 2011-2012 period, 10.4 percent of Colorado residents 12 and older said they had used pot in the month before being surveyed. That number jumped to 12.7 percent in the 2012-2013 data. That means about 530,000 people in Colorado use marijuana at least once a month, according to the results.

Nationally, about 74 percent of people 12 and older reported monthly marijuana use. That’s an increase of about 4 percent.

In Washington state, which also legalized marijuana use and lim-

ited possession for adults, monthly pot use rose about 20 percent to 12.3 percent of people 12 and older.

The survey is among the first to quantify pot use in Colorado since late 2012, when voters approved legal pot use and possession for those over 21. But the survey did not analyze data from 2014, when recreational marijuana shops opened, which means it is not a good indication of the effect of commercial sales on marijuana use.

“I don’t think this tells us about the long-term impacts of legalization,” said University of California, Los Angeles, professor Mark Kleiman, who studies marijuana policy. The number of medical marijuana patients in Colorado rose over the same time period, so the results are not surprising, Kleiman said.

He told the Post that researchers will have a better idea about pot use in the first state to legalize recreational sales of the drug once they can focus on data showing how many people use pot daily.

“The fraction of people who are monthly users who are in fact daily users has gone way, way up,” he said.

Xbox Live back online; PlayStation still down

By BRANDON BAILEY

The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Sony’s PlayStation network remained offline Friday on the second day of an outage that began rolling the online world just as eager video game players were unwrapping new consoles on Christmas morning.

Microsoft’s Xbox Live service, which also went down Thursday, was back online Friday although the company reported problems with some functions in the afternoon.

Credit for the disruptions was claimed on Twitter by a group of self-proclaimed hackers called Lizard Squad — or someone purporting to speak for it. But many video game enthusiasts and some other hacker groups quickly condemned their actions.

Even the notorious Kim Dotcom, a New Zealand-based online entrepreneur who’s been accused of abetting Internet piracy, got into the act by offering free vouchers for his online privacy service called Fight Back Software to restore the Xbox network.

A Lizard Squad account on Twitter appeared to credit Dotcom’s offer for the partial restoration of Xbox service on Friday. But exactly what happened is still unclear. Sony nor Microsoft would say what disrupted

their networks, and experts say it’s difficult to trace the source of attacks or confirm claims of responsibility.

Sony Online Entertainment said on its website Friday that its PlayStation network was still down, adding on Twitter: “We are working to restore full network services for all platforms — thanks, as always, for your patience!” A Microsoft support site said Xbox Live was available at midday Friday, but it reported new problems in the afternoon.

Signs of trouble emerged earlier this week when someone using a Lizard Squad account on Twitter began threatening to disrupt gaming services on Christmas — and then boasted of causing the outages on Thursday.

A person or group using the same name on Twitter took credit last August for similar attacks in which hackers overwhelmed company servers with a flood of Internet traffic, disrupting the online gaming networks operated by Sony, Riot Games and other companies. The same Twitter account was also used in August to make an apparently false report that a bomb was on an airliner carrying a Sony executive.

So far, there’s no specific evidence to link these episodes with last month’s malware attacks on Sony’s movie division.

WORLD

Woman taken off life support in Ireland

By SHAWN POGATCHNIK
The Associated Press

DUBLIN — A brain-dead pregnant woman was taken off life support Friday after a court ruled that her 18-week-old fetus was doomed to die — a case that exposed fear and confusion among doctors over how to apply Ireland's strict ban on abortion in an age of medical innovation.

The three-judge Dublin High Court said that all artificial support for the woman should end more than three weeks after she was declared clinically dead. Her relatives gathered at a hospital in the Irish Midlands to bid farewell to the unidentified woman, who was in her late 20s and had two young children.

In their 29-page ruling, the judges accepted testimony from seven doctors who said the fetus couldn't survive for the extra two months of development needed to be delivered safely. The doctors detailed how the woman's body was becoming a lethal environment rife with infections, fungal growths, fever and high blood pressure.

The nation's Supreme Court was put on standby for an appeal, given the constitutional questions at stake. But lawyers representing the rights of the woman and of the fetus said they accepted the ruling from the country's second-highest court.

Ireland has the strictest abortion ban in Europe, a reflection of the country's heavily Roman Catholic population. But Dublin's archbishop had suggested before the decision came down that he would have no objection to removing life support.

The woman suffered irreversible brain death on Dec. 3, four days after sustaining a severe head injury in a fall. She had already been hospitalized after doctors found a cyst in her brain. Doctors refused family pleas to turn off a half-dozen machines that regulated oxygen, blood flow, nutrition and waste collection, citing fears they could be sued for negligence or even face murder charges if they cut life-sustaining support for the fetus.

One doctor testified that he and the judges didn't agree on how Ireland's constitutional ban on abortion should be applied, given the lack of explicit laws or guidelines for such cases.

Other doctors described the woman as a corpse unrecognizable from the photo by her bedside. Another noted that the body was being pumped with drugs never authorized for use on a pregnant woman and described what they were doing as experimental and, if it persisted, grotesque.

The judges said the fetus faced "a perfect storm" from which it has no realistic prospect of emerging alive. It has nothing but distress and death in prospect.



MAJDI MOHAMMED/AP

West Bank protest

A Palestinian protester wearing a Santa Claus costume uses a slingshot to throw back a tear gas canister fired by Israeli soldiers during a demonstration Friday against Israel's separation barrier outside the West Bank village of Bilin, near Ramallah.

Suspect in Pakistan school massacre killed in firefight

By TIM CRAIG
The Washington Post

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — Security forces on Friday killed an alleged organizer of last week's school massacre, the latest sign that the government and the military are stepping up their assault on the Pakistani Taliban and other Islamist militant groups.

The slaying of the Taliban commander, known as Saddam, comes as Pakistani leaders are vowing to forcefully respond to the attack on the school. With the country still mourning the deaths of 149 students and teachers, security forces are taking their battle deep into Pakistani cities while the country's air force pounds militants' havens along the border with Afghanistan.

Saying he plans "to wipe terror out of Pakistan," Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif hurried with his cabinet much of Friday to oversee the implementation of a newly announced anti-terrorism policy. While Pakistan's battle against Islamist militants has appeared to sputter during much of the past decade, Sharif has stressed in recent days that the current operations will define his term as prime minister.

"To me, zero tolerance is zero tolerance, and violence in any form against my people equals terror," Sharif said. He vowed that Pakistan "shall come down heavy on it."

Under its new policy, the government is planning to quickly

‘To me, zero tolerance, and violence in any form against my people equals terror.’

Nawaz Sharif
Pakistan's prime minister

establish military courts to try terrorism suspects as well expedite the executions of prisoners being detained on terrorism charges.

A senior Interior Ministry official said 6,777 Pakistani residents are being monitored around-the-clock for suspected ties to militant groups. Mass arrests are likely in the coming days, the official added. On Friday, 83 suspects were picked up in the capital, Islamabad, according to Pakistan's the Nation newspaper.

The Pakistani military also issued a statement saying that fresh airstrikes in North Waziristan along the Afghan border had killed 23 militants, including some Taliban commanders. Earlier in the day, eight militants were slain in two suspected U.S. drone strikes in the same area, according to Pakistani intelligence officials.

Saddam was killed in a firefight with security forces in Khyber Agency, in the country's unruly tribal belt near the Afghan bor-

der. The 25-year-old is believed to have provided lodging for the seven Taliban fighters who stormed the army-run school in Peshawar on Dec. 16, according to local officials. He helped guide the fighters, all of whom were killed in the attack, to the school, officials said.

During the past week, key regional Pakistani Taliban commanders were killed in Karachi and Peshawar. But Pakistani political leaders say that this time the country's campaign against terrorism will extend far beyond the Taliban.

Pakistan is home to more than three dozen terrorist organizations, some of which have links to the country's powerful intelligence agency and carry out attacks in neighboring India and Afghanistan.

U.S. officials remain skeptical that Pakistan will aggressively confront groups such as the Haqqani network, which has targeted U.S. forces in Afghanistan, or Lashkar-e-Taiba, a Lahore-based militant group that has carried out attacks in India.

But Pakistani military analysts say it would be a mistake to underestimate the resolve of the country's new army chief, Gen. Raheel Sharif.

Analysts say the military leader has felt embarrassed by the number of brutal attacks that the Taliban and other militant groups have been able to carry out inside Pakistan, including a siege in June of Karachi's international airport.

Iran's army tests suicide drone in drills

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's army has deployed a suicide drone for the first time in massive ongoing military drills near the strategic Strait of Hormuz at the entrance to the Persian Gulf.

Gen. Ahmad Reza Pourdastan, the army's chief commander of ground forces, is quoted by Iranian state media Saturday as calling the unmanned aircraft "a mobile bomb." The drone, named Yasir according to one Iranian newspaper, has been designed to plunge into aerial and ground targets, as well as ships.

The six-day military exercise is being carried out over 850,000 square miles in the northern part of the Indian Ocean, the Sea of Oman and the eastern part of the Persian Gulf.

Extremist leader surrenders in Somalia

NAIROBI, Kenya — A Somali intelligence official says a leader with the Islamic extremist group al-Shabab, who has a \$3 million bounty on his head, surrendered in Somalia.

The intelligence officer, who insisted on anonymity because he is not authorized to speak to the press, said Saturday Zakariya Ismail Ahmed Hersi surrendered to Somali police in the Gedo region.

The officer said Hersi may have surrendered because he fell out with those loyal to Ahmed Godeane, al-Shabab's top leader who was killed in a U.S. airstrike earlier this year.

Hersi was one of eight top al-Shabab officials whom the Obama administration offered a total of \$53 million for information leading to their capture in 2012.

Egypt cuts sentences in same-sex wedding case

CAIRO — An Egyptian appeals court has reduced the sentences of eight men convicted on charges of "inciting debauchery" for taking part in an alleged same-sex wedding party from three years to one year in prison.

Last month's convictions were based on an Internet video showing two men exchanging rings and embracing among cheering friends at a party on a Nile boat. The appeals court reduced the sentences on Saturday.

Egyptian law doesn't explicitly prohibit homosexuality, so the defendants were tried for "debauchery" — a charge normally reserved for prostitution.

Snow, ice hit Britain, stranding drivers

LONDON — Snow and icy weather have swept through parts of Britain, stranding drivers and leaving thousands of homes without power.

Snow also covered parts of Switzerland and southwestern Germany on Saturday, and nearly 16 inches of snowfall was predicted in higher parts of Germany's Black Forest.

Many motorists in Britain were forced to abandon their cars or were trapped in vehicles after becoming snowed in.

From The Associated Press

WORLD

Russia downplays effects of economic sanctions

By KAREN DEYOUNG
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Trade between the United States and Russia has increased by 7 percent, despite U.S. economic sanctions, Russian President Vladimir Putin told lawmakers in Moscow last week.

"When I looked at the statistic today... [it] even surprised me a little," Putin said, according to Russia's Interfax news agency.

It also surprised U.S. Commerce Department officials, who say that while U.S. exports to Russia are up by about 1 percent in 2014 from last year, imports from Russia are down by about 13 percent.

Even allowing for lag times in reporting, the differences are as stark as the two countries' public descriptions of the overall effect of U.S. and European sanctions have had on Russia. While the

United States insists it sees signs Putin's government is beginning to crack under the penalties imposed as punishment for Russia's activities in Ukraine, the Kremlin says that any current discomfort is only temporary.

"We have been in much worse situations in our history, and every time we were getting out of these fixes much stronger. This will happen this time," Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told French television recently.

Whichever side turns out to be right, however, both agree that substantive change in either direction, despite events such as the plunge in the value of the ruble, is likely to come slowly.

Speaking to reporters Friday, Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said the Russian economy could contract by 4 percent next year and have a budget deficit of more than 3 percent unless the price of oil rises.

'We have been in much worse situations in our history, and every time we were getting out of these fixes much stronger.'

Sergey Lavrov
Russian foreign minister

In a recent news conference, Putin told Russians that the economy would rebound within the next two years. The Obama administration sees a similarly long timeline, but with the trend moving in the opposite direction.

Beyond Putin's confident demeanor and his high domestic approval rating reflected in recent polls, U.S. officials working on the Russia account spend much of their time studying other tea leaves: Twitter feeds and bank statements, they say, indicate that the smart money is leaving

Russia.

"We don't think there are going to be big public protests against Putin but quiet, very concerned protests of the wealthy, powerful people who depend on Putin and whom Putin depends on," said a senior official who was authorized to discuss the subject on the condition of anonymity. If Putin changes course, the official said, "it won't be because of public demonstrations but the concerns of the broader leadership around him."

"We're not saying the Russians

aren't tough. They're very tough," a second administration official said. "Will they survive it? Of course, they'll survive, but that doesn't mean it won't have an effect in their thinking about their leadership or that the leadership isn't worried."

Putin's "bravado," the official said, "is an indication itself" of his concern.

The Obama administration says it recognizes that Russia's current economic problems, including the increase in interest rates after the ruble's drop, have as much, if not more, to do with the plummeting price of oil, Russia's primary export, as they do with sanctions.

"There are a lot of combined factors," Secretary of State John Kerry said at a news conference, "but the sanctions were clearly intended to invite President Putin to a different set of choices" on Ukraine.

War prisoners exchanged in Ukraine as hostilities ease

The Associated Press

DONETSK, Ukraine — Ukrainian authorities and pro-Russia rebels exchanged nearly 370 prisoners Friday, a major step toward easing hostilities in eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine handed over 222 prisoners, and the rebels released 145 people, according to Russia's state RIA Novosti news agency — the biggest one-time prisoner swap since the pro-Russian insurgency flared up in eastern Ukraine in April. Hundreds of others were released during previous months.

Numbers of those to be released varied Friday, and tensions were flying high as buses carrying the prisoners arrived at a site north of the main rebel stronghold of Donetsk.

At some point during the exchange, separatist rights ombudsman Darya Morozova was quoted by Tass news agency as saying that the exchange was pushed back until Saturday.

Russia's state television showed Ukrainian war prisoners boarding buses in the main rebel stronghold of Donetsk before being driven to a location north of the city where the exchange took place.

On the site where the swap was conducted, prisoners were called up in groups of 10 with officials from both sides verifying their identities.

The exchange had been tentatively planned for earlier last week, and the failure to conduct it pushed back another round of Ukraine peace talks in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, which was set for Friday but was adjourned indefinitely.

Fighting in eastern Ukraine between government forces, volunteer battalions and pro-Russia separatists has claimed more than 4,700 lives since last spring.

Previous rounds of talks in September produced a cease-fire and an agreement to pull back heavy weapons, but both sides have failed to agree on a line of division and fighting continued.



Topless woman grabs Baby Jesus

A Vatican police officer stops an activist from the Ukrainian feminist group Femen after she snatched the statue of Baby Jesus from the Nativity scene set in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on Thursday. The Holy See has released the woman, Yana Zhdanova, who took the statue and bared her breasts in the square, shouting "God is woman." Vatican spokesman the Rev. Federico Lombardi said the Holy See prosecutor met with Zhdanova on Saturday and decided to order her freed. She was told never to set foot again in Vatican City State or on other Vatican property. The Christmas Day episode took place about an hour after Pope Francis had greeted and blessed tens of thousands of faithful.

Russian official seeks probe of 2 US bombings during WWII

By SERGEI L. LOIKO
Los Angeles Times

MOSCOW — A leading Russian elected official on Thursday called for an investigation of the United States' atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II as a "crime against humanity."

The effort to reconsider history by Sergei Naryshkin, the parliament's lower house speaker, comes after similar calls by colleagues early last week to revisit significant events involving Russia in the 20th century.

On Wednesday, lawmaker Frants Klintsevich, of the ruling United Russia faction, called on his colleagues to reconsider or even annul a 1989 statement of the then-Soviet Union's Congress of People's Deputies denouncing its military invasion in Afghanistan, which lasted 10 years and led to the deaths of about 15,000 Soviet servicemen and hundreds of thousands of Afghans.

Also last week, upper house speaker Valentina Matviyenko sought to void the 1954 handover of Crimea from the Russian Federation to the then-Soviet republic of Ukraine. That action was in effect annulled in March, when Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the annexation of Crimea after a referendum whose fairness was questioned by many analysts.

Relations between Putin and the West are growing increasingly frosty as the former Cold War rivals escalate their rhetoric and actions over the fate of Russian neighbor Ukraine. Critics warn that efforts by the Kremlin to rewrite history are a hallmark of the Soviet communist era of totalitarian rule.

The 1945 atomic bombings of the two Japanese cities came before the end of World War II were similar to Nazi crimes, Naryshkin argued at a conference in Moscow on Thursday.

"I think that we should discuss this topic together with lawyers and international law experts because crimes against humanity have no limitation period," Naryshkin said, according to the Itar-Tass news service.

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OPINION

US has been too slow to help in Iraq

By DAVID IGNATIUS

WATCHING events unfold in Iraq this year has been like viewing a slow-motion train wreck. Tribal leaders have been warning since spring about the rise of the terrorist Islamic State and pleading for American help. But after months of slaughter, the United States is only now beginning to build an effective tribal-assistance program.

The Albu Nimr tribe has been savaged especially, in part because it supported what became the U.S.-led Awakening movement in Anbar province. In 2004, members of the Albu Nimr made early contacts with U.S. Marine officers in Amman, Jordan, that helped foster the later, broader campaign against al-Qaida.

Back in October, I wrote about the plight of the Albu Nimr as Islamic State fighters advanced on the tribe's ancestral home near Hit along the Euphrates River. Pleas to CENTCOM and the Iraqi military on the night of Oct. 23 brought no aid, and the tribal fighters surrendered; over the next few weeks, several hundred tribesmen were killed.

"What happened to the Nimrs was an unmitigated tragedy," says one top U.S. official. U.S. commanders say they lacked systems for quick response. CENTCOM is now said to have a hotline for the tribes, but material assistance has been limited.

The Albu Nimr catastrophe happened partly because of crossed wires. Many of the tribe's leaders were based in Amman, but U.S. policy was seeking to draw Sunni fighters toward Baghdad and the new, less-polarizing prime minister, Haider

al-Abadi. In effect, Baghdad trumped Amman, and the Albu Nimr were caught in the middle.

Aspet toward needed Jordanian-Iraqi cooperation came last week, as Iraqi Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi announced that Jordan would train and arm Sunni tribal units. This unusual Amman-Baghdad project followed a visit by Abadi to the United Arab Emirates, which pledged support for the Kuwaitis and also pledged weapons and ammunition for this Sunni "national guard."

The plight of the Albu Nimr and other tribes is suggested by emails sent over the past few months as the Islamic State group terrorized Anbar.

"Today, we have a small window of opportunity to recruit fighters from Sunni tribes because they are mad about losing their livelihoods and their relatives have been killed," wrote one Albu Nimr leader in November, after the Hit massacre, to a retired Marine major who had served in Anbar.

The problem, the tribal leader argued, was that because the United States was working so closely with the Shiite-led government in Baghdad, Sunnis in Anbar doubted there was any U.S. commitment to giving them more power. Without this political commitment, weapons and even Apache gunships would be of little use.

"This effort will not succeed as a strategy simply because there is no political solution offered as part of the recruitment," the Albu Nimr leader warned.

On Nov. 21, the same tribal leader advised CENTCOM, through the retired Marine major, that Albu Nimr volunteers still

fighting near Hit had not been fed properly for three days and that 17 had given up because of hunger. "The whole effort will collapse very soon if no proper supplies and proper food [are] delivered."

The Albu Nimr continued to knock on the U.S. door. On Dec. 11, the tribal leader wrote to the retired Marine major: "I must say, people are very disappointed with the level of support by government to tribal fighters which is almost nonexistent." Ten days before, he said, Albu Nimr fighters had been forced to give up a position they had retaken along the Euphrates, with several dozen captured, and that the situation in nearby Ramadi was "very critical."

A retired Marine brigadier general who served in Anbar summarized the lesson for rolling back the Islamic State. "It's about trust, and trust can't be argued or instantaneously developed," he urged.

What has begun to change over the past six months is that Sunni leaders in Jordan, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Turkey all seem willing to work with the Shiite-led government in Baghdad to back a tribal campaign against the Islamic State. This effort may fail because of mistrust among the tribes, but it would have been inconceivable while the divisive Nouri al-Maliki was prime minister.

Sunni tribal leaders say in interviews that they want to roll back the Islamic State, but they're wary allies. They don't trust Baghdad, and many don't trust the United States. A common-front strategy won't work without sustained, close-in U.S. support for people who have been betrayed so often that their first thought is survival.

David Ignatius is a member of Washington Post Writers Group

The pastor who brought down a dictator

By LEE EDWARDS

The Heritage Foundation

YOU'VE probably heard of Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia and Lech Walesa of Poland, both Nobel Laureates and heroes of the Cold War who precipitated the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe a quarter of a century ago.

But how many of us know the story of Laszlo Tokes, a Protestant pastor who in December 1989 stood up to the Romanian communist despot Nicolae Ceausescu and sparked a people's revolution that freed Romania from a totalitarian tyrant the equal of the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin?

In the spring of 1989, while other Soviet satellite regimes, including the communist leaders, Romania remained in the iron grip of the Ceausescu regime. Few dared to speak out against "President" Ceausescu and his Stalinist secret police, the Securitate.

A notable exception was 37-year-old Laszlo Tokes, the assistant pastor of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the Transylvanian town of Timisoara. The theme of his sermons was simple but arresting: "We do not have to support the dictatorship and the dictator Ceausescu." No one had dared utter such a public challenge.

Ordered to stop preaching, Tokes re-

fused. Directed to leave the apartment in which he and his family were living and move to a distant isolated town, he refused. In November, rioters armed with knives broke into his church apartment, but Tokes and friends fought them off. In mid-December when an eviction order was issued, members of Tokes' congregation began a vigil outside his lodging, and a human chain formed around the block.

By the evening of Dec. 15, 1989, the crowd had increased to several thousand, including students, Romanians as well as Hungarians, Orthodox as well as Protestants. They began singing "We Wake up, O Romanian!" a song banned in 1947 by the communists. They shouted, "Down with Ceausescu!" and "Down with communism!"

Two days later, on direct orders from Ceausescu, communist troops fired on a large crowd gathered in the town center of Timisoara, killing hundreds and perhaps thousands of innocents. This cowardly, bloody act was the catalyst for a spontaneous people's revolt that quickly spread across the country and to the capital city of Bucharest.

Confident he had the backing of the populace, Ceausescu went to the main square and tried to give a speech listing the socialist "accomplishments" under his rule. To his shock and amazement, he was inter-

rupted by jeers, boos and whistles. Unable to control the crowd, he and his wife Elena fled the city in a helicopter only to be forced down and taken prisoner by a new government. After a short trial by a special military tribunal, Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu were executed on Dec. 25, 1989.

Today, Laszlo Tokes, the courageous pastor who brought down a dictator, continues to speak out for freedom and against totalitarianism as a member of the European Parliament and a bishop of the Reformed Church in Romania. A modern St. George, Bishop Tokes stands ready to battle any force that threatens the faith and the freedom of those whom he represents as pastor and political leader.

So, let us give thanks in this holiday season for Havel and Walesa and Tokes, for all the men and women on both sides of the Iron Curtain — the known and the unknown — who resisted and kept on resisting the evil empire over a span of 40 years so that Marxism-Leninism would wind up where it belonged: on the ash heap of history.

Lee Edwards, Ph.D., is a distinguished fellow at the Heritage Foundation's Center for Principles and Politics at The Heritage Foundation, 214 Massachusetts Avenue NE, Washington, D.C. 20002. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC

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OPINION

How to enforce the law – without force

BY IAN AYRES AND DANIEL MARKOVITS

Recent deaths at the hands of police in Ferguson, Mo., and on Staten Island, N.Y., have rightly raised questions about illegal force and racial bias in law enforcement. But a more basic question also needs to be weighed: Should police be permitted to initiate force by confronting and deterring nonserious crimes? The answer should be no.

The existing rules of engagement for police in the United States invite violence, not just when officers act abusively but also when their conduct falls clearly within the limits of the law. There is no question that police in the United States can lawfully arrest anyone they see jaywalking or selling single cigarettes. And there is equally no question that any American who refuses a police order to come to the station can be forced by violence to comply.

But should police be permitted to initiate force in such cases?

Consider what arrests are for. An arrest is not punishment. After all, there has been no conviction at that point. The purpose of an arrest is to prevent crime and to aid in prosecution by establishing identity, gathering evidence and preventing flight. The steps taken to secure arrests therefore must, at every point, be proportional to the suspected crimes that underlie the arrests.

The current police rules of engagement violate these basic principles at every turn. Convictions for jaywalking and selling single cigarettes — the predicate offenses in Ferguson and Staten Island, respectively — effectively never carry jail sentences, and nobody thinks that they should. Fines are the proper punishments for these minor crimes.

But under current law, when the police arrest someone based on nothing more than a probable cause of a minor crime, they can treat the wrongdoer more severely than the punishment that would ordinarily be imposed by a court of law, even after a full trial. We believe that the New York Police Department violated current law when Of-



ROBERT COHEN, ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH/AP

Police guard the entrance to a gas station Wednesday in Berkeley, Mo., in front of a memorial to Antonio Martin, a black 18-year-old who was killed by a white police officer after Martin pointed a gun at him, police said.

ficer Daniel Pantaleo placed Eric Garner in a chokehold. And under current rules of engagement, Garner's saying "Don't touch me" unquestionably authorized the police to initiate the use of force — nonlethal force, but still force — to subdue him.

That's wrong. An arrest should not impose a burden greater than a conviction. When it does, the arrest amounts to police oppression.

To fix the wrong, we should change the rules of engagement. A police officer confronting someone suspected of only a minor crime should not be permitted to arrest the suspect by force. In most cases, the police should simply issue a ticket. If the police wish to take someone into custody, they should not use force but instead issue a warning, like the Miranda warning, backed by a sanction. The text might say

something like: "I am placing you under arrest. You must come with me to the station. If you don't come, you're committing a separate crime, for which you may be punished." If the person complies upon hearing the warning, that ends the matter. If not, then the police can obtain a warrant from a judge and make a forcible arrest for both the old crime and the new. Similar rules of engagement should govern searches based on suspicion of petty crimes.

Such rules would not only protect the public's rights but also promote law and order. Many critics rightly doubt that maximally aggressive "broken windows" public-order policing works. And other countries marry nonviolent rules of engagement with effective law enforcement; Germany, for example, imposes strict limits on the use of force to arrest petty offenders, and the

entire German police, governing a population of 80 million, fired only 85 bullets in 2011. Moreover, nonviolent rules of engagement would also protect the police. Officers must of course retain the right to defend themselves when subject to attack. But by inviting police to initiate force, current practices require officers to control a naturally escalating dynamic that can quickly endanger all concerned.

Garner's tragic death illustrates the drawbacks of policies that permit but seek to limit police use of force. In the heat of the moment, Officer Pantaleo violated the longstanding NYPD policy against the longstanding NYPD policy against chokeholds. The current rules of engagement make such excesses inevitable. Once the police initiate force, limits on escalation stand in tension with the goal of convincing the subject that resistance is futile. A policy restricting when an officer may initiate force at all draws a coherent, bright line that is much more likely to be observed.

Finally, new rules of engagement would also promote racial equality. Outraged citizens properly emphasize that police disproportionately harm and kill black men. But these racial disparities are, once again, not simply products of illegal police conduct but rather are invited by the existing rules of engagement. Police discretion is greatest for minor offenses, and racial discrepancies follow discretion. By allowing the police forcibly to arrest people for these offenses, the current rules place communities of color at disproportionate risk of police violence. Reforms that aim merely to increase police compliance with existing rules of engagement cannot undo the disproportion.

If the police in Ferguson or Staten Island had employed our rules, two men who are now dead might instead have been safely placed in voluntary custody, admitted their crimes and paid a small fine. At worst, they would likely have received orderly and fair judicial process for defying the law.

In either event, rights would be respected, order maintained and justice served.

Teachers at Yale Law School, Ian Ayres and Daniel Markovits wrote this for The Washington Post.

Should noncitizens be allowed to vote? It's only fair

BY RON HAYDUK

The contemporary immigrant rights movement has commanded attention through civil disobedience, student walkouts and intensive lobbying. But there's another tactic — increasing immigrant clout by allowing all noncitizens to vote — that also deserves serious consideration.

Many Americans understandably question why immigrants should be able to vote before they become U.S. citizens. They know citizenship is required for federal elections, and they attested to their status when they registered. But what most don't know is that the right to vote in this country has never been intrinsically tied to citizenship. And even now, in a few jurisdictions and on some issues, noncitizens have a limited right to vote.

As it turns out, voting by noncitizens is as old as the Republic. From 1776 until 1926 in 40 states and federal territories, residents who weren't citizens could vote in local, state and sometimes federal elections. They also have held public office; Indiana and Louisiana elected noncitizen aldermen and coroners, for example. In a country where "no taxation without representation" was the rallying cry for revolution, and where government theoretically rests "on the consent of the governed," al-

lowing all residents to vote only makes sense.

Today, immigrants here legally and illegally work in every sector of the economy. They own homes and businesses, attend colleges and send children to schools. They pay billions in taxes each year, and make countless social and cultural contributions to their communities. They are subject to all the laws that govern citizens, serve in the military and even die defending the U.S. But most are without formal political voice.

Their numbers are staggering. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 22 million adults in the U.S. are barred from voting because they lack U.S. citizenship. In some districts — and in some whole cities and towns — noncitizens make up 25 percent to 50 percent of voting-age residents. In Los Angeles, they make up more than one-third of the voting-age population; in New York City, they are 22 percent of adults. Such levels of political exclusion approximate the exclusion of women prior to 1920, African-Americans before the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and 18-year-olds prior to 1971.

Sadly, America knows all too well what can occur when groups don't have a formal political voice: discriminatory public policy and private practices — in employment,

housing, education, healthcare, welfare and criminal justice.

Noncitizens suffer social and economic inequities, in part, because policymakers can ignore their interests. The vote is a proven mechanism to keep government responsive and accountable to all.

But why don't they just become citizens? Most immigrants want to, but the average time it takes for the naturalization process is eight years and sometimes longer. That's a long time to go without a vote.

Besides, many who are here legally are barred from pursuing citizenship by the terms of their visas; they are students or green card holders who are nonetheless members of their communities who deserve a voice in its policies. And, of course, those who are here illegally, who overstayed a visa or never had one have no practical pathway to citizenship.

But do noncitizens possess sufficient knowledge of our political system to vote responsibly? If political knowledge was a criterion for voting, many U.S. citizens would be out of luck, as public surveys regularly show. Moreover, as is a citizen can move from New York to Los Angeles and register and vote within 30 days, even if he or she doesn't know a thing about the candidates or ballot proposals. So why should literacy tests or restrictive residen-

cy requirements be able to disenfranchise noncitizens voters?

There are now a handful of U.S. jurisdictions where noncitizens have a right to vote in some elections. In six towns in Maryland since the 1990s, all residents (except felons serving sentences or those judged mentally incompetent by a court) can vote in local elections. Chicago permits all noncitizen parents of schoolchildren to vote in local school council elections. In California, all parents can participate in "parent trigger" votes to change the administration of their children's schools.

Next year, the New York City Council will take up a basic, widely opposed political support — that would allow noncitizens lawfully residing in the U.S. to vote in local elections. In March, Burlington, Vt., voters will decide on a similar ballot proposition to let legal permanent residents vote in local elections. The District of Columbia has a similar bill pending.

The right to vote helps keep our democracy inclusive and fair, and resident voting is the next logical step toward creating a truly universal franchise. It is what America's past and future as an immigrant nation requires. Noncitizen voting is the suffrage movement of our time.

Ron Hayduk, a professor of political science at Queens College, City University of New York, wrote this for the Los Angeles Times (TN5).

AMERICAN ROUNDUP



JOHN ANTICZAK/AP

Gull gaggle

Startled gulls rise and turn into a stiff offshore wind at Malibu Lagoon in Malibu, Calif., on Christmas Day. The winds, which followed a cold front that raced through the state overnight, swept skies clean and whipped up whitecaps along the coast.

Sweet justice in ice cream shop vandalism

MA BOURNE — The owner of a Cape Cod ice cream parlor has been charged for allegedly having his teenage employees vandalize a competitor in exchange for alcohol.

The Cape Cod Times reported that David Ariagno, owner of Lazy Sundae Ice Cream in Bourne, was released on personal recognizance last week after pleading not guilty to charges including malicious or wanton damaging of property, malicious destruction of property and contributing to the delinquency of his workers.

Police started investigating six months ago after windows at Somerset Creamery were broken by rocks several times.

Police eventually traced the vandalism to three teens, who pointed the finger at their boss. The teens are charged with malicious destruction of property.

Roommate charged in walker assault

MT HAMILTON — A Hamilton woman was charged with felony intimidation and misdemeanor assault after her roommate reported that the woman ran into her with her walker, causing her to fall.

The Ravalli Republic reported that the charges were filed against Joyce Marie Renfro, 62, after she and her roommate fought about finances on Dec. 8. Jeanne Hatfield told police she was standing in the hallway with her walker when Renfro came out of her bedroom with her own walker and told Hatfield to get out of the way or she was going to run her over. Hatfield said Renfro then ran into her, causing her to fall. Renfro told officers the col-

THE CENSUS

11,300

The number of funerals that the New York National Guard says its military honor guards expect to conduct for veterans of the Army and Air Force by the end of 2014. Last year, New York National Guard honor guards provided funeral services for 11,585 families of military veterans. Officials say the lower 2014 number appears to be due to the decline in the number of World War II and Korean War-era veterans still living, as well as cutbacks following a temporary budget reduction in October 2013.



lision was an accident, but she acknowledged threatening to kill Hatfield if she called police.

Renfro has not entered a plea and remains free on her own recognizance.

Heart issue found after accidental shooting

OH MEDINA — The son of a 75-year-old woman who was struck with birdshot by her husband while sitting in a recliner said the accident might have been a blessing because doctors treating her found a previously undiagnosed heart problem.

Charlene Ross' 77-year-old husband told authorities the shotgun went off Sunday at their home in York Township, in northeast Ohio, when he was checking to see if it was loaded. He told deputies he was getting the gun from a closet because he wanted to use it to scare off geese from a pond on their property.

Ross was taken to an Akron hospital, where she was listed in serious condition Friday.

Steve Ross told The Medina County Gazette that his family considers the outcome "a blessing on two fronts" — that his mother was nicked in the neck by only one tiny pellet and that doctors then discovered she had an abnormal heartbeat, or arrhythmia, that can be dangerous and now can be addressed with a pacemaker.

Police: Woman, 42, had sex, sent nudes to teen

PA POTTSTOWN — Police said a suburban Philadelphia mom had sex with a 17-year-old boy she met while volunteering with her daughter's cheerleading squad at a high school football game.

Iris Gibney, 42, was charged Tuesday with corruption of minors, disseminating obscene materials to a minor and trespassing in a motor vehicle.

Police said the mother of three and the boy admitted they were engaging in sexual conduct last month when an officer found them naked in a car at a closed park.

They say Gibney, who works at Victoria's Secret, also sent the boy nude photos. Police said she told the officer she's sorry and couldn't believe what she'd done.

Gibney is free on \$50,000 bail pending a Dec. 30 hearing.

Nature center seeks mice to feed its animals

CT MYSTIC — A nature center in Mystic has an unusual request: It's asking the public to donate dead mice.

The Day of New London reported that the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center is no longer receiving donations of frozen

meat from Pfizer and the Charles River Laboratory to feed 20 animals, including owls, eagles and snakes.

The two firms donated extra laboratory mice used in research, but the donations have recently stopped. The nonprofit center now faces costs of \$24,000 a year to buy mice.

Dog trapped in cave rescued on Christmas

KY PARTRIDGE — An eastern Kentucky man got an extra special present this Christmas when rescuers were able to free his dog from a cave where it had been trapped for days.

WYMT-TV reported that crews were able to free the animal, named Jane, early Thursday from a cave on Black Mountain in Letcher County. Owner Lonnie Lewis said it is the "best Christmas" he's ever had now that his dog is safe and back home.

Man donates 26 rods to hook kids on fishing

MI PORTAGE — Hams, money, coats? No, a Kal-amazoo-area man gave the needy what he knows best — fishing.

Bass fisherman Wesley Hanna donated 26 fishing rods and reels to Portage Community Outreach

Center, which put together gift baskets for Christmas. He said he just wants to put rods in the hands of kids.

Adam Nix is grateful. The Portage man picked up two fishing poles for his sons last week. Nix said they're "going to love them."

Man in a kayak helps nab suspected thief

WA SAMMAMISH — A fast-paddling good Samaritan in a kayak helped sheriff's deputies in Washington state nab a suspected Christmas mail thief.

Q13 reported that deputies received multiple calls on Wednesday morning that a man and a woman were going through mailboxes around the town of Sammamish.

While deputies were on their way, residents spotted a car filled with mail and used their cars to block it in.

The suspected mail thieves ran off, although one was caught immediately. The other fled into a nearby pond with a kayak he grabbed out of a yard.

A resident grabbed his own kayak, caught up to the suspect and convinced him to return to shore, where he was arrested.

The sheriff's office said the suspect didn't get very far because he was using his hands to paddle.

From wire reports

LIFESTYLE

It came as a ... pondering in August 2010, while he was at a Phillies game:

‘What would Chase Utley look like if he were a Muppet?’

Father finds success making sports stars into dead-ringer dolls

BY DIANE MASTRULL
The Philadelphia Inquirer

Getting that first win of the season, after 17 losses, certainly was a point of pride for the beleaguered Philadelphia 76ers. But what about Sixers point guard Michael Carter Williams? What did it mean to him?

Not the 6-foot-6 MCW. The 10-inch plush version that retails for \$19.99.

At the Plymouth Meeting, Penn., office of Bleacher Creatures, the doll made in Williams' likeness was a point of interest the morning after a recent game.

"Does two dolls make a run?" joked Matthew Hoffman, president and founder of the nine-employee company that opened in February 2011.

Maybe not, but Bleacher Creatures itself has been on an incredible run. While the privately held company does not disclose financials, Hoffman said, "We did seven figures in our first year." Sales have nearly doubled each year since, he added.

Out of economic necessity, manufacturing is done in China, he said.

Bleacher Creatures has partnerships with the National Basketball Association, the National Football League, the National Hockey League, Major League Baseball and Major League Soccer, as well as international soccer clubs and national federation teams. With more than 1,000 player dolls on the market — and plenty more planned — the company is expanding into entertainment.

A licensing deal with DC Comics and Warner Bros. led to the release of the "Man of Steel" and "Batman '66" series of plush figures.

The company is also the exclusive plush licensee for Warner Bros.' recent hit "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies."

"If you have a vision, you can accomplish anything," said Hoffman, 43, who spent 15 years in sports licensing before he got the idea for Bleacher Creatures.

It came as a rather bizarre pondering in August 2010, while he was at a Phillies game: "What would Chase Utley look like if he were a Muppet?" Hoffman wondered.

Such are the musings of a father of three who visited many ballparks as vice president of merchandising and brand management for sports-apparel provider Majestic Athletic. He found few high-quality toys for his children that had a connection to players.

Within a week of that fateful Phillies game, Hoffman had a sketch of an Utley



PHOTOS BY CLEM MURRAY, PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER/TNS

Matthew Hoffman, above, is founder and president of Bleacher Creatures, which specializes in stuffed likenesses of pro sports players, including, at left, Bleacher Creature creations of Pittsburgh Steelers fan favorites Troy Polamalu and Brett Leisel. See more at bleachercreatures.com.



doll. By the company's opening, he had secured licenses from the NFL, MLB, NHL and NBA. Utley was the first doll, quickly joined by another infield phenom, now-retired New York Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter.

Hoffman calls 2012 "our evolution year." Sales were decent, but feedback wasn't: "It really doesn't look like the players. It looks like a Muppet version of the players," he recalled.

development for NFL Players Inc., which represents group licensing rights for all 1,800 to 2,000 active players. Its licensing agreement with Bleacher Creatures is in its third year.

"I've never seen a product in this category that captures the realistic likeness so well," Scabelo said.

As the figures become better known, player requests increase for dolls modeled after them.

When Hoffman first heard from an agent for Seahawks cornerback Richard Sherman, Hoffman didn't know who that was. He sure does now: "He's in our top five sellers."

Not that the business is all fun and games. A player trade could become a sales and inventory headache. Hoffman avoided one by resisting a reorder urge earlier this year, when the plush of LeBron James as a Miami Heat player was nearly sold out.

When the vaunted forward announced his return to the Cleveland Cavaliers, Bleacher Creatures had only six Heat dolls left.

"I'm not always right, but in this case I was," Hoffman said.

Another goal is landing licensing partnerships in new areas, said Daniel Erlbaum, CEO of Finch Brands advertising agency and one of Bleacher Creatures' primary investors.

What might those be? "Actors and musicians," Erlbaum said. "The top of our list is Taylor Swift," Hoffman said. "To have her part of the Bleacher Creatures universe would be amazing."

LIFESTYLE

Newfound beauty

Class helps Army vets turn useless objects into art

By MEG JONES
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

AMILWAUKEE
tfirst, Bob Darnell couldn't see it.
Chain links. Cabi-
net handles. Nuts. Bolts.
Padlocks. Keys that once opened something.

It was just stuff, not paint or sculpting clay. But slowly Darnell, an Army veteran, began to envision not just junk, but items he could connect to create art.

"I kept an open mind and looked at the parts that were available," Darnell said recently at a reception for found-object artwork by him and other artists who participated in a class at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Milwaukee.

About a dozen people, mostly veterans, signed up this fall for the eight-session class on using found objects to create art.

Darnell made a sculpture he dubbed the "Great Emancipator."

using a padlock for a face, a drawer knob for a hat and chains for a body. "When I saw all these chains, the first thing I thought of was slaves and I thought I might have enough stuff to make a Lincoln statue," said Darnell, 68, of West Allis, Wis., who served as a journalist in the Army from 1976 to 1981.

He also made a tank from a tin can, mesh wire, screws, bolts and a square metal electrical box.

"Since I was in the Army, this looked like a turret to me.

From there it went on,

I found some mesh wire for the tank treads," Darnell said.

Beth Sahagian-Allsopp, co-owner of Vanguard Sculpture Ser-



vices, taught the class at St. John's, bringing objects from her studio and other places. She also raided her father's basement. It took a while to get the students, most of whom had never had art training, to get the hang of using something other than conventional materials to create their pieces.

"At first I think they were baffled. We tried to get them to look at things not as what they were but as shapes," said Sahagian-Allsopp. "They'd put two shapes together and see what it looked like. I gave them total freedom to do whatever they wanted."

Gary Pochert's piece was made from wood and wire he pulled from old television sets. He worked in electronics for the Army while stationed in Germany from 1966-'68, and was drawn to the electrical wiring.

"I never did anything like this before, although I come from a family of artists," said Pochert, 68. "I like the simplicity, which is a lot more appealing."

Pochert learned of the art classes while volunteering at the food pantry and free breakfast at St. John's that's offered to veterans and others who live in the neighborhood. He figured he'd take the class since he was already at the church several times a week.

Pochert plans to work more on his art piece because he thinks it's not done yet. The class has encouraged him to look for other objects to create pieces of art "instead of taking it to the scrap yard. Maybe people will get some art for Christmas," said Pochert.

The classes were sponsored by artists who work with Milwaukee's homeless. Though the veterans involved in this art class were not homeless, the artists have taught classes at Vets Place Central and several homeless shelters, said Jane Brite, an arts advocate and curator who coordinates the program.

The goal of the class was to allow veterans, particularly those dealing with issues such as post-traumatic stress, a way to express themselves, said St. John's Pastor Pres Hoffman.

"We like to do things that are life giving, and this is kind of a natural for us to do this" at St. John's, said Hoffman. "Some are loners and the art helps them open up and gives them a voice."



Above: Gary Pochert, an Army veteran who served from 1966-'68, discusses his antenna-like sculpture with Jane Brite, who worked to organize the art classes at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Milwaukee.

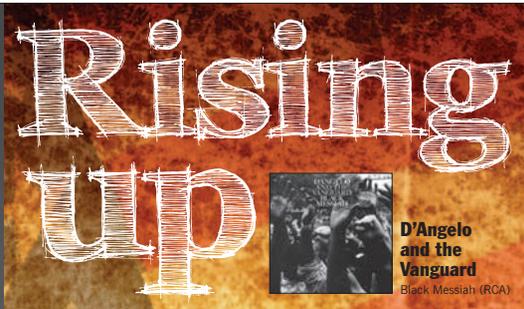
At top: "Great Emancipator" is one of Army veteran Bob Darnell's works.

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL SEARS, MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL/TNS

MUSIC



Gera Hennes/Courtesy of RCA Records



D'Angelo returns with mighty, political new album

By CHRIS RICHARDS

The Washington Post

After a 14-year absence marked by cataclysmic falls from grace and various false-start comebacks, D'Angelo's new album, "Black Messiah," dropped out of the heavens on Dec. 14.

Play it once with your eyes closed, and you'll hear something almost paralyzing — a survivor on the rebound of all rebounds, excavating new spiritual truths from unknown depths. It's as if he sank so low that he finally discovered the ocean floor of American soul music, and then started drilling.

This album communicates its complexity with immediacy and finesse — proof that this is the same D'Angelo who left us hanging back in 2000 with "Voodoo," an ecstatic masterstroke that many feared might end up becoming his swan song. Now 40, the man has released the most poignant and powerful album of his life, putting him in the running for the greatest comeback story popular music has ever seen.

In case you forgot, he rose up in the mid-'90s amid a generation of neo-soul singers brave enough to revisit the stratosphere originally mapped out by Marvin Gaye, Curtis Mayfield and other R&B deities. These '90s rookies made some exceptional albums and got seriously freaked out by fame. Maxwell, Lauryn Hill and D'Angelo each responded to the turbulence of stardom with unex-

pected vanishing acts, with D'Angelo receding the farthest, returning to his native Richmond, Va., and tumbling into drug abuse.

So when he started touring again in 2012, we all exhaled and smiled.

Despite all of the optimistic vibes that came radiating off that tour, it doesn't make the unannounced release of "Black Messiah" any less gobsmacking — especially because this album does what so few eternally postponed comeback albums do. Instead of feeling heavy with expectation, it feels weightless in its delivery, sophisticated in its detail and urgent in its fury.

As a singer, the auteur is still forging fresh melodic relationships, multi-tracking his voice to create vocal harmonies that carry anomalous magic.

As a lyricist, he has never been more commanding. Collaborating with rapper Q-Tip and songwriter Kendra Foster, he sends heavy political messages out on airy grooves, such as during "The Charade," a wounded funk song about the invisible burdens of being black in America. "All we wanted was a chance to talk," he sings on the refrain. "Stead we only got outlined in chalk."

This is a deeply political album, and in the liner notes circulating online, D'Angelo explains its provocative title: "It's about people rising up in Ferguson (Mo.) and in Egypt and in Occupy Wall Street and in every place where a community has had enough and decides to make change happen. ... 'Black Messiah' is not one man. It's a feeling that, collectively, we are all that leader."

With demonstrators across the U.S. protesting decisions in Missouri and New York to not indict police officers involved in the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, it's as if D'Angelo had been saving these songs for when America needed to hear them most.

In another sense, the timing doesn't really matter at all. "Black Messiah" is an album that instantly asserts its consequence and vows to stick around, eliciting bliss, stoking awe, urging us on, reminding us of what music can do.

'All we wanted was a chance to talk,
'Stead we only got outlined in chalk.'
— 'The Charade'

MOVIES

Streep sings Sondheim, and finds her own voice

By ANNE MIDGETTE
The Washington Post

Meryl Streep sings. Her fans know this. Meryl Streep sang in "Postcards From the Edge," in "Ironweed," on the children's album "Philadelphia Chickens" and, of course, in "Mamma Mia," the movie that improbably, given all the successes in her career, made her a box-office star. That Meryl Streep can sing Sondheim is something that music-theater aficionados are likely to question — until, at least, they've heard it.

Streep, as film and theater fans are well aware by now, plays the Witch in the new Rob Marshall film of Stephen Sondheim's "Into the Woods." Like most big Sondheim roles, it requires a certain level of vocal ability. Streep's singing voice is recognizably her own; it's also credible and moving, and it allows her, when called for, to chew the scenery in the best musical-theater tradition.

"I had to expand my chest and be able to hold a tone longer than I've tried to do in 15 years," Streep said.

"I thought, you know, this is the height of arrogance, to think that I could sing this score, because I'd heard the great Bernadette Peters," she said, speaking deliberately and thoughtfully, with few tangents. "But like everything

that's wonderful — every play that has many, many lines, they can expand the shape of the people who are going to make it."

In short: There are a lot of ways to sing Sondheim, or any score, and get it right.

Once upon a time, actors in movie musicals had to meet certain standards of vocal beauty — or have their voices dubbed by singers who did. Audrey Hepburn was game to do her own singing in "Funny Face" but was dubbed by Marni Nixon in "My Fair Lady"; Nixon also became the singing voice of Deborah Kerr in "The King and I" and of Natalie Wood in "West Side Story."

Today, however, actors who aren't known for singing are routinely performing their own parts: Johnny Depp in "Sweeney Todd," Richard Gere in "Chicago," Russell Crowe in "Les Miserables." And this opens up a whole range of questions about what it means to be able to sing, and what we expect from a singing voice, and whether the singing of an actor who hasn't specialized in song — from Marlon Brando in "Guys and Dolls" to "Les Miz" — ruins the show, or makes it more authentic.

The "Into the Woods" cast falls across the spectrum of vocal experience. There are non-singers such as Emily Blunt, who plays the Baker's Wife, and Depp, who took a critical drubbing (unfairly, I thought) for his performance as Todd and who's back here as the Wolf. But Tracey Ullmann, who had a full-on recording career for a while, plays Jack's mother (as in "Jack and the Beanstalk"), and Cinderella is played by Anna Kendrick, who has been singing onstage and screen since age 12, when she played the role of Frederika in "A Little Night Music" at the New York City Opera under Paul Gemignani (who also

is the musical director of this movie).

Here's one thing singers and actors have in common: When your work schedule is full, it's hard to put in the time to learn new roles. Acknowledging this, and working to counteract it, Disney Studios took the highly unusual step of setting aside six weeks of rehearsal time, with the full cast and musical staff, before filming even began. By the time they were done, the cast felt ready to perform the piece onstage.

Streep didn't work privately with a coach, either. "I didn't want to inflict that on anyone," she said, laughing. Instead, she practiced herself, drawing on resources and exercises learned when she was studying at the Yale School of Drama.

"In graduate school, we had lots of acting classes, and I didn't really understand a lot of what they were talking about," she said. "But my singing class: I had a great teacher, Betsy Parrish, and she said, to the assembled class, 'Every single one of you, men and women, is going to stand up here on the stage at the end of this term and you're going to sing a song and you're going to make us cry.' And a lot of the boys said, 'Well, I don't sing, so, you know, (expletive) that, I'm just not going to do that.' And what was really interesting was that, when she got them to a point of expanding, getting the support of their diaphragm, connecting breath to emotion, to the point, they were the ones that cried. Because the connection in music to your emotional center is direct.

There's no impediment. ... That was really fascinating. And that I understood. That was an acting lesson."

There's a common misconception about formal singing training, which is that it teaches you to learn an affected, stylized sound. Witness all those YouTube videos of young people singing

in plummy voices with lots of vibrato, and calling it operatic. The fact that many trained singers sound artificial further obfuscates the point of the exercise. Vocal training, in any style, is about finding ways to amplify and deepen your ability to express yourself. Luciano Pavarotti had one of the most distinctive voices in opera, but it wasn't put on, and it was always immediately recognizable as himself. Ultimately, the sound you make comes from your emotional center, not from the technical apparatus that you build around it.

Perhaps as a result of this, Streep, who listens to music continually as part of her preparation for a role, didn't have a particular vocal model for this one. "I just listened to myself," she said. "And I was very interested to find my voice, because I hadn't sung out of the character of, I don't know, in 'Ironweed' or 'Mamma Mia,' a sort of pop voice — I was using different voices for different things. But I wanted to locate, especially in 'Stay With Me'" — the witch's signature song, the plea of a mother to the daughter she can't let go — "to the center of what I would sound like." Because there are so many layers of the Witch that it just didn't seem necessary for her to have any voice other than mine."



Meryl Streep stars in "Into the Woods." The musical fantasy film intertwines the plots of select fairy tales and explores the consequences of the characters' wishes and quests.

GETTY IMAGES/Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures



DISNEY ENTERPRISES, INC./AP

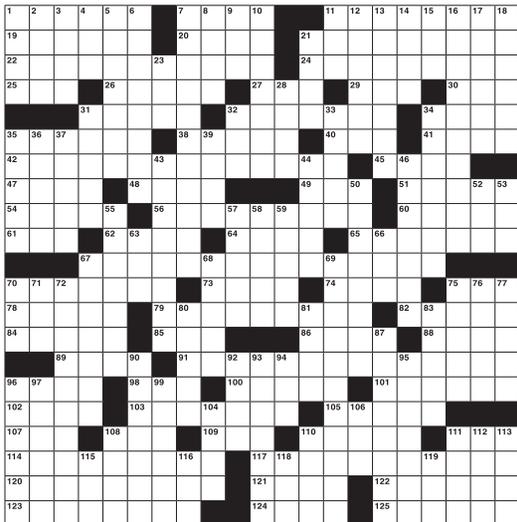
CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

SEASON'S GREETINGS

BY JOEL FAGLIANO / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

- ACROSS**
- 1 Something put on the spot?
 - 7 Without a mixer
 - 11 Likely feature of a college town
 - 19 One may be removed
 - 20 ___-American
 - 21 Red or white sticker?
 - 22 Homer that leaves people yawning?
 - 24 "Shucks!" or "Pshaw!"?
 - 25 Go astray
 - 26 Father-son activity
 - 27 They can be fertilized
 - 29 Pale ___
 - 30 Majors in acting
 - 31 Disminering
 - 32 Give rise to
 - 34 "The less you wear, the more you need ___ (slogan)
 - 35 "Pick me, pick me!"
 - 38 Sauce with a name derived from the Italian for "pounded"
 - 40 Risky chess move, informally
 - 41 Some briefs
 - 42 Southwest tribe after a fistfight?
 - 45 Pad ___ (noodle dish)
 - 47 Part of E.T.S.: Abbr.
 - 48 Piano sonatas, e.g.
 - 49 ___ genres
 - 51 World of Warcraft creatures
 - 54 Navratilova rival
 - 56 Starts recycling, say
 - 60 First lady from Texas
 - 61 Nav. rank
 - 62 War stat
 - 64 Bleacher feature
 - 65 Where a director directs
 - 67 Backstabbing pal?
 - 70 Soon gonna
 - 73 "Dedicated to the ___ Love"
 - 74 Siouan speaker
 - 75 Filch
 - 78 Around
 - 79 Zion National Park material
 - 82 Coast along, with "by"
 - 84 Reader of the Desert News
 - 85 Break off
 - 86 They're above abs
 - 88 "It Came ___ a Midnight Clear" me!"
 - 89 ___ tide
 - 91 Barn dance that's free to attend?
 - 96 Seeks change?
 - 98 Hematite, e.g.
 - 100 Together
 - 101 Across Strabowski of 2008 TV
 - 102 What vinegar has a lot of
 - 103 Proctor's charge
 - 105 Gawks at
 - 107 Computer addresses: Abbr.
 - 108 Believe it!
 - 109 R.S.V.P., e.g.: Abbr.
 - 110 Where the big buys are?
 - 111 Makeshift, maybe
 - 114 Vagrant after getting kicked off a train, say?
 - 117 Surf your dad finds ridiculous?
 - 120 Gentle treatment, metaphorically
 - 121 Temple
 - 122 Saharan nomad
 - 123 "The Shawshank Redemption" setting
 - 124 Nursing need
 - 125 Charles Schwab competitor
- DOWN**
- 1 Feel deep compassion
 - 2 Way out
 - 3 Germany's ___ Basin
 - 4 Pac-12 team, for short
 - 5 Steve Jobs's successor at Apple
 - 6 Minuses, basically
 - 7 House speaker after Dennis Hastert
 - 8 I will follow it
 - 9 "___, we done!"
 - 10 Hockey Hall of Fame locale
 - 11 Playlist info
 - 12 World capital once conquered by Augustus
 - 13 Return to one's seat?
 - 14 Roy Rogers's real last name
 - 15 Raven's cry
 - 16 Cause for a quarantine
 - 17 Moon of Neptune
 - 18 Church leaders
 - 21 Sound of a fly swatter
 - 23 "___ no biggie" ___ Cognac bottle letters
 - 28 Cognac bottle letters
 - 31 Lawn game
 - 32 "Or so"
 - 33 Bone to pick
 - 34 Celtic battle, say
 - 35 Like President Taft
 - 36 Bygone
 - 37 Trucks, maybe
 - 39 Sedgwick in Warhol films
 - 43 Warrior or downward dog
 - 44 Rhone tributary
 - 46 Some Christmas decorations
 - 50 Computer-don, informally
 - 52 "Fore
 - 53 Got the chair?"
 - 55 Composer whose name is an anagram of SANTA + ME
 - 57 Bear
 - 58 Put-downs
 - 59 Like used cigars, maybe
 - 63 Suffix with social
 - 66 "Personally, I think ___" in texts
 - 67 Kate Middleton, e.g.
 - 68 Complex thing?
 - 69 Tree whose pods have sweet pulp
 - 70 Lead-in to pressure
 - 71 Was gullible
 - 72 Crush, e.g.
 - 75 Fattened fowl
 - 76 Nickname for Orlando
 - 77 Pasta with a name derived from the Italian for "quills"
 - 80 Auntie ___ (pretzel chain)
 - 81 German auto
 - 83 "Good job by you!"
 - 87 Trendy coffee order
 - 90 Joint business venture?
 - 92 Look
 - 93 Special newstand offering
 - 94 "Illmatic" rapper
 - 95 Balance
 - 96 Regal and Encore
 - 97 Lively intelligence
 - 99 Take off
 - 104 Ski resort near Santa Fe
 - 106 Beauty
 - 108 ___ of Man
 - 110 Stillwater's home: Abbr.
 - 111 ___ Liasson, NPR political correspondent
 - 112 & 113 It's full of options
 - 115 Mt. rank
 - 116 Son of, in Hebrew names
 - 118 Get behind
 - 119 It's hard to shoot



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GUNSTON STREET



"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and visit gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



KNOWLEDGE

ARCHIVE PHOTO OF THE DAY

IS POWER.

STRIPES CENTRAL

Stripes BLOGS

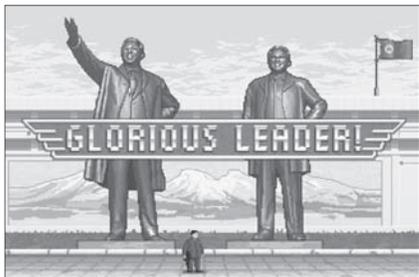
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PACIFIC SPORTSBLOG

PACIFIC STORM TRACKER

OMBUDSMAN

GADGETS & CHARTS



PHOTOS BY MONEYHORSE GAMES/AP

"Glorious Leader!" creator Jeff Miller says he's not worried about potential threats from North Korea. He says the game makes North Korea leader Kim Jong Un look "totally awesome."

No plans to cancel Kim Jong Un game

By DERRIK J. LANG
The Associated Press

The creator of a satirical video game that depicts Kim Jong Un as a gun-toting, unicorn-riding hero has no plans to cancel his zany creation following a cyberattack and threats of violence against Sony Pictures that the FBI has attributed to North Korea.

In fact, "Glorious Leader!" creator Jeff Miller is now more motivated than ever to finish his game. While North Korea forces have frequently been depicted as the adversary in games, such as "Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2" and "Homefront," "Glorious Leader!" cast the nation's leader as the protagonist — with cameos from such folks as Dennis Rodman and Kim Jong Il.

The retro-styled, run-and-gun game comically puts players in the shoes of a super-powered Kim Jong Un as he battles waves of American drones and soldiers with weapons like a machine gun and bazooka. Miller is planning levels set in such locations as the streets of Pyongyang and atop Paektu Mountain. He's now planning another on the Sony Pictures backend.

"We want the game to be as topical as possible," said Miller, adding he hasn't received any threats from North Korea or hackers and isn't afraid of any backlash because the game makes Kim Jong Un "look totally awesome."

Miller's Moneyhorse Games has been independently working on the tongue-in-cheek game off and on for more than a year.

In response to the fallout from the cyberattack last week, Miller launched a crowdfunding campaign Dec. 17 asking for \$55,000 by Jan. 15 to finish the game.

"I should probably ask for more funds now to beef up our cyber-security," Miller said. "We didn't



Game creator Miller says he's planning a game level set on the Sony Pictures backend.

know things were going to get this weird."

Miller, who plans to release the downloadable game for PC and mobile devices, said he also reached out to Microsoft Corp. and Sony Corp. about making the game available on their respective Xbox and PlayStation consoles. Microsoft declined to distribute "Glorious Leader!" However, he said Sony was responsive when he last communicated with the company in October before the attack.

"I think I'll wait a little while before I reach out to them again," Miller said.

The FBI formally accused the North Korean government Dec. 19 of being responsible for the hacking attack against Sony, while President Barack Obama said Sony "made a mistake" in halting the Dec. 25 release of "The Interview," a comedy about a plot to assassinate the North Korean leader.

The hackers sent a new message Dec. 19 to Sony Pictures Entertainment, gloating over the studio's decision to cancel the release of "The Interview" and warning not to distribute the film in any form.

Ultimately, "The Interview" was released in select theaters nationwide Dec. 25, and is available on select streaming services.

GADGET WATCH

Quirky's provides a spacious solution

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

Any gadget that offers to free up space on my desk and give me additional USB ports, I'm all for.

Quirky's new Space Bar lets you put your monitor on top, gives you free space below and provides six USB ports.

Two of the ports are for USB charging and the others (USB 3.0) are for computer connections and syncing.

In many cases you can slide your keyboard underneath or just spread your mess around even more as I typically do.

It can store a keyboard up to 18 x 1.5 inches or up to 20 pounds, which can be a 27-inch iMac. I love Quirky products because they are cool and innovative. A big reason is that they are designed by users, like me and you. In this case, I have to give credit to Michael Cavada of Selingsgrove, Pa., for the Space Bar.

Online: quirky.com; \$99.99 for black or white versions, \$129.99 for an Apple-matching brushed aluminum look.



Photos by TNS

Quirky's new Space Bar increases your desktop space and provides six USB ports.

training regiment. A Soft-touch silicone wrist strap is included. Online: adidas.com; \$149

Western Digital's pocket-sized My Passport Ultra metal edition is one-stop shopping and a complete solution for backing up videos, music libraries, digital images or documents.

It's great for digital storage and/or a secure backup to your personal digital files.

It can be set up with local and cloud backup options, WD SmartWare Pro backup software, and makes a great solution for Apple Time Machine users. Security can even be added with password protection or 256-bit hardware encryption.

The slim drives are available in 1TB and 2TB drives in eye-catching colors of blue, champagne and silver.

The WD store is running a special at \$110 each along with free shipping.

Online: store.westerndigital.com

The miCoach Fit Smart from Adidas, the worldwide sportswear manufacturer, is a strong entry in the wearable fitness category.

Its name is obviously fitting as it's designed to be your personal coach, and it does a great job at that.

It measures just 1.5 by 0.5 by 8 inches and works off of an internal 200 mAh lithium ion battery, which charges in three hours.

An integrated accelerometer records distance run, calories burned and your heart rate from the internal Mio heart sensor.

Everything is recorded in the miCoach and can be synced wirelessly (Bluetooth) with the miCoach Train and Run app (iOS and Android).

The app is great for keeping up with a personal



The Brookstone uPillow doesn't have a lot to do with electronics, but it sure made watching a movie on my tablet a lot more comfortable on a recent flight.

It's almost magic how it auto-inflates with the twist of the intake valve to create the U-shaped neck pillow. The comfort comes from the memory foam along with the inflated air.

When you're done, just twist the valve to compress it to get the air out.

I took a little of the air out for a softer support. Fully inflated, it provides a firmer support.

It's probably the simplest gadget I've tried that also put me to sleep.

Online: brookstone.com; \$49.99

The 808 Audio Thump wireless speaker is just under 3 inches tall and 2.25 inches in diameter, but produces a big-time sound for such a small speaker with a small price (\$19.99).

It's advertised as the top-selling Bluetooth speaker under \$50 on the company's website.

The speaker has a rechargeable battery, good for about six hours of play.

Online: 808Audio.com; available in black, blue, pink and white



The 808 Audio Thump wireless speaker is just under 3 inches tall, but produces big sound.

ON THE COVER: Musician D'Angelo dropped a surprise gift for his fans on Dec. 14 with his first album in 14 years, "Black Messiah."

Gregg Harris/Courtesy of RCA Records

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BUSINESS/WEATHER

Mo. sees average gas price below \$2

The Associated Press
KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Missouri became the first state Friday to have an average statewide gas price fall below \$2 per gallon since 2009, while Oklahoma's average was expected to drop below that threshold sometime during the weekend, according to AAA.

The national average gas price was at \$2.32 per gallon Friday, which AAA spokesman Michael Green said was the lowest since May 2009. That average has dropped for 92 days in a row, he said, which is the longest streak since AAA started keeping daily records in January 2000.

Gas prices have fallen every day since Sept. 25, for a total of \$1.02 per gallon, Green said.

"The steady decline in gas prices this autumn is unlike anything we have previously tracked," he said.

Missouri's average on Friday morning was \$1.98, according to AAA. Oklahoma had the second-lowest average at \$2.01 and "is



MATT ROURKE/AP

A car passes a sign advertising the price of gas Dec. 18 at the Eastcoast filling station in Pennsauken, N.J.

likely to drop below that price point this weekend," Green said.

Kansas had the third-lowest statewide average at \$2.06 per gallon, while Texas and Indiana each averaged \$2.09, Green said. Gas prices are about 94 cents

per gallon lower than they were a year ago, and AAA estimates consumers nationwide are saving more than \$450 million per day on gasoline compared with the highs of spring and summer this year.

The slide is expected to contin-

ue in the short term.

"Consumers could ring in the New Year with gas prices about 5 to 10 cents per gallon less than today, which would make for the lowest New Year's gas prices since 2008," Green said.

A government report earlier this week said the economy has been benefiting from sinking energy prices, and that cheaper gas has freed up money for Americans to spend on other items, such as cars, clothes and appliances.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (Dec. 29)	\$1.2539
Dollar buys (Dec. 29)	€0.7975
British pound (Dec. 29)	\$1.59
Japanese yen (Dec. 29)	¥116.00
South Korean won (Dec. 29)	₩1,072.00

Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3770
British pound	\$1.5558/0.6428
Canada (dollar)	1.1636
China (Yuan)	6.2289
Denmark (Krone)	6.1089
Egypt (Pound)	1.6551
Euro	\$1.2176/0.8213
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7614
Hungary (Forint)	260.70
Israel (Shekel)	3.1916
Japan (Yen)	120.39
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.2928
Norway (Krone)	1.4775
Philippines (Peso)	44.70
Poland (Zloty)	3.59
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7502
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3242
South Korea (Won)	1,106.15
Switzerland (Franc)	0.9878
Thailand (Bath)	32.94
Turkey (New Lira)	2.3176

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

MARKET WATCH

Dec. 26, 2014

Dow Jones Industrials	+23.50	18,053.71
Nasdaq Composite	+33.39	4,806.86
Standard & Poor's 500	+6.89	2,088.77
Russell 2000	+8.42	1,215.21

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	3.25
3-month bill	0.13
Federal funds market rate	0.13
3-month bill	0.06
30-year bond	2.82

WEATHER OUTLOOK

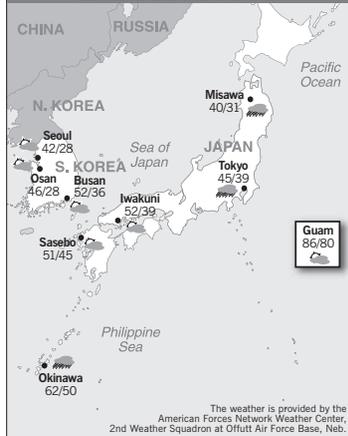
SUNDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



SUNDAY IN EUROPE



MONDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

Sunday's US temperatures

City	Hi	Lo	Wthr	Chatanooga	56	46	Rain	Fort Wayne	37	36	Cloudy	Louisville	42	34	Rain	Pocatello	30	13	Snow	Sioux City	28	16	Cloudy												
Ablene, Tex	51	35	Pdly	Cheyenne	28	4	Cldy	Fresno	55	34	Pdly	Lubbock	49	28	Cldy	Portland, Maine	47	27	Snow	Sioux Falls	24	6	Cldy												
Akron, Ohio	40	27	Cldy	Chicago	34	27	Cldy	Goodland	32	11	Pdly	Macon	71	56	Cldy	Portland, Ore.	46	35	Rain	South Bend	36	26	Pdly												
Albany, N.Y.	45	27	Cldy	Cincinnati	41	29	Cldy	Grand Junction	31	15	Cldy	Madison	32	21	Cldy	Providence	48	33	Snow	Spokane	31	18	Cldy												
Albuquerque	38	21	Cldy	Cleveland	39	28	Cldy	Grand Rapids	34	25	Pdly	Medford	46	28	Cldy	Pueblo	40	7	Pdly	Springfield, Ill.	37	25	Pdly												
Allentown, Pa.	49	33	Rain	Colorado Springs	39	10	Cldy	Great Falls	22	-9	Snow	Memphis	46	35	Rain	Raleigh-Durham	60	48	Cldy	Springfield, Mo.	39	27	Cldy												
Amarillo	45	18	Cldy	Columbia, S.C.	67	55	Cldy	Green Bay	29	14	Pdly	Miami Beach	83	71	Cldy	Rapid City	24	-1	Cldy	Worcester	40	27	Cldy												
Anchorage	33	31	Rain	Columbia, Ga.	70	54	Cldy	Greensboro, N.C.	55	49	Rain	Midland-Odessa	50	33	Cldy	Reno	45	20	Pdly	Tallahassee	76	60	Cldy												
Asheville	56	45	Rain	Columbus, Ohio	42	28	Cldy	Hartford	49	34	Rain	Milwaukee	33	25	Cldy	Richmond	56	44	Rain	Tampa	79	67	Pdly												
Atlanta	64	41	Rain	Concord, N.H.	45	24	Rain	Harrisburg	46	31	Cldy	Miami Beach	83	71	Cldy	Roanoke	55	43	Rain	Toledo	39	27	Pdly												
Atlantic City	54	36	Rain	Corpus Christi	54	38	Rain	Helena	22	-2	Snow	Missoula	29	7	Snow	Rochester	40	28	Cldy	Topeka	39	23	Cldy												
Austin	51	33	Cldy	Dallas-Ft. Worth	50	33	Pdly	Honolulu	82	69	Cldy	Monterey	52	36	Cldy	Rockford	37	25	Pdly	Wichita	45	30	Rain												
Baltimore	51	39	Rain	Dayton	39	27	Cldy	Houston	48	37	Rain	Montgomery	72	55	Rain	Sacramento	55	35	Pdly	Tulsa	42	23	Cldy												
Baton Rouge	65	45	Rain	Daytona Beach	79	64	Cldy	Huntsville	56	40	Rain	Nashville	50	36	Rain	St. Louis	38	28	Pdly	Tupelo	54	41	Rain												
Bilings	24	-1	Snow	Denver	31	10	Cldy	Indianapolis	38	27	Cldy	New Orleans	71	52	Cldy	St. Petersburg	77	66	Cldy	Wichita	41	27	Cldy												
Birmingham	63	48	Rain	Des Moines	35	23	Cldy	Jackson, Miss.	57	42	Rain	New York City	50	36	Cldy	St. Thomas	85	74	Rain	Washington	52	41	Rain												
Bismark	12	-12	Snow	Detroit	38	27	Cldy	Jacksonville	76	62	Pdly	Newark	58	47	Cldy	Salem, Ore.	47	34	Cldy	W. Palm Beach	82	70	Pdly												
Boise	33	19	Snow	Butte	15	-1	Rain	Juneau	29	12	Cldy	Norfolk, Va.	58	47	Cldy	Salt Lake City	35	20	Cldy	Wichita	41	22	Cldy												
Boston	47	33	Cldy	El Paso	49	29	Cldy	Kansas City	37	24	Cldy	North Platte	30	9	Cldy	San Antonio	54	34	Pdly	Wichita Falls	48	31	Cldy												
Bridgeport	49	33	Cldy	Elkins	49	29	Rain	Key West	49	34	Rain	Oklahoma City	53	38	Cldy	San Diego	55	36	Pdly	Wilkes-Barre	45	30	Rain												
Brownsville	55	43	Rain	Erie	38	29	Cldy	Knoxville	57	44	Rain	Omaha	34	22	Pdly	San Diego	63	49	Cldy	Wilmington, Del.	51	39	Rain												
Buffalo	38	27	Cldy	Eugene	45	34	Cldy	Lake Charles	56	43	Rain	Orlando	81	64	Cldy	San Francisco	57	44	Pdly	Yakima	38	26	Cldy												
Burlington, Vt.	35	10	Cldy	Evansville	41	30	Cldy	Lansing	40	24	Pdly	Paducah	42	30	Cldy	San Jose	58	39	Snow	Youngstown	41	27	Cldy												
Caribou, Maine	35	10	Cldy	Fairbanks	24	11	Cldy	Las Vegas	50	32	Cldy	Pendleton	39	25	Snow	Santa Fe	33	15	Pdly	Yuma	35	8	Cldy												
Casper, Wyo.	25	0	Cldy	Fargo	9	-5	Cldy	Lexington	45	35	Rain	Peoria	37	25	Cldy	St. Marie	26	8	Snow	Charleston, S.C.	72	57	Rain	Flagstaff	38	15	Pdly	Lincoln	35	21	Pdly	Philadelphia	51	39	Rain
Charleston, S.C.	72	57	Rain	Flint	38	25	Pdly	Little Rock	46	31	Cldy	Phoenix	58	38	Pdly	Savannah	74	58	Cldy	Fort Smith	45	28	Pdly	Los Angeles	63	44	Pdly	Pittsburgh	43	29	Cldy				
Charleston, W.Va.	51	37	Rain	Fort Smith	45	28	Pdly	Los Angeles	63	44	Pdly	Pittsburgh	43	29	Cldy	Shreveport	50	34	Rain	Park, Wyo.															
Charlotte, N.C.	59	50	Rain																																

National Temperature Extremes

Hi: Fr., -13, Edinburg, Texas
 Lo: Fr., -12, Yellowstone National Park, Wyo.

SPORTS BRIEFS/HOCKEY

Briefly Yanks' Kuroda to return to Japan

The Associated Press

TOKYO — Japanese media report free-agent right-hander Hiroki Kuroda will return to Japan in 2015 to pitch for his first team, the Hiroshima Toyo Carp.

The reports say Kuroda, who turns 40 in February, has signed a one-year contract worth \$3.3 million. Kuroda pitched for Hiroshima from 1997-2007 and then spent four years with the Los Angeles Dodgers before moving to the New York Yankees.

The Japanese broadcaster NHK and other reports said Saturday that Kuroda will wear No. 15, the same number he wore when he last pitched for the Carp. Hiroshima kept the number open for him during his time in the major leagues, where he wore 18.

Last season, Kuroda was 11-9 with a 3.71 ERA. He was 79-79 with a 3.45 ERA in 1,319 career major league innings. He struck out 986 and walked only 292.

Kuroda was perhaps the most durable starter in the Yankees' rotation the past three seasons. He worked 199 innings this year after exceeding 200 in his first two with New York and the final season with the Dodgers.

In other baseball news:

■ The Washington Nationals have agreed to terms with second baseman Dan Uggla for a minor league deal with an invitation to major league spring training.

The Nationals also announced similar deals Friday with relievers Heath Bell, third baseman Ian Stewart, first baseman Clint Robinson and right-handed pitcher Scott McGregor and Mitch Lively.

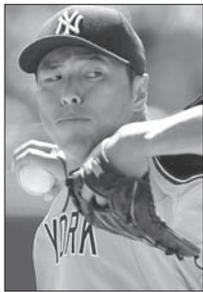
Uggla played in four games with San Francisco this year after being cut by Atlanta after the All-Star break. The 34-year-old slugger finished the year batting .194. The Braves still owe him \$13 million for 2015.

The 37-year-old Bell has 168 career saves. The three-time All-Star closer was released by Tampa Bay on May 4 after he posted a 7.27 ERA in 13 appearances. He later signed a minor league deal with the New York Yankees.

■ Joe Macko, who hit 306 home runs in nearly 2,000 major league games before a long career as a clubhouse manager with the Texas Rangers, has died. He was 86.

Macko was manager of the Texas League's Dallas-Fort Worth Spurs when the Washington Senators moved to Texas after the 1971 season. He joined them as business manager, became home clubhouse manager the following year and moved to the visiting clubhouse in 1995.

After his retirement from that role in 2001, Macko was the club's goodwill ambassador for 12 years.



PAUL SANCIYA/AP

Japanese media are reporting that Hiroki Kuroda, a free agent with the Yankees, will return to Japan in 2015 to pitch for the Hiroshima Carp.

Browns rookie Gilbert stung by criticism

BEREA, Ohio — Browns rookie cornerback Justin Gilbert says he was hurt by public comments from some teammates who said he wasted this season.

The No. 8 overall pick in this year's draft, Gilbert has been a major disappointment. In the past week, safety Donte Whitner and Karlos Dansby were critical of Gilbert, saying he needed to grow up as a player and person. Browns coach Mike Pettine says he has no problem with veterans giving a teammate "tough love."

Gilbert says he's not "mad at anyone about it. I brought it upon myself. I messed up." He does think some teammates "may have crossed the line a little bit" with their words.

Gilbert refuses to divulge his missteps but promises to work harder in the offseason, vowing "I'm going to make it right."

In other NFL news:

■ Runningback Ryan Mathews has been ruled out of San Diego's game Sunday at Kansas City, which the Chargers must win to clinch a wild-card berth.

Mathews will miss his third straight game with what's believed to be a high ankle sprain. He was hurt during a home loss to New England on Dec. 7.

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

Garza is finishing his 14th season in the NFL and 10th with Chicago. He has made 144 starts with the Bears and 175 in his career.

Garza missed four games this season because of an ankle injury.

NHL scoreboard

Eastern Conference									
Atlantic Division									
Montreal	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	PP	PKA
Tampa Bay	35	21	11	4	46	117	96	35	84
Toronto	35	20	12	3	43	118	102	35	83
Boston	35	18	14	4	40	97	83	31	81
Florida	32	15	19	8	38	73	82	31	81
Ottawa	34	14	17	3	31	80	87	29	69
Buffalo	35	19	3	29	69	115	85	30	80
Metropolitan Division									
Pittsburgh	34	22	11	0	49	108	93	35	84
N.Y. Islanders	34	23	11	0	46	105	94	34	83
N.Y. Rangers	32	18	10	4	40	99	90	31	83
Washington	34	17	11	6	40	99	90	31	83
Philadelphia	34	17	14	4	37	83	91	31	83
Columbus	33	14	16	3	31	80	107	31	80
New Jersey	36	12	17	7	31	78	104	31	80
Carolina	35	10	20	4	24	70	93	31	80
Western Conference									
Central Division									
Chicago	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	PP	PKA
Nashville	33	23	19	2	46	107	72	35	84
St. Louis	34	21	10	3	45	100	86	35	83
Winnipeg	35	19	10	3	41	97	89	35	83
Minnesota	32	16	13	3	35	93	89	34	84
Colorado	34	13	8	14	34	90	103	34	84
Dallas	33	10	14	5	35	104	93	34	84
Pacific Division									
Anaheim	36	23	18	5	51	113	98	35	94
San Jose	33	20	11	2	42	99	91	35	94
Vancouver	33	19	12	2	42	99	91	35	94
Los Angeles	35	17	15	3	41	97	88	35	94
Calgary	34	17	15	3	39	104	98	35	94
Arizona	34	12	18	4	28	80	112	35	94
Edmonton	35	21	4	0	42	100	91	35	94

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

Friday's games

No games scheduled

Saturday's games

N.Y. Islanders at Buffalo

Detroit at Ottawa

Carolina at Tampa Bay

New Jersey at N.Y. Rangers

Boston at Columbus

Philadelphia at Minnesota

Washington at Pittsburgh

Dallas at St. Louis

Philadelphia at Nashville

Anaheim at Arizona

Colorado at Colorado

Edmonton at Calgary

San Jose at Los Angeles

Sunday's games

Toronto at Florida

Vancouver at Anaheim

Monday's games

Detroit at Boston

Pittsburgh at New Jersey

Buffalo at N.Y. Islanders

Toronto at Tampa Bay

Carolina at Colorado

Minnesota at Winnipeg

San Jose at St. Louis

N.Y. Rangers at Dallas

Los Angeles at Calgary

Philadelphia at Arizona

Scoring leaders

Through Dec. 25

Player	GP	A	Pts
Jakub Voracek, Phi	34	14	42
Ilya Bryzgalov, Det	34	29	42
Evan Malkin, Pit	34	16	25
David Backstrom, Wash	31	11	30
Ryan Getzlaf, Anh	35	12	27
Patrick Kane, Chi	31	17	28
Vladimir Tarasenko, StL	34	20	37
Tyler Johnson, Tex	35	12	24
Sidney Crosby, Pit	31	10	24
Rick Nash, NYR	32	13	36
Patrick Marleau, TB	36	19	37
Patrick Kane, Chi	35	16	30
Steve Stamkos, Was	35	17	36
Mark Giordano, Cgy	36	10	24

Devils replace DeBoer with trio of coaches

NEWARK, N.J. — The New Jersey Devils are replacing the fired Pete DeBoer with a three-headed coaching staff.

Former Washington Capitals coach Adam Oates, ex-Devils assistant and star defenseman Scott Stevens and general manager Lou Lamoriello will split duties with the team.

Lamoriello said at a news conference before Saturday's morning skate that Oates will handle the forwards and Stevens will oversee the defense. Lamoriello will "go on the bench to make sure the Devils are winning points out of the last playoff spot in the Eastern Conference at 12-17-7.

There will be no official head coach for the rest of the season.

DeBoer was fired Friday with the Devils leading the nine-point out of the last playoff spot in the Eastern Conference at 12-17-7.

From The Associated Press



GRIFFIN HUGHES, THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

The United States' Chase DeLeo scores against Finland's Ville Husso during the shootout of preliminary-round hockey action at the IHF World Junior Championship in Montreal on Friday.

US tops defending champion Finland in junior opener

The Associated Press

MONTREAL — Jack Eichel and Chase DeLeo scored in a shootout to help the United States beat defending champion Finland 2-1 on Friday in their round-robin opener in the World Junior Championship.

Eichel is a freshman at Boston University, and DeLeo plays for Portland in the Western Hockey League.

"We knew it was going to be a tough game," said Eichel, a top prospect in the 2015 NHL draft.

"They're the defending champs, and you've got to give them a lot of credit. They played a very close-checking game. It's really good for us to get the win. Hopefully, we can build off that and get some confidence."

Boston College's Thatcher Demko is a very close-checking goalie.

They played a very close-checking game. It's really good for us to get the win. Hopefully, we can build off that and get some confidence."

Boston College's Thatcher Demko made 28 saves, and stopped Pittsburgh Penguins prospect Kasperi Kapalan in the shootout to secure the victory.

"I thought we got better as the game went on," Demko said. "It's a good starting point, and something we can work forward from."

Mikko Rantanen opened the scoring for Finland, and Boston College's Alex Tuch tied it on a first-period power play. Ville Husso stopped 36 shots for Finland.

In the other Group A game Friday night at Bell Centre, Canada

beat Slovakia 8-0.

Robby Fabbri led Canada with two goals and two assists, Nik Petan added a goal and two assists, Max Domi, Anthony Duclair, Jake Virtanen and Brayden Point each had a goal and an assist. Nick Paul also scored and Zach Fucale made 12 saves.

"Getting the first game under the belt always feels good," said Fabbri, a first-round pick by the St. Louis Blues. "Points are one thing, but the way the team played throughout the whole game, sticking where we're headed, seeing to our game, it was good to see and good to get the win."

The United States will face Germany on Sunday, Slovakia on Monday and finish group play Wednesday night against Canada. The top two teams in each group will advance to the quarterfinals.

In Group B in Toronto, Russia rallied to beat Denmark 3-2 in a shootout, and Sweden topped the Czech Republic 5-2.

Sergei Tolchinsky and Nikolai Goldobin scored for Russia in the shootout. Nikolaj Ehlers and Oliver Bjorkstrand staked Denmark to a 2-0 lead in the first period. Goldobin scored in the second, and Maxim Mamin tied it in the third.

"I think we were a little bit surprised by how well they played," Tolchinsky said. "They have a really good team. They were proud and skilled. We didn't expect that kind of hockey."

Adrian Kempe scored twice for Sweden, and Jens Looke, Jacob de Rose and Maple Leafs first-round pick William Nylander added goals. Jakub Vrana had two goals for the Czech Republic.

"It was good to get off to a good start in the tournament after two bad exhibition games," Nylander said.

NBA



CHRIS SCHNEIDER/AP

Nuggets forward Kenneth Faried, left, looks to pass the ball to guard Arron Afflalo, right, while Timberwolves forward Andrew Wiggins defends Faried in Denver. Faried had 26 points and 25 rebounds in Denver's 106-102 win.

Roundup

James helps Cavs rally past Magic

The Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — LeBron James had 29 points and eight assists, helping Cleveland rally for the 98-89 win.

Kevin Love scored 22 points and reserve Dion Waters added 17 for Cleveland, which bounced back from a 101-91 loss at Miami on Christmas. Tristan Thompson grabbed 13 rebounds.

The Cavaliers played without point guard Kyrie Irving, who was sidelined by a bruised knee.

Tobias Harris led Orlando with 16 points. Nik Vucevic had 12 points, seven assists and eight rebounds, and reserve Evan Fournier scored 15.

The Magic lost for the fifth time in the last six games.

Nuggets 106, Timberwolves 102: Kenneth Faried had a career-high 25 rebounds to go along with 26 points, and host Denver beat Minnesota.

Faried tied the NBA's highest rebounding total this season. Mavericks center Tyson Chandler also had 25 rebounds in a 109-102 victory over the New York Knicks on Nov. 26.

Trail Blazers 114, 76ers 93: Damian Lillard had 28 points and nine assists, and host Portland won for the seventh time in eight games.

Lillard, who had scored at least 40 points in two of Portland's previous three games, had 19 second-half points for the Blazers (24-7). Wesley Matthews went 7 of 14 from three-point range and finished with 25 points.

Suns 115, Kings 106: Marcus Morris had 20 points and nine rebounds for visiting Phoenix, and

Isaiah Thomas keyed the decisive run against his former team.

In his first game back in Sacramento, Thomas led an 18-7 surge to start the fourth quarter that lifted Phoenix by 15. The former Kings fan favorite finished with 17 points, five assists and three rebounds in just 29 minutes.

Bucks 107, Hawks 77: Reserve forward Jared Dudley made all 10 shots, including four three-pointers, and scored a season-high 24 points to lead Milwaukee to the road win.

Brandon Knight added 16 points for Milwaukee, which snapped Atlanta's five-game winning streak.

Thunder 98, Hornets 75: Russell Westbrook scored 29 points, and host Oklahoma City stopped Charlotte's four-game winning streak.

The Hornets scored the game's first basket, and then the Thunder reeled off nine straight points to take a lead they never relinquished in winning for the second straight day.

Pistons 119, Pacers 109: Greg Monroe had 19 points and 15 rebounds, Andre Drummond scored 20 points and host Detroit ended a four-game skid.

The Pistons had seven players score in double figures.

Nets 109, Celtics 107: Jarrett Jack made a tiebreaking jumper with 28 seconds left, lifting Brooklyn to the road win.

Jack had 27 points and Alan Anderson scored 15 for the Nets, who won their third straight.

Jeff Green scored 22 points for Boston, which has dropped three in a row. Jared Sullinger had 19 points and eight rebounds.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division		
Team	W	L
Toronto	15	16
Brooklyn	13	14
Boston	11	16
New York	5	26
Philadelphia	5	26
Southeast Division		
Atlanta	21	8
Washington	14	16
Miami	14	16
Orlando	10	20
Charlotte	10	20
Central Division		
Chicago	9	23
Cleveland	18	11
Milwaukee	15	14
Indiana	10	20
Detroit	6	23

Western Conference

Southwest Division		
Team	W	L
Houston	21	7
Memphis	21	7
Dallas	20	8
San Antonio	18	10
New Orleans	15	13
Northwest Division		
Portland	17	10
Oklahoma City	15	12
Utah	9	20
Minnesota	23	19
Pacific Division		
Golden State	23	5
Cleveland	17	14
Phoenix	17	14
Los Angeles	17	14
L.A. Lakers	9	21

Thursday's games

Washington 102, New York 91
Oklahoma City 114, San Antonio 106
Miami 101, Cleveland 91
Chicago 113, L.A. Lakers 99
Atlanta 109, Charlotte 86

Friday's games

Brooklyn 109, Boston 98
Cleveland 98, Orlando 89
Milwaukee 107, Atlanta 77
Detroit 119, Indiana 109
New Orleans 97, San Antonio 90
Kia Motors 98, Charlotte 75
Denver 117, Memphis 111, OT
Dallas 102, L.A. Lakers 101
Houston 106, Minnesota 102
Portland 114, Philadelphia 93
Phoenix 115, Sacramento 106

Saturday's games

Toronto at Charlotte
Boston at Washington
Orlando at Charlotte
Memphis at Miami
New York at Brooklyn
Atlanta at Brooklyn
Cleveland at Atlanta
Philadelphia at Utah
New York at Sacramento
Phoenix at Golden State

Sunday's games

Detroit at Charlotte
Orlando at San Antonio
Oklahoma City at Dallas
New York at Portland
Toronto at Denver
Phoenix at L.A. Lakers

Friday's games

BOLYKIN Johnson 4-13 J-2, J-9, Garrett 5-9 P, P-12, 23-25, 26-28, 30-31, 32-34, 35-37, 38-40, 41-42, 43-45, 46-48, 49-51, 52-54, 55-57, 58-60, 61-63, 64-66, 67-69, 70-72, 73-75, 76-78, 79-81, 82-84, 85-87, 88-90, 91-93, 94-96, 97-99, 100-102, 103-105, 106-108, 109-111, 112-114, 115-117, 118-120, 121-123, 124-126, 127-129, 130-132, 133-135, 136-138, 139-141, 142-144, 145-147, 148-150, 151-153, 154-156, 157-159, 160-162, 163-165, 166-168, 169-171, 172-174, 175-177, 178-180, 181-183, 184-186, 187-189, 190-192, 193-195, 196-198, 199-201, 202-204, 205-207, 208-210, 211-213, 214-216, 217-219, 220-222, 223-225, 226-228, 229-231, 232-234, 235-237, 238-240, 241-243, 244-246, 247-249, 250-252, 253-255, 256-258, 259-261, 262-264, 265-267, 268-270, 271-273, 274-276, 277-279, 280-282, 283-285, 286-288, 289-291, 292-294, 295-297, 298-300, 301-303, 304-306, 307-309, 310-312, 313-315, 316-318, 319-321, 322-324, 325-327, 328-330, 331-333, 334-336, 337-339, 340-342, 343-345, 346-348, 349-351, 352-354, 355-357, 358-360, 361-363, 364-366, 367-369, 370-372, 373-375, 376-378, 379-381, 382-384, 385-387, 388-390, 391-393, 394-396, 397-399, 400-402, 403-405, 406-408, 409-411, 412-414, 415-417, 418-420, 421-423, 424-426, 427-429, 430-432, 433-435, 436-438, 439-441, 442-444, 445-447, 448-450, 451-453, 454-456, 457-459, 460-462, 463-465, 466-468, 469-471, 472-474, 475-477, 478-480, 481-483, 484-486, 487-489, 490-492, 493-495, 496-498, 499-501, 502-504, 505-507, 508-510, 511-513, 514-516, 517-519, 520-522, 523-525, 526-528, 529-531, 532-534, 535-537, 538-540, 541-543, 544-546, 547-549, 550-552, 553-555, 556-558, 559-561, 562-564, 565-567, 568-570, 571-573, 574-576, 577-579, 580-582, 583-585, 586-588, 589-591, 592-594, 595-597, 598-600, 601-603, 604-606, 607-609, 610-612, 613-615, 616-618, 619-621, 622-624, 625-627, 628-630, 631-633, 634-636, 637-639, 640-642, 643-645, 646-648, 649-651, 652-654, 655-657, 658-660, 661-663, 664-666, 667-669, 670-672, 673-675, 676-678, 679-681, 682-684, 685-687, 688-690, 691-693, 694-696, 697-699, 700-702, 703-705, 706-708, 709-711, 712-714, 715-717, 718-720, 721-723, 724-726, 727-729, 730-732, 733-735, 736-738, 739-741, 742-744, 745-747, 748-750, 751-753, 754-756, 757-759, 760-762, 763-765, 766-768, 769-771, 772-774, 775-777, 778-780, 781-783, 784-786, 787-789, 790-792, 793-795, 796-798, 799-801, 802-804, 805-807, 808-810, 811-813, 814-816, 817-819, 820-822, 823-825, 826-828, 829-831, 832-834, 835-837, 838-840, 841-843, 844-846, 847-849, 850-852, 853-855, 856-858, 859-861, 862-864, 865-867, 868-870, 871-873, 874-876, 877-879, 880-882, 883-885, 886-888, 889-891, 892-894, 895-897, 898-900, 901-903, 904-906, 907-909, 910-912, 913-915, 916-918, 919-921, 922-924, 925-927, 928-930, 931-933, 934-936, 937-939, 940-942, 943-945, 946-948, 949-951, 952-954, 955-957, 958-960, 961-963, 964-966, 967-969, 970-972, 973-975, 976-978, 979-981, 982-984, 985-987, 988-990, 991-993, 994-996, 997-999, 1000-1002, 1003-1005, 1006-1008, 1009-1011, 1012-1014, 1015-1017, 1018-1020, 1021-1023, 1024-1026, 1027-1029, 1030-1032, 1033-1035, 1036-1038, 1039-1041, 1042-1044, 1045-1047, 1048-1050, 1051-1053, 1054-1056, 1057-1059, 1060-1062, 1063-1065, 1066-1068, 1069-1071, 1072-1074, 1075-1077, 1078-1080, 1081-1083, 1084-1086, 1087-1089, 1090-1092, 1093-1095, 1096-1098, 1099-1101, 1102-1104, 1105-1107, 1108-1110, 1111-1113, 1114-1116, 1117-1119, 1120-1122, 1123-1125, 1126-1128, 1129-1131, 1132-1134, 1135-1137, 1138-1140, 1141-1143, 1144-1146, 1147-1149, 1150-1152, 1153-1155, 1156-1158, 1159-1161, 1162-1164, 1165-1167, 1168-1170, 1171-1173, 1174-1176, 1177-1179, 1180-1182, 1183-1185, 1186-1188, 1189-1191, 1192-1194, 1195-1197, 1198-1200, 1201-1203, 1204-1206, 1207-1209, 1210-1212, 1213-1215, 1216-1218, 1219-1221, 1222-1224, 1225-1227, 1228-1230, 1231-1233, 1234-1236, 1237-1239, 1240-1242, 1243-1245, 1246-1248, 1249-1251, 1252-1254, 1255-1257, 1258-1260, 1261-1263, 1264-1266, 1267-1269, 1270-1272, 1273-1275, 1276-1278, 1279-1281, 1282-1284, 1285-1287, 1288-1290, 1291-1293, 1294-1296, 1297-1299, 1300-1302, 1303-1305, 1306-1308, 1309-1311, 1312-1314, 1315-1317, 1318-1320, 1321-1323, 1324-1326, 1327-1329, 1330-1332, 1333-1335, 1336-1338, 1339-1341, 1342-1344, 1345-1347, 1348-1350, 1351-1353, 1354-1356, 1357-1359, 1360-1362, 1363-1365, 1366-1368, 1369-1371, 1372-1374, 1375-1377, 1378-1380, 1381-1383, 1384-1386, 1387-1389, 1390-1392, 1393-1395, 1396-1398, 1399-1401, 1402-1404, 1405-1407, 1408-1410, 1411-1413, 1414-1416, 1417-1419, 1420-1422, 1423-1425, 1426-1428, 1429-1431, 1432-1434, 1435-1437, 1438-1440, 1441-1443, 1444-1446, 1447-1449, 1450-1452, 1453-1455, 1456-1458, 1459-1461, 1462-1464, 1465-1467, 1468-1470, 1471-1473, 1474-1476, 1477-1479, 1480-1482, 1483-1485, 1486-1488, 1489-1491, 1492-1494, 1495-1497, 1498-1500, 1501-1503, 1504-1506, 1507-1509, 1510-1512, 1513-1515, 1516-1518, 1519-1521, 1522-1524, 1525-1527, 1528-1530, 1531-1533, 1534-1536, 1537-1539, 1540-1542, 1543-1545, 1546-1548, 1549-1551, 1552-1554, 1555-1557, 1558-1560, 1561-1563, 1564-1566, 1567-1569, 1570-1572, 1573-1575, 1576-1578, 1579-1581, 1582-1584, 1585-1587, 1588-1590, 1591-1593, 1594-1596, 1597-1599, 1600-1602, 1603-1605, 1606-1608, 1609-1611, 1612-1614, 1615-1617, 1618-1620, 1621-1623, 1624-1626, 1627-1629, 1630-1632, 1633-1635, 1636-1638, 1639-1641, 1642-1644, 1645-1647, 1648-1650, 1651-1653, 1654-1656, 1657-1659, 1660-1662, 1663-1665, 1666-1668, 1669-1671, 1672-1674, 1675-1677, 1678-1680, 1681-1683, 1684-1686, 1687-1689, 1690-1692, 1693-1695, 1696-1698, 1699-1701, 1702-1704, 1705-1707, 1708-1710, 1711-1713, 1714-1716, 1717-1719, 1720-1722, 1723-1725, 1726-1728, 1729-1731, 1732-1734, 1735-1737, 1738-1740, 1741-1743, 1744-1746, 1747-1749, 1750-1752, 1753-1755, 1756-1758, 1759-1761, 1762-1764, 1765-1767, 1768-1770, 1771-1773, 1774-1776, 1777-1779, 1780-1782, 1783-1785, 1786-1788, 1789-1791, 1792-1794, 1795-1797, 1798-1800, 1801-1803, 1804-1806, 1807-1809, 1810-1812, 1813-1815, 1816-1818, 1819-1821, 1822-1824, 1825-1827, 1828-1830, 1831-1833, 1834-1836, 1837-1839, 1840-1842, 1843-1845, 1846-1848, 1849-1851, 1852-1854, 1855-1857, 1858-1860, 1861-1863, 1864-1866, 1867-1869, 1870-1872, 1873-1875, 1876-1878, 1879-1881, 1882-1884, 1885-1887, 1888-1890, 1891-1893, 1894-1896, 1897-1899, 1900-1902, 1903-1905, 1906-1908, 1909-1911, 1912-1914, 1915-1917, 1918-1920, 1921-1923, 1924-1926, 1927-1929, 1930-1932, 1933-1935, 1936-1938, 1939-1941, 1942-1944, 1945-1947, 1948-1950, 1951-1953, 1954-1956, 1957-1959, 1960-1962, 1963-1965, 1966-1968, 1969-1971, 1972-1974, 1975-1977, 1978-1980, 1981-1983, 1984-1986, 1987-1989, 1990-1992, 1993-1995, 1996-1998, 1999-2001, 2002-2004, 2005-2007, 2008-2010, 2011-2013, 2014-2016, 2017-2019, 2020-2022, 2023-2025, 2026-2028, 2029-2031, 2032-2034, 2035-2037, 2038-2040, 2041-2043, 2044-2046, 2047-2049, 2050-2052, 2053-2055, 2056-2058, 2059-2061, 2062-2064, 2065-2067, 2068-2070, 2071-2073, 2074-2076, 2077-2079, 2080-2082, 2083-2085, 2086-2088, 2089-2091, 2092-2094, 2095-2097, 2098-2100, 2101-2103, 2104-2106, 2107-2109, 2110-2112, 2113-2115, 2116-2118, 2119-2121, 2122-2124, 2125-2127, 2128-2130, 2131-2133, 2134-2136, 2137-2139, 2140-2142, 2143-2145, 2146-2148, 2149-2151, 2152-2154, 2155-2157, 2158-2160, 2161-2163, 2164-2166, 2167-2169, 2170-2172, 2173-2175, 2176-2178, 2179-2181, 2182-2184, 2185-2187, 2188-2190, 2191-2193, 2194-2196, 2197-2199, 2200-2202, 2203-2205, 2206-2208, 2209-2211, 2212-2214, 2215-2217, 2218-2220, 2221-2223, 2224-2226, 2227-2229, 2230-2232, 2233-2235, 2236-2238, 2239-2241, 2242-2244, 2245-2247, 2248-2250, 2251-2253, 2254-2256, 2257-2259, 2260-2262, 2263-2265, 2266-2268, 2269-2271, 2272-2274, 2275-2277, 2278-2280, 2281-2283, 2284-2286, 2287-2289, 2290-2292, 2293-2295, 2296-2298, 2299-2301, 2302-2304, 2305-2307, 2308-2310, 2311-2313, 2314-2316, 2317-2319, 2320-2322, 2323-2325, 2326-2328, 2329-2331, 2332-2334, 2335-2337, 2338-2340, 2341-2343, 2344-2346, 2347-2349, 2350-2352, 2353-2355, 2356-2358, 2359-2361, 2362-2364, 2365-2367, 2368-2370, 2371-2373, 2374-2376, 2377-2379, 2380-2382, 2383-2385, 2386-2388, 2389-2391, 2392-2394, 2395-2397, 2398-2400, 2401-2403, 2404-2406, 2407-2409, 2410-2412, 2413-2415, 2416-2418, 2419-2421, 2422-2424, 2425-2427, 2428-2430, 2431-2433, 2434-2436, 2437-2439, 2440-2442, 2443-2445, 2446-2448, 2449-2451, 2452-2454, 2455-2457, 2458-2460, 2461-2463, 2464-2466, 2467-2469, 2470-2472, 2473-2475, 2476-2478, 2479-2481, 2482-2484, 2485-2487, 2488-2490, 2491-2493, 2494-2496, 2497-2499, 2500-2502, 2503-2505, 2506-2508, 2509-25

NBA



BRANDON DILL/AP

Rockets forward Josh Smith, right, works for position against Grizzlies forward Tayshaun Prince on Friday in Memphis, Tenn. Smith netted 21 points in Houston's 117-111 overtime win.

Rockets top Grizzlies in OT in Smith's debut

By CLAY BAILEY
The Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Josh Smith immediately paid dividends for the Houston Rockets, while the Memphis Grizzlies remained spiraling on their longest losing streak of the season.

Smith, who signed earlier in the day, scored 21 points and grabbed eight rebounds Friday night as the Rockets beat Memphis 117-111 in overtime.

"We knew what he brought to the table," said James Harden, who led the Rockets with 32 points and 10 assists. "All he has to do is go out there and play his game."

The Rockets held a 111-109 lead with 1:18 left in overtime when Harden missed a 17-footer. Smith grabbed the offensive rebound, leading to a miss by Trevor Ariza, only to have Smith corral another offensive rebound.

Smith was fouled and converted both free throws, padding the Rockets' lead.

"When you're a professional, and you've played a lot of years, it's not that hard," Smith said of joining a new team, "especially since you know a lot of the guys in the locker room. They helped me out when I was kind of lost out there."

Ariza finished with 15 points, while Corey Brewer added 13. Patrick Beverley had 12 points for the Rockets, who took over the top spot in the Western Conference's Southwest Division from Memphis.

Marc Gasol led Memphis with 29 points, while Beno Udrih contributed 17. Quincy Pondexter scored 14, and Vince Carter had 10, including a pair of three-pointers in the fourth quarter to fuel a Rockets rally.

The teams were tied at 104 at the end of regulation after Gasol's jumper at the end of the fourth bounced away.

The Grizzlies got within two points on several occasions in overtime, but couldn't overtake the Rockets as Memphis dropped its fourth straight.



BRANDON WADE/AP

Mavericks guard Rajon Rondo, left, looks for space against Lakers guard Ronnie Price during Friday's game in Dallas. Dallas topped the Lakers 102-98.

Pelicans hold off Spurs

Davis' 22 points leads New Orleans past slumping San Antonio

By BRADLEY HANDWERGER
The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Anthony Davis stepped to his right and blocked a direct path to the basket for Tim Duncan, who instead went up for a layup.

Davis took over from there.

The 6-foot-10 power forward blocked Duncan's shot before tying up the ball, drawing loud cheers from the sold-out crowd. He finished with 22 points, 12 rebounds and five blocks in New Orleans' 97-90 victory over slumping San Antonio on Friday night.

"Honestly, I didn't even think about it was Tim," Davis said. "I was just in the moment playing basketball."

The Pelicans earned consecutive wins over the Spurs for the first time in team history. They also won 100-99 in San Antonio on Nov. 8.

Ryan Anderson scored 22 points for New Orleans (15-14), and Jrue Holiday added 15 points and seven assists.

San Antonio played without point guard Tony Parker, who was sidelined by a lingering left hamstring strain. Parker played the previous two games, including Thursday's 114-106 loss to Oklahoma City, but coach Gregg Popovich said the injury is still a problem.

Duncan had 20 points and 11 rebounds for the Spurs (18-13), and Cory Joseph also scored 20 points. San Antonio has dropped six of seven.

The Pelicans led 48-44 at halftime, and Davis helped his team stay in front in the third. He had 10 points, six rebounds and four blocked shots in the period, including an emphatic rejection of a Manu Ginobili shot that bounced



JONATHAN BACHMAN/AP

Pelicans forward Anthony Davis, left, drives to the basket against Spurs forward Aron Baynes on Friday in New Orleans. New Orleans won 97-90.

out of play.

The Pelicans put the game out of reach on Davis' third assist of the game in the final minute, a soft underhanded toss to Anderson, who finished the play off with a dunk.

"He's an MVP candidate," Popovich said of Davis. "He's blossomed."

New Orleans scored 20 points off of 17 San Antonio turnovers and outrebounced the Spurs by five. The Spurs picked up only one offensive rebound.

"Any time you hold a team with Tim Duncan on it to one offensive rebound, you feel like you've accomplished something," Pelicans coach Monty Williams said.

Rondo, Nowitzki carry Mavericks past Lakers

By SCHUYLER DIXON
The Associated Press

DALLAS — Rajon Rondo is learning to play with his new Dallas teammates, and Dirk Nowitzki is trying to play through a stomach ailment that won't go away.

They both look forward to when things will be more comfortable.

Rondo scored a season-high 21 points in his fourth game with the Mavericks and Nowitzki added 14 to move up another spot on the NBA's scoring list in a 102-98 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers on Friday night.

Rondo, traded from Boston last week, also had eight rebounds and seven assists in Dallas' franchise-best fifth straight win against the Lakers in the regular season.

"We basically just have to communicate on the floor," said Rondo, who topped his season high of 20 against Oklahoma City last month when he was still with the Celtics. "The game is still the same."

Kobe Bryant missed his third straight game for Los Angeles to rest his sore body. He could return Sunday at home against Phoenix.

The NBA's No. 3 career scorer watched from the Lakers' bench while Nowitzki passed Elvin Hayes for eighth place, and 10th on the combined NBA-ABA list.

The 36-year-old hit a long jumper on the first possession of the third quarter to surpass Hayes and asked out less than 4 minutes later, apparently winded from the effects of the illness after coming up short on a pair of open shots.

"It's been up and down for last couple of weeks so had to get it checked out this morning," said Nowitzki, the highest-scoring foreigner in league history at 27,322 points, now nine ahead of Hayes.

"It's just hope to feel better soon," said the 7-foot German, who also had eight rebounds.

Carlos Boozer scored 18 points for the Lakers, who lost again on the second night

of a back-to-back after beating NBA-leading Golden State in the first game without Bryant.

But they looked much better than the team that lost 140-106 last month in Dallas, when Bryant did play.

"We just want the win," Boozer said. "There's no such thing as a moral victory in the NBA."

Nick Young, who had 15 points on five three-pointers, hit a pair from long range about a minute apart to help the Lakers get within five midway through the fourth quarter.

But Dallas' Charlie Villanueva, enjoying an expanded role since the Rondo trade sent Brandon Wright to the Celtics, hit two big threes to spark a fourth-quarter run that put away the game. The 10th-year player finished with 13 points.

Like Nowitzki, Monta Ellis was questionable before the game. Playing with an unspecified illness, Ellis finished with 15 points, seven assists and three steals.

NBA/COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Star: Curry's profile on rise with Warriors off to best start in franchise history

FROM BACK PAGE

And with the Warriors (23-5) atop the NBA standings, Curry's case for MVP is starting to echo around the league as loud as the chants do nightly at rowdy Oracle Arena.

Paul, the lead man in those commercials, has been considered among the best point guards for years. Curry, long labeled "just a shooter," has added to his repertoire — and stayed healthy — each of the past three seasons to enter the debate alongside Tony Parker, Russell Westbrook, James Harden, Mike Conley and others.

While the qualifying criteria might be a matter of preference, this much is indisputable: nobody is running the show the way Curry is for the Warriors now.

In a game dominated by big men, Curry controls the flow without physically overpowering defenders. His shooting stroke can seem unstoppable at times, and when he gets going, nobody can seem to slow him down.

Cleveland's LeBron James and reigning NBA MVP Kevin Durant are among those who already have called Curry the best shooter of their generation. In the next breath, they also credit Curry for improving his all-around game.

Curry is averaging 23.1 points, 6.8 assists, 4.2 rebounds and 1.7 steals this season. He's also becoming a pest for Golden State's smothering defense after being challenged by Warriors coach Steve Kerr to guard his position — a major shift from the past few years under former coach Mark Jackson, who usually used Klay Thompson to defend elite point guards.

"He's awesome to play alongside with, he knows when to pass

and take the big shots," said Thompson, who teamed with Curry to help the U.S. win gold at the World Cup in Spain this year.

"He should definitely be mentioned in the MVP talks with the way he has been playing."

Getting to that level often requires attention away from the court, and Curry is starting to get his share of it.

He left shoe giant Nike for a lucrative deal with Under Armour in 2013. He moved into the top five of the NBA's most-sold jerseys at the end of last season. And in November, Sports Illustrated named Curry one of the top 100 sports figures to follow on Twitter.

Henry Schafer, executive vice president of The Q Scores Company, said Curry's popularity stacks up with the NBA's most notable names.

Q Scores measure awareness and likability, assigning an overall value that provides a gauge for marketers who are seeking celebrity endorsers. In the latest figures taken this year, Curry had a 53 percent awareness among sports fans and a 26 Q Score, Schafer said.

Only Durant and San Antonio's Tim Duncan had a higher Q Score (29) for an NBA player. James had the highest awareness at 82 percent among sports fans with a 25 Q Score.

Curry also had a 21 percent awareness rating and a 19 Q Score among the general population, Schafer said. The average general Q Score is 15 for sports personalities.

"What that signals is as his awareness grows in and out of the sport," Schafer said, "he looks like he has the potential to become more of an athlete that's transcending basketball."



SUE OGORCINI/AP

With the Warriors on top of the NBA, Golden State guard Stephen Curry is quickly becoming one of the league's brightest — and most marketable — stars.



JOHN BAZEMORE/AP

In this Nov. 23, 2013, file photo, Georgia junior running back Todd Gurley (3) dives into the end zone for a touchdown in Athens, Ga. Bulldogs coach Mark Richt says Gurley has informed him that he plans to enter the NFL draft.

Briefly

Georgia coach: Gurley set to enter NFL draft

Wire reports

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Georgia running back Todd Gurley has informed coach Mark Richt that he plans to enter the NFL draft.

Richt said after practice Friday for the Belk Bowl that Gurley won't return for his senior season. The 13th-ranked Bulldogs face No. 20 Louisville on Tuesday.

The news doesn't come as a huge surprise.

Gurley was a preseason Heisman Trophy candidate and got off to a strong start, but a four-game suspension and a knee injury derailed a promising season. Richt said Gurley's rehabilitation is going well and his spirits are high.

He predicted Gurley "will be a very high draft pick."

Michigan officials in Bay Area for Harbaugh

By nearly all accounts, Jim Harbaugh's coaching tenure with the San Francisco 49ers is nearing its end.

That was reported last week by Fox Sports' NFL insider Jay Glazer and speculated by many other NFL reporters over the past year.

Now it appears Michigan is ready to pounce.

Fox Sports college football insider Bruce Feldman tweeted Friday night that Michigan officials and the search firm will be in the Bay Area this weekend, presumably to lock down Harbaugh to be the school's next coach.

49ers general manager Trent Baalke would only say this week on his radio show that Harbaugh will meet with the organization's brass early next week after Sunday's season finale against Arizona.

Narduzzi officially takes over at Pittsburgh

PITTSBURGH — Pat Narduzzi is the next man up at Pittsburgh.

The Panthers officially announced the longtime Michigan State defensive coordinator as their new coach Friday. Narduzzi replaces Paul Chryst, who left Pitt last week after three seasons to become the coach at Wisconsin.

Narduzzi takes over a program looking to gain traction in the ACC. The Panthers are 6-6 heading into the Armed Forces Bowl against Houston on Jan. 2.

West Virginia QB retires from concussions

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — West Virginia senior quarterback Clint

Trickett is retiring from football because of concussions and won't play in the Liberty Bowl on Monday against Texas A&M.

Trickett said Friday that he had endured five concussions over the last 14 months.

"It would be dangerous for me to be out there," Trickett said.

West Virginia coach Dana Holgorsen indicated that Trickett wasn't cleared to play in the bowl game and that sophomore Skyler Howard would start at quarterback for the Mountaineers (7-5) against Texas A&M (7-5).

Arkansas' Williams to return for senior season

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. — Jonathan Williams wasn't quite ready to end his time at Arkansas.

The standout running back said that he's returning for his senior season. He leads Arkansas (6-6) with 1,085 yards rushing this season.

Williams had said leading into the Texas Bowl against Texas that he would wait until heading back from the NFL on his draft prospect before deciding whether to leave school, and he wasted little time in making that decision.

The Texas Bowl is Monday night.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

NC State caps year with Bitcoin win



LM ORSON/AP

Illinois running back Donovan Young, top, leaps over Louisiana Tech defender Bryson Abraham in Friday's Heart of Dallas Bowl. The Bulldogs beat the Illini 35-18.

La. Tech tops Illinois in Heart of Dallas Bowl

The Associated Press

DALLAS — Louisiana Tech's Houston Bates had a career day against his former team — his 4½ sacks in the Heart of Dallas Bowl matched the number he had in three seasons at Illinois.

Bates, who graduated and transferred to finish his eligibility closer to home was chosen MVP of the game after the Bulldogs beat the Illini 35-18 on Friday.

"It wasn't Houston Bates vs. Illinois. It was Louisiana Tech vs. Illinois," Bates said.

Kenneth Dixon scored one of his two touchdowns on an 80-yard reception and Xavier Woods scored on a 69-yard interception. The Bulldogs (9-5) also got touchdown runs of 16 yards from Jarred Craft and 28 yards from Blake Martin on a dark, overcast day at the Cotton Bowl stadium.

Illinois (6-7) struggled early with penalties and missed field goals, but got within three points on David Reinsner's 43-yard field goal early in the fourth quarters. But Dixon scored his second TD from one yard out with six minutes left to make it 28-18 and the Illini couldn't answer.

Illinois appeared to have gotten a break when LaKeith Walls sacked Cody Sokol, causing him to fumble. Jihad Ward returned it 19 yards before Dixon forced a fumble and Sokol recovered. That drive was capped by Dixon's TD.

Dixon became Louisiana Tech's career leader in yards rushing, finishing with 63 for a total of 3,410 in three seasons.

He is also the only FBS player with both a run and a reception of at least 80 yards this season.

Louisiana Tech went into the game tied for first place among FBS schools with 25 interceptions and first with 40 total turnovers forced. With Monday's two Illini turnovers, Tech converted turnovers into 198 points this season.

By FRED GODDALL
The Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — North Carolina State took another step forward in its turnaround under coach Dave Doeren with a strong performance in the Bitcoin Bowl. Jacoby Brissett threw for 262 yards and one touchdown and Matt Dayes scored on runs of 24 and 15 yards to help the Wolfpack beat Central Florida 34-27 on Friday night at Tropicana Field.

Brissett tossed a 37-yard TD pass to Johnathan Alston to put the Wolfpack (8-5) ahead for good in the second quarter. Running back Shadrach Thornton got NC State going early with an 18-yard scoring pass to Jaylen Samuels.

UCF (9-4) began the night ranked in the top 10 in fewest yards allowed per game, as well as pass efficiency, rushing and scoring defense. But American Athletic Conference co-champions had no answers for Brissett and a supporting cast that amassed 488 yards of total offense — over 200 more than opponents averaged against the Knights during the regular season.

Brissett was 15 of 26 with no interceptions, completing passes to eight receivers. Thornton rushed for 96 yards on 17 carries and Dayes finished with 78 yards on 13 attempts to key a ground attack that produced 188 yards.

UCF's Justin Holman threw for 291 yards, including TD passes of 6, 14 and 2 yards to Josh Reese, who had six receptions for 75 yards. Reese's second touchdown cut it to 34-20 with 11 minutes remaining.

The Knights got the ball back three more times, but couldn't get any closer until Holman threw his 2-yarder to Reese with 1:44 left. NC State's Tyler Purvis recovered the ensuing onside kick, and the Wolfpack ran out the clock.

UCF is a year removed from arguably the biggest victory in school history, an upset of Baylor in the Fiesta Bowl that



MONICA HEERDOND, TAMPA BAY TIMES/AP

North Carolina State quarterback Jacoby Brissett, left, prepares to pass during Friday's Bitcoin St. Petersburg Bowl against UCF in St. Petersburg, Fla. The Wolfpack topped UCF 34-27.

capped the Knights' first 12-win season.

NC State is in its second season of rebuilding under Doeren, who took over after a highly successful stint at Northern Illinois. The Wolfpack went 0-8 in the ACC and 3-9 overall in 2013, and the four-game improvement in their regular-season record this year matched Mississippi State for the second-biggest in the five power conferences.

The Bitcoin Bowl was a homecoming of sorts for Brissett, who is from West Palm Beach and transferred to NC State from

Florida. The 6-foot-4, 231-pound redshirt junior completed 10 of his first 12 passes for 197 yards, including his TD pass to Alston that put the Wolfpack up 14-10 early in the second quarter.

Thornton's first pass attempt of the season resulted in the first TD reception of Samuels' career.

Perriman finished with nine receptions for 138 yards for UCF, which was trying to finish with at least 10 wins for the fourth time in five seasons.

Rutgers rolls past UNC in Quick Lane Bowl

By DAVE HOGG
The Associated Press

DETROIT — North Carolina coach Larry Fedora knew that his team was going to have to play a very good game to beat Rutgers in the Quick Lane Bowl.

That didn't happen, and the Tar Heels looked like the team that was blown out 35-7 by North Carolina State in its last game.

"I'm very disappointed with what we did in the last few games of the season, and especially in these last two," Fedora said after the Tar Heels' 40-21 loss Friday night at Ford Field. "We're going to have to take a long look at some things."

The final score was misleading. North Carolina (6-7) trailed 40-7 midway through the fourth quarter before a successful onside kick helped the Tar Heels add two late touchdowns.

North Carolina's biggest problem was freshman running back Josh Hicks, who ran for 207 yards and six touchdowns. "This is a childhood dream come true," said Hicks, the MVP trophy sitting just above him in his locker. "It is just now hitting me what happened out there. Our O-line was just so good today — they were opening lanes, and all I had to do was hit them."

Senior Gary Nova threw for 184 yards and two touchdowns, and freshman Robert Martin ran for 100 yards and two scores to help the Scarlet Knights (8-5) cap their



CARLOS OSORIO/AP

Rutgers wide receiver Andre Patton runs to the end zone for a touchdown during the Quick Lane Bowl on Friday in Detroit. The Scarlet Knights beat North Carolina 40-21.

first Big Ten season.

"I saw the predictions before the season, so I knew what the public perception of our team was, especially going into the Big

Ten," Rutgers coach Kyle Flood said. "But I have always believed that this was going to be a competitive team that was going to play in the postseason, and we proved that all year."

The Scarlet Knights lost the coin toss, but got the ball when North Carolina deferred. They only needed 2:17 to take the lead, with Nova hitting a wide-open Andre Patton for a 34-yard touchdown strike.

North Carolina got into Rutgers' territory its first two drives, but turned the ball over on the first and punted on the second. The Tar Heels blocking a punt to take over at the 30, but the drive stalled at the 5 and a fake field goal was buried for a 4-yard loss.

The Scarlet Knights answered with a 91-yard drive that ended with Hicks' 21-yard run that made it 14-0 early in the second. Rutgers then turned another Tar Heels fumble into a quick touchdown — Martin's 8-yard run — but missed the extra point, leaving it 20-0.

The Tar Heels missed a field goal, then shanked a punt 20 yards, allowing Rutgers to kick a 19-yard field goal that made it 23-0 at halftime.

Williams got North Carolina on the board with a 1-yard run, but the Scarlet Knights came back with a 34-yard pass from Nova to Andrew Turzilli to make it 30-7. Martin's second touchdown run — this one from 28 yards — gave Rutgers a 30-point advantage early in the fourth.

NFL

Cowboys ready for Redskins

Romo, Dallas not backing off rivals

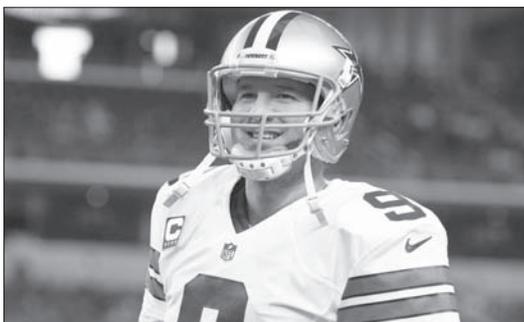
By SCHUYLER DIXON
The Associated Press

IRVING, Texas — Tony Romo hasn't made it through his past two games against Washington without a back injury, and the most realistic playoff scenarios don't require the Cowboys to beat the Redskins on Sunday.

So what does that mean for the 34-year-old quarterback who has actually had three back problems in less than two years? Not much.

"I go in with the exact same mental approach I do every game," Romo said. "If you're a football player and there's a game, there's only one way to play and it's hard the whole time. You go all out. I think you're doing a disservice to the game and your team if you don't play that way."

Besides, the only inexplicable loss this season for NFC East champion Dallas (11-4) came against a Washington team already going nowhere in October. Granted, the Cowboys were without Romo for about



BRANDON WADE/AP

Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo has suffered back injuries in each of his last two games against the Washington Redskins, but don't expect that to keep Romo from doing everything he can to earn a win over the Cowboys' division rivals on Sunday.

a quarter in the second half after taking a direct hit by his surgically repaired back on a sack by linebacker Keenan Robinson.

But they still couldn't get key steps against third-string quarterback Colt McCoy, who started in place of ineffective backup Kirk Cousins while Robert Griffin III was still sidelined with a dislocated ankle. The 20-17 loss in overtime snapped Dallas' six-game winning streak.

The earlier win means the Redskins (4-11) can break even in the division in an otherwise dismal first season under coach Jay Gruden. Plus, Washington is coming off a 27-24 upset of Philadelphia that put the Cowboys in position to knock the Eagles out of the playoffs, which they did the next day by beating Indianapolis.

"It would give us a chance to finish 3-3 in our division and sweep the Cowboys, which our fans love," Griffin said. "It's Dallas week. We understand that. They're

playing at a very high level right now."

In his last visit to Washington, Romo finished a winning rally last December after sustaining a herniated disk earlier in the game. He had surgery five days later and missed a season-ending loss to Philadelphia that extended the Cowboys' playoff drought to four years.

After his latest back injury against the Redskins — best described as two small fractures — Romo missed a loss to Arizona and clearly had a difficult time with the quick Thanksgiving turnaround a few weeks later in a loss to the Eagles. They've put together three strong performances since then, another reason to try to keep it going.

"It really comes down to just being the best version of yourself regardless of circumstance," Romo said. "These are great games to go show that. In the playoffs, not in the playoffs, it doesn't matter."

Colts held players-only meeting after loss to Dallas

By JIM JOHNSON
The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The Colts held a meeting this week to ensure the team was headed in the same direction.

Players only. No coaches. "It was a chance for a player, if he wanted to leave, it was a chance to leave and not be crucified," said receiver Reggie Wayne, who called the meeting along with other veterans. "It was a chance for us as a team to really figure out if everybody was on the same page going forward and what we need to do."

Indianapolis is locked into the No. 4 seed in the playoffs set to begin next week. The Colts have no chance of moving up or down in the seeding process unless the Bengals and Steelers would happen to tie this week.

Right now, though, the Colts (10-5) are looking for a win over the Titans (2-13) on Sunday. They want to gain some momentum heading into the postseason.

Depending on the outcome of Sunday's games between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, Indy is expected to face the loser of that game in the Wild Card round.

Coach Chuck Pagano said he hasn't looked ahead to Indy's potential playoff opponents, and has spent his time only on preparing for Tennessee.

Still, Pagano said, he has people on the Colts staff who do "audience work" and have things in place for the team to begin preparing for the first playoff game with the opponent is announced.

"All that stuff, all the information, all the film, it's already broken down in the computers," he said. "Everything's laid out, so once we're done with the regular season, we can jump right on it."

The Colts are coming off a 42-7 loss at Dallas last week in one of the team's worst performances of the season. Wayne described the loss a wake-up call and a slap in the face, which is why Pagano has emphasized the importance of Indy finishing on a positive note.

"We need to go try to win," Pagano said. "We need to get this taste out of our mouth and we need to go into the playoffs feeling good about ourselves."

The Colts had little trouble with the Titans in a 41-17 win back on Sept. 28 and Tennessee has only won once since. A win this week would mean the Colts finish 6-0 against AFC South division opponents for the second straight year.

Wayne brushed aside the notion that the regular-season finale against the Titans was a meaningless game for the Colts. Sure, a win wouldn't be much momentum for Indy to take into the postseason, he acknowledged, but every little bit helps.

"I don't think you could say coming off a one-game winning streak is considered to be hot," Wayne said. "But, in my opinion, the hot team going in is the team that does well. One way to get hot is to start with one game."

Staying focused isn't all that difficult to do, according to offensive tackle Anthony Castonzo, even with the playoff's set to start next week.

"It's our job so at the end of the day it's our job to get the job done on every play, regardless of who we're playing, regardless of where in the season it is," he said. "It's pride beyond everything else. You want to win every rep regardless of whether it 'matters' or not."

Patriots focus on health, beating Bills

The Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Bill Belichick opened his regular Friday news conference with some un-Belichick comments.

"Good morning. How are we looking today? Get everything that you asked Santa for?" the New England Patriots coach asked the gathered media.

Asked, "How about you," Belichick said, "Yeah, no complaints. No complaints."

But Belichick and his team need one more holiday gift to truly complete the season: get through Sunday's meaningless game against the Buffalo Bills without anyone getting hurt.

Having clinched home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs, the Patriots (12-3) with 10 wins in their last 11 games, get to rest their bumps and bruises during a bye week after Sunday. This team is relatively healthy, at least in terms of heading into the 17th week of the regular season, and would love to keep it that way.

Now, as far as how many starters will play, Belichick said earlier this week, "We'll do what's best for the New England Patriots." But don't count on seeing Tom Brady or any of the other main guys for too long — even though another win would allow the Pats to add to some impressive stats.

A win would give them 13 for a

regular season that started out 2-2, the second loss a Monday night drubbing at Kansas City that had people wondering about this team.

A win would also be their 14th straight at home against Buffalo, and the 22nd in the last 23 games overall against the Bills, who secured missing the playoffs for the 15th straight season by losing to Oakland last week.

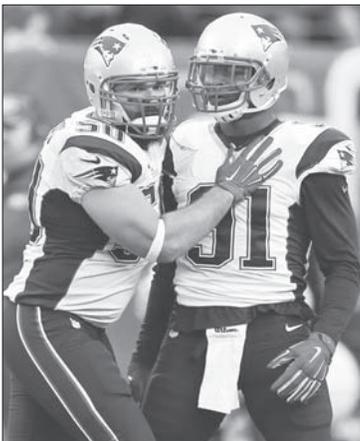
Brady could score his 13th win in as many home tries against the Bills, and go to 24-2 overall against Buffalo. The Patriots have won 35 straight home games against AFC teams, the longest streak against a conference in NFL history. They have also won 16 straight regular-season home games, and captured 17 in a row at home against the AFC East. New England can equal the NFL record for interdivision wins with a victory.

And, since 2009, the Pats are 20-3 in the last four games of the regular season.

The defense comes into this game not having allowed a second-half touchdown in the last five games.

All nifty streaks. None of them matter if someone important gets hurt.

"Right now, I think it's good that our focus be on Buffalo," said safety Devin McCourty. "We realize this is a game we're playing and we want to go out there and win."



JULIO CORTEZ/AP

New England Patriots outside linebacker Jamie Collins, right, celebrates with teammate Rob Ninkovich after intercepting a pass against the New York Jets in East Rutherford, N.J. After clinching home-field advantage with last Sunday's 17-16 win over the Jets, the Patriots will simply be looking to get through their regular-season finale against the Buffalo Bills without any injuries.



GAMEDAY

WEEK 17

TELEVISED GAMES



San Diego Chargers (9-6) at Kansas City Chiefs (8-7)

AFN-Xtra
7 p.m. Sunday CET
Series: Chargers lead 54-53-1.

Last meeting: Kansas City beat host San Diego 23-20 on Oct. 19.

Notes: The Chargers clinch a play-off berth with a victory ... QB Philip Rivers needs 5 passing yards for his 6th career 4,000-yard season. He needs 3 TD passes to surpass Dan Fouts (254) for the franchise record. ... Chiefs LB Justin Houston is tied for the NFL lead in sacks (18), the second-most team history (Derrick Thomas had 20 in 1990).



Carolina Panthers (6-8-1) at Atlanta Falcons (6-9)

AFN-Sports
7 p.m. Sunday CET
Series: Falcons lead 24-15.

Last meeting: Atlanta defeated host Carolina 19-17 on Nov. 16.

Notes: Atlanta clinches the NFC South with a win; Carolina clinches with a win or tie ... Panthers QB Cam Newton has won 3 of his past 4 starts against the Falcons. ... Falcons QB Matt Ryan has won 5 of his past 6 home starts against Carolina.

Marquee matchup

Cincinnati Bengals (10-4-1) at Pittsburgh Steelers (10-5)

AFN-Sports, 2:20 a.m. Monday Central European Time

SERIES RECORD: Steelers lead 54-34 and have won seven of the past nine.

LAST MEETING: Steelers beat the Bengals 42-21 on Dec. 7 at Cincinnati.

BENGALS OFFENSE: OVERALL (15), RUSH (5), PASS (22).

BENGALS DEFENSE: OVERALL (22), RUSH (23), PASS (16).

STEELERS OFFENSE: OVERALL (2), RUSH (13), PASS (2).

STEELERS DEFENSE: OVERALL (20), RUSH (6) PASS (27).

STREAKS, STATS AND NOTES: The Bengals have clinched a playoff spot for a club-record fourth consecutive season ... In his past three games against Pittsburgh, QB Andy Dalton has passed for 812 yards with 5 TDs and 0 INTs for a 95.0 rating. He has a 40-22-1 (642) record, the highest winning percentage of any Bengals QB (minimum 20 starts) ... In the past eight games, RB Jeremy Hill has 829 rushing yards with 6 TDs. He leads NFL rookies in rushing yards (1,024) and rushing TDs (9). He needs 106 rushing yards to surpass Corey Dillon (1,129 in 1997) for the club rookie record. He's the first rookie with four 140-plus-yard games since 1995 (Curtis Martin) ... Since entering the NFL in 2011, WR A.J. Green has 4,792 receiving yards, the fourth-most of

any player in their first four NFL seasons ... Since 2011, Geno Atkins has 29 sacks, the most among NFL DTs. ... In the past nine games, Steelers QB Ben Roethlisberger has 3,042 passing yards with 22 TDs and 5 INTs for a 110.4 rating. He has the team's season record with 4,636 yards. He needs 1 TD pass to be the first player in club history with 250 ... RB Le'Veon Bell leads the AFC and is second in the NFL with 2,115 scrimmage yards (1,341 rushing, 774 receiving), a Steelers record ... WR Antonio Brown leads the NFL with 122 catches and needs 2 to surpass Herman Moore (123 in 1995) and Wes Welker (123 in 2009) for the second most in an NFL season (Marvin Harrison leads with 143 in 2002).



RB Le'Veon Bell has been burning out yards for the Steelers all season.

Don Wright/AP

Game capsules compiled from nflmedia.com



Oakland Raiders (3-12) at Denver Broncos (11-4)

AFN-Xtra
10:25 p.m. Sunday CET
Series: Raiders lead 59-47-2.

Last meeting: Denver defeated host Oakland 41-17 on Nov. 9.

Notes: Raiders QB Derek Carr leads NFL rookies in passing yards (3,112) and TDs (20), both club rookie records. ... Broncos QB Peyton Manning has 4,454 passing yards and has an NFL-record 14 career 4,000-yard seasons. Last week, Manning (9,012) joined Brett Favre (10,169) as the only players to reach 9,000 career attempts.



Detroit Lions (11-4) at Green Bay Packers (11-4)

AFN-Sports
10:25 p.m. Sunday CET
Series: Packers lead 94-67-7.

Last meeting: Detroit beat visiting Green Bay 19-7 on Sept. 21.

Notes: Winner will be the NFC North champion and earn a first-round bye. ... Lions QB Matthew Stafford, who has four consecutive 4,000-yard seasons, has won his past 2 starts against Green Bay. ... The Packers are 7-0 at home, outscoring opponents 288-143. Green Bay is the first team in NFL history to score 23-plus first-half points in 6 consecutive home games.

Also on AFN: Cleveland Browns (7-8) at Baltimore Ravens (9-6), AFN-Atlantic, 7 p.m. Sunday Central European Time
St. Louis Rams (6-9) at Seattle Seahawks (11-4), AFN-Atlantic, 10:25 p.m. Sunday Central European Time

EXPANDED STANDINGS

American Conference

	W	L	T	East			Home	Away	AFC	NFC	Div
				Pct	PF	PA					
y-New England	12	3	0	.800	459	296	7-0-0	5-3-0	9-2-0	3-1-0	4-1-0
Miami	8	7	0	.533	364	336	4-3-0	4-4-0	6-5-0	2-2-0	3-2-0
Buffalo	8	7	0	.533	326	280	5-0-0	3-4-0	4-7-0	4-0-0	3-2-0
N.Y. Jets	3	12	0	.200	246	377	2-6-0	1-6-0	3-8-0	0-4-0	0-5-0
South											
y-Indianapolis	10	5	0	.667	431	359	6-2-0	4-3-0	8-3-0	2-2-0	5-0-0
Houston	8	7	0	.533	349	290	4-3-0	4-4-0	7-4-0	1-3-0	3-2-0
Jacksonville	3	12	0	.200	232	389	3-5-0	0-7-0	2-9-0	1-3-0	1-4-0
Tennessee	2	13	0	.133	244	411	1-6-0	1-7-0	2-9-0	0-4-0	1-4-0
x-Cincinnati	10	4	1	.700	348	317	5-2-1	5-2-0	7-4-0	3-0-1	3-2-0
x-Pittsburgh	10	5	0	.667	409	351	5-2-0	5-3-0	8-3-0	2-2-0	3-2-0
Baltimore	9	6	0	.600	389	292	5-2-0	4-4-0	5-6-0	4-0-0	2-3-0
Cleveland	7	8	0	.467	289	317	4-4-0	3-4-0	4-7-0	3-1-0	2-3-0
West											
y-Denver	11	4	0	.733	435	340	7-0-0	4-4-0	9-2-0	2-2-0	5-0-0
San Diego	9	6	0	.600	341	329	5-3-0	4-3-0	6-5-0	3-1-0	2-3-0
Kansas City	8	7	0	.533	334	274	5-2-0	3-5-0	6-5-0	2-2-0	2-3-0
Oakland	3	12	0	.200	239	405	3-5-0	0-7-0	2-9-0	1-3-0	1-4-0

x-clinched playoff spot; y-clinched division

National Conference

	W	L	T	East			Home	Away	NFC	AFC	Div
				Pct	PF	PA					
y-Dallas	11	4	0	.733	423	325	4-4-0	7-0-0	7-4-0	4-0-0	3-2-0
Philadelphia	9	6	0	.600	440	374	6-2-0	3-4-0	5-6-0	4-0-0	3-2-0
N.Y. Giants	6	9	0	.400	354	366	3-4-0	3-5-0	4-7-0	2-2-0	2-3-0
Washington	4	11	0	.267	284	394	3-4-0	1-7-0	2-9-0	2-2-0	2-3-0
South											
Carolina	6	8	1	.433	305	371	4-4-0	2-4-1	5-6-0	1-2-1	3-2-0
Atlanta	6	9	0	.400	378	383	3-4-0	3-5-0	6-5-0	0-4-0	5-0-0
New Orleans	6	9	0	.400	378	404	3-5-0	3-4-0	5-6-0	1-3-0	2-3-0
Tampa Bay	2	13	0	.133	257	387	0-7-0	2-6-0	1-10-0	1-3-0	0-5-0
West											
x-Detroit	11	4	0	.733	301	252	7-1-0	4-3-0	9-2-0	2-2-0	5-0-0
x-Green Bay	11	4	0	.733	456	328	7-0-0	4-4-0	8-3-0	3-1-0	4-1-0
Minnesota	6	9	0	.400	312	334	4-3-0	2-6-0	5-6-0	1-3-0	0-5-0
Chicago	5	10	0	.333	310	429	2-6-0	3-4-0	4-7-0	1-3-0	1-4-0
West											
x-Seattle	11	4	0	.733	374	248	6-1-0	5-3-0	9-2-0	2-2-0	4-1-0
Arizona	11	4	0	.733	293	278	7-1-0	4-3-0	8-3-0	3-1-0	3-2-0
San Francisco	7	8	0	.467	286	323	3-4-0	4-4-0	6-5-0	1-3-0	1-4-0
St. Louis	6	9	0	.400	318	334	3-5-0	3-4-0	4-7-0	2-2-0	2-3-0



CHARLES RYERBAGST/AP

QB Matthew Stafford and the Lions will try to hand the Packers their first home loss.

REST OF THE SCHEDULE

Indianapolis at Tennessee
Jacksonville at Houston
Chicago at Minnesota
Dallas at Washington
N.Y. Jets at Miami
Buffalo at New England
Philadelphia at N.Y. Giants
New Orleans at Tampa Bay
Arizona at San Francisco
St. Louis at Seattle

SPORTS

NBA

Shooting stardom

Golden State guard Steph Curry getting celebrity treatment

By ANTONIO GONZALEZ
The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif.

Golden State Warriors point guard Stephen Curry was driving in a car with his wife, Ayesha, over the summer when they put on a song by a popular rapper that everybody had been telling them to play.

"Been Steph Curry with the shot," Drake called out in the song "0 to 100."

The stunned couple looked at each other, smiled and broke out in laughter.

"It was pretty cool," Curry said.

Sure, fans voted him into the All-Star Game as a starter, media selected him second-team All-NBA and a major car insurance company created a fictional twin for a popular commercial series last season. But the shout-out from a renowned recording artist might have been the moment Curry realized he had truly made it big.

As his stardom continues to rise, Curry is still surprised by the celebrity treatment — even though nobody else is.

Coaches, players and executives have taken notice of the growth in Curry's game by strategizing everything they do around him. Marketers in the NBA league office and sponsors across the country have, too, putting his boyish face on national television and social media advertisements to promote their brands.

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- Smith scores 21 points in winning debut with Rockets, Page 27
- James, Cavaliers rally past Magic, Page 26

Golden State Warriors' All-Star guard Stephen Curry is quickly becoming one of the new faces of the NBA.

Doug Duran/TNS



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