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Volume 81 Edition 234 ©SS 2023 WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 2023

平成12年4月5日 第三種郵便物認可 日刊(土日除く)
発行所 星条旗新聞社 〒106-0032 東京都港区六本木7丁目23番17号 定価 ¥50

50¢/Free to Deployed Areas

Navy aims to buy 9 ships, retire 11 in 2024 budget

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy wants to buy nine warships for its fleet and decommission 11 vessels in its proposed \$202.5 billion budget for 2024, the service announced Monday.

The budget request calls for the purchase of two Virginia-class attack submarines, two Arleigh Burke-class destroyers, two Constellation-class frigates, one John Lewis-class oiler and one submarine tender.

It also includes a second Columbia-class, ballistic-missile submarine — a “central component of our recapitalization of our nuclear triad,” said Erik Raven, the under-secretary of the Navy. The triad refers to the three legs of the Defense Department’s nuclear forces: land, air and sea.

The Navy is not requesting any funding for amphibious ships. Of the 11 ships that the service is seeking to cut, there are three Whidbey Island-class dock landing ships, three Ticonderoga-class cruisers and two Independence-class littoral combat ships — the 9-year-old USS Jackson and 8-year-old USS Montgomery. Both ships were expected to have a 25-year service life.

Congress last year allowed the Navy to cut only four of nine littoral combat ships targeted for early retirement. The Navy this year is

SEE NAVY ON PAGE 4

RELATED

Breaking down the other branches’ budget proposals
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PHOTOS BY MISPER APAWU/AP

Ghanaian soldiers conduct hook and climb drills during Flintlock 2023 on a Spanish frigate at Tema port, Ghana, on Thursday.

US trains West African militaries during annual exercise as jihadi threat spreads

BY SAM MEDNICK
Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal — As extremist violence in West Africa’s Sahel region spreads south toward coastal states, the United States military has launched its annual military training exercise aimed at helping armies contain the jihadi threat.

Soldiers from several African countries are being trained in counterinsurgency tactics as part of the annual U.S.-led exercise known as Flintlock, that began last week.

Some 1,300 military personnel from 29 countries are training in Ghana and Ivory Coast, amid



Ghanaian soldiers conduct close-quarter combat drills.

surging jihadi violence linked to al-Qaida and Islamic State that’s killed thousands, displaced millions and plunged countries into crises.

While most of the extremist activity is concentrated in West Africa’s inland Sahel region in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, the violence is rapidly spreading to coastal states like Ghana, which is experiencing an upsurge in attacks by unidentified groups, which could have links to jihadis. Northern Ghana had just one violent incident connected to an unidentified armed group in 2021 but that

SEE THREAT ON PAGE 7

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Buffalo Wild Wings sued over ‘boneless wings’

The Washington Post

A new lawsuit has a bone to pick with Buffalo Wild Wings: A Chicago man is suing the popular chain for false advertising, claiming its “boneless wings” aren’t really wings at all.

Aimen Halim said he purchased the “boneless wings” in January only to discover that they were, in fact, composed of chicken breast. “Unbeknownst to Plaintiff and other consumers, the Products are not wings at all, but instead, slices of chicken breast

meat deep-fried like wings,” says the lawsuit, which also names parent company Inspire Brands. “Indeed, the Products are more akin, in composition, to a chicken nugget rather than a chicken wing.”

In response to The Washington Post’s email seeking comment, Buffalo Wild Wings sent a link to a tweet in which the company sounded a cheekily defiant note. “It’s true,” the tweet reads. “Our boneless wings are all white meat chicken. Our hamburgers contain

no ham. Our buffalo wings are 0% buffalo.”

The lawsuit seeks compensation on Halim’s behalf and for an unspecified number of other customers who claim to have been similarly duped into buying what they considered a “premium” product. “Plaintiff and other consumers would have paid significantly less for the Products, or would not have purchased them at all, had they known ... the truth about the Products,” the lawsuit says.

EXCHANGE RATES			
Military rates			
Euro costs (March 15)	\$1.05	Switzerland (Franc)	.9155
British pound (March 15)	\$1.19	Thailand (Baht)	34.62
Japanese yen (March 15)	130.00	Turkey (New Lira)	18.9723
South Korean won (March 15)	1,272.00	(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)	
Commercial rates		INTEREST RATES	
Bahrain (Dinar)	.3769	Prime rate	7.75
Britain (Pound)	1.2165	Interest Rates Discount rate	5.25
Canada (Dollar)	1.3657	Federal funds market rate	4.55
China (Yuan)	6.8813	3-month bill	4.84
Denmark (Krone)	6.9516	30-year bond	3.70
Egypt (Pound)	30.9009		
Euro	.9338		
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8474		
Hungary (Forint)	362.91		
Israel (Shekel)	3.6250		
Japan (Yen)	134.69		
Kuwait (Dinar)	.3070		
Norway (Krone)	10.5604		
Philippines (Peso)	54.94		
Poland (Zloty)	4.37		
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7549		
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3450		
South Korea (Won)	1,308.90		

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PACIFIC

N. Korea fires 2 ballistic missiles off eastern coast

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles off its eastern coast Tuesday morning, according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The missiles were launched at 7:41 a.m. and 7:51 a.m. from Janggyon in the southwestern coastal province of South Hwanghae, the Joint Chiefs said in a message to news agencies. They flew roughly 385 miles before landing in the East Sea, or Sea of Japan, according to a Joint Chiefs' update.

South Korea considers missile launches "provocations that harm the peace and stability" of the region, the update stated.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the launches posed no immediate threat to "U.S. personnel or territory, or to our allies,"

according to a Tuesday statement.

The missiles "highlight the destabilizing impact" of North Korea's unlawful weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs, the command said.

A U.N. Security Council resolution on Oct. 16, 2006, prohibits North Korea from "all activities related to its ballistic missile program."

The launches are North Korea's sixth and seventh so far this year in five separate days of testing. The communist regime last fired a short-range ballistic missile on Thursday. The North also said it fired a pair of cruise missiles Sunday from a submarine, according to a report Monday by the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

Tuesday's launches come a day after the start of the large-scale Freedom Shield exercise by U.S. and South Korean forces. The



KCNA

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un observes a missile launch in this undated photo from the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

11-day joint exercise involves training in the latest elements of defensive warfare, according to U.S. and South Korean military officials.

North Korea previously warned the U.S. and South Korea against the exercise, which it views as a rehearsal for an invasion. The regime also accuses the allies of rais-

ing regional tensions.

The ongoing drills "seriously encroach upon the security interests" of North Korea and threatened "strong counteractions" against the allies, Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry said in a statement last month.

However, the U.S. and South Korean forces will "train normal-

ly," regardless of "provocations" from the North, a Joint Chiefs spokesman said Tuesday in Seoul. Some government spokespeople in South Korea customarily speak to the media on the condition of anonymity.

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Japanese missile base opens on island near Taiwan

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Tokyo officially opens a new Japan Ground Self-Defense Force base with missile units this week on Ishigaki in the nation's southern island chain.

Camp Ishigaki will begin operations on Thursday, with an opening ceremony April 2, a spokesman from the Okinawa Defense Bureau told Stars and Stripes by phone Tuesday. The bureau represents Japan's Defense Ministry in the region.

The official launch date was first announced March 7 by ministry spokesman Takeshi Aoki, Japanese public broadcaster NHK reported that day.

"The gap of the Japan Self-Defense Forces in the Nansei region will be solved," Aoki said of the new base during a press conference at the ministry offices in Tokyo, according to the NHK report. "This shows the will of our country to not allow changes in the status quo by force."

The Nansei Islands stretch from Kyushu, the southernmost of the four main islands, to within 70 miles of Taiwan. Ishigaki is about 150 miles east of Taiwan.

Aoki said the new facility will enhance Japan's "deterrence power" in the southern island chain and lead to the "security of our nation."

The base is scheduled to receive long-range missiles on Saturday and Sunday, Okinawa Times newspaper reported March 8, citing unnamed sources.

Construction at Camp Ishigaki began in 2019, with essential facilities completed this month, the bureau spokesman said. Plans from 2018 called for three main buildings, a



Japan Ground Self-Defense Force

Members of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force fire a Type-03 missile.

shooting range, two vehicle maintenance hangars, four ammunitions depots, a warehouse, a training facility and other buildings, according to the Ishigaki city website.

Construction is ongoing, the bureau spokesman said.

Some government officials in Japan are required to speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

Approximately 570 personnel from security, surface-to-air and surface-to-ship guided-missile units will be stationed at the base, according to the ministry website. The missile units will be moved south from Ground Self-Defense Force camps in Naga-

saki and Kumamoto prefectures.

They will be armed with Type-12 surface-to-ship guided missiles and Type-03 surface-to-air guided missiles, the ministry said. Type-12 missiles will be stored in the ammunition facilities on the base, Aoki said Friday, according to a separate NHK report.

The Chinese military is increasing its presence in the seas east of the island chain and around Taiwan with naval drills, overflights and transits of key, narrow straits that give way to the Pacific Ocean.

In response, Japan has built military bases in the Nansei, deployed troops and an-



Okinawa Defense Bureau

This undated photo shows a building under construction at Camp Ishigaki on Japan's Ishigaki Island.

nounced it intends to position surface-to-air missiles in the region as well.

Tokyo in December approved a record defense budget of about \$51.4 billion for fiscal year 2023, which begins in April, that emphasized counterstrike capabilities and strengthened standoff air and missile defense.

The country is developing an upgraded version of the high-speed, truck-mounted Type-12 missile with its range extended from 62 miles to 620 miles, putting potential targets around the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea and parts of China and North Korea within reach.

Critics have said that positioning these assets in the Nansei may violate Japan's pacifist constitution.

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MILITARY

USMC seeks \$53B budget to prepare for future conflicts

BY DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes
WASHINGTON — The Marine Corps is requesting a budget of more than \$50 billion to help speed up plans to modernize and reshape the service to better respond to future conflicts against military powers, such as China.

The Navy's budget request, which includes the Marine Corps, asks for a funding increase of \$11 billion for fiscal 2024, which begins in October.

The budget plan, which must be approved by Congress, accelerates the Marine Corps' Force Design 2030 program by increasing funding by \$705 million next year. Force Design 2030 is a plan for the service to modernize and adapt for future marine warfare environments.

Roughly \$53 billion of the Navy's \$255 billion budget request would go to the Marine Corps. The plan provides funding for about 206,000 active-duty Marines and Reserve members — a few hundred more than projected for the Marines for 2023 — as well as three new Marine Littoral Regiments and five traditional infantry regiments.

Almost two-thirds of the Marine Corps budget would fund personnel, operations and maintenance, according to the budget proposal. About 25% would fund procuring weapons, vehicles and equipment and about 10% is for construction projects and research and development.

The Marine Corps funding plan is \$1.3 billion more than its enacted budget from 2023.

"This is a strategy-driven budget," Undersecretary of the Navy Erik Raven told reporters. "The budget reflects the nation's priorities ... and solidifies [Navy] Secretary [Carlos] Del Toro's enduring priorities of maintaining maritime dominance, empowering warfighters and strengthening strategic partnerships."

In its National Defense Strategy last fall, the Pentagon called China the top "pacing challenge" for the

United States and underscored the importance of maintaining stability and limiting Beijing's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Chinese aggression in recent years, including an accelerated warship-building program, has persuaded Pentagon leaders that the Marine Corps must be more sophisticated and its forces more adaptable.

"Strengthening maritime dominance requires us to rapidly field the concepts and capabilities that create advantage relative to our pacing threat," according to the budget request. "That is why we are making the investments now ... to ensure we remain the most lethal, capable and globally postured force on this planet for decades to come."

Notably, the budget request does not include additional amphibious warships, which is something Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger has requested. San Antonio-class amphibious transport ships are used to move Marines and equipment.

Del Toro said months ago that there would be a pause in building amphibious warships so the Navy could study how many it needs and for what purpose.

The other figures from the Marine Corps' budget request for fiscal 2024 are as follows:

- \$17.3 billion in aircraft procurement, including the F-35B and F-35C fighter jets.
- \$15.6 billion for pay, allowances and benefits, including 5.2% pay increase.
- Almost \$7 billion in weapons procurement, including tactical Tomahawk missiles.
- \$4.5 billion for installations/facilities and \$1.3 billion in new construction.
- \$85 million for education at Marine Corps University in Virginia.
- \$85 million in funding for junior ROTC and tuition assistance programs.

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SAMUEL HARDGROVE/U.S. Navy

Lt. Austin Gooder, left, and Lt. Cole Roberts stand junior officer and officer of the deck aboard Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Montgomery in 2022. The Navy has the Montgomery on its list of 11 ships it would like to cut.

Navy: Budget request marks \$10B increase from last year

FROM PAGE 1

again asking lawmakers to approve the decommissioning of four ships that the service also wanted retired last year: the guided-missile cruiser USS Vicksburg and dock landing ships USS Germantown, USS Gunston Hall and USS Tortuga.

Raven said the dock landing ships posed a challenge for readiness.

"We want to make sure that the capabilities that we field are the right capabilities," he said. "We're proposing those divestments because we think the return on investment on further investments on those particular ships ... is not there. Additionally, we have sailors and Marines who are serving on these ships, and we think getting them matched up with the right platforms is the way to go."

The Navy's deployable battle

force will number 293 ships in fiscal 2024, which begins Oct. 1, compared with 296 now. The service is expected to reach an active-duty end strength of 347,000 sailors and 57,200 Reserve members, an increase of 5,264 sailors and 983 reservists, respectively, from the previous year.

The Navy's budget request represents a nearly \$10 billion, or 5% increase, from last year's enacted budget. It contains \$67.3 billion for operations and maintenance, \$63.7 billion for procurement, \$42.9 billion for personnel, \$23.3 billion for research and development and \$5.3 billion for military construction and family housing.

About \$17 billion of the procurement request is for 88 aircraft, including fighters, helicopters, unmanned aircraft and training aircraft.

The construction spending plan

is a nearly 20% increase compared to last year's budget and will include the construction of three child development centers, said Rear Adm. John Gumbleton, the deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for budget.

The Navy also wants to boost investment in the Pentagon's Pacific Deterrence Initiative by nearly 50%, committing \$3.2 billion to a "free and open Indo-Pacific" in the face of China's growing military power. A significant portion of the funds will be spent on construction projects to build up naval bases in Guam, Hawaii and other locations, Gumbleton said.

"We know that our prosperity and security as a nation are dependent upon unfettered access to the sea," Raven said.

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USS Reagan sailor dies after falling from housing building at Yokosuka

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes
YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A sailor assigned to the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan died Monday evening after falling from an unaccompanied housing building, the base confirmed Tuesday.

The sailor, a 22-year-old sea-

man whose identity was not disclosed, was critically injured in the fall, base spokesman Randall Baucom told Stars and Stripes by email.

The sailor was treated first at Naval Hospital Yokosuka and then at Kyosai Hospital, roughly one mile from base, and died at 9:27 p.m., Baucom said.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the Sailor's family, friends and the crew of USS Ronald Reagan during this difficult time," he wrote. "As with any situation where a Sailor passes away, the incident is under investigation by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service."

The sailor's next of kin were no-

tified, and the Ronald Reagan's command is providing chaplain and counseling support to the crew of the carrier, which is in port at Yokosuka.

"The command has three Chaplains, a Psychologist, a mental health technician and a Deployed Resiliency Counselor to assist any Sailor grieving the loss of their

shipmate," Baucom said. Baucom said he could not provide any additional information, such as the sailor's identity or command, whether the death was considered a suicide or if foul play was suspected.

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MILITARY

Air Force seeks nearly 100 new aircraft in budget

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Air Force leaders said Monday that they plan to buy 96 aircraft, including 72 fighter jets, and boost their research into future technologies by nearly 10% as part of the service's more than \$185 billion budget proposal for fiscal 2024.

The spending plan for the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1 is about \$5.4 billion more than the budget for 2023. Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall said the plan is a "beautiful balance" between operational demands now and modernizing to stay ahead of the future threats that are primarily coming from China's ability to rapidly update its military's technology. It's just part of the more than \$215 billion budget request from Department of the Air Force, which includes \$30 billion for Space Force.

"I'm very comfortable with what we're asking for. I think we've got a good mix here," Kendall said Friday on a call with reporters.

The Air Force funding plan is part of the Defense Department budget proposal of \$842 billion, which is up 3.2% from fiscal 2023,

which ends Sept. 30. The \$26 billion increase from last year's spending would include a 5.2% salary bump for troops — the highest in 20 years.

The Air Force's proposed budget speeds up planned purchases of aircraft, including 48 F-35A fighter jets and 24 F-15EX jets. The service also plans to retire 310 aircraft, including 32 F-22 Raptors, 57 F-16 Eagles, 48 MQ-9 Reapers, which are unmanned aircraft, and 42 A-10 Thunderbolt II, also known as the Warthog.

The Air Force also plans to retire 24 KC-10 tankers as it requests the purchase of 15 of its replacement aircraft, the KC-46.

The plan includes funding for 1.1 million flying hours.

The proposal calls for a 9.7% increase in research and development spending, including the formation of an experimental operations unit, said Maj. Gen. Michael A. Greiner, deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force for budget. It includes an increase in money for the intercontinental ballistic missile replacement, the Sentinel program, as the first of the new strategic bomber B-21 Raider is projected to take flight later this year, he said.



JHADE HERRERA/U.S. Air Force

An Air Force F-35 Lightning II flies over Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., on March 4.

Other new technology programs with increased funding include the next generation of manned and unmanned combat aircraft and test aircraft for the continued development of the Survivable Airborne Operations Center, which is sometimes called the "Doomsday" plane and is made to survive a nuclear blast.

The Air Force budget also calls for \$42.1 billion to fund 512,100 members of the Air Force and Space Force, including Air National Guard and Reserve members.

There are about 504,475 troops now in the Air Force and Space Force, according to budget documents. The Air Force is autho-

rized now to have about 250 additional troops. If the Air Force can fill all the positions it's requesting in 2024, it could see about 7,625 more troops in its ranks.

The Air Force asked for \$588 million for civilian personnel, which includes a 5.2% pay raise — the largest in 40 years, Greiner said.

To help with recruiting, the budget includes funding for increasing pilot retention bonuses from \$35,000 to \$50,000, and \$45 million for initial recruiting bonuses.

The service is requesting \$368 million that will go toward 39 dormitories, and another \$731 million for infrastructure improvement for environmental sustain-

ability, such as electric, water, pipeline and landscaping improvements.

The Air Force requested \$3.8 billion for 49 projects in 17 states and overseas locations for military construction.

Kendall said it's important that Congress pass this budget on schedule.

"So many people have been asking me about going faster and accelerating change ... and how to make acquisition move faster. We move at the pace of money and engineering. And you don't start until you get the money," he said.

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Space Force looks to add 800 guardians, boost security role

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Space Force wants to recruit 800 new guardians and take on more responsibility in national security with a nearly \$4 billion proposed increase in funding in its 2024 budget request, officials announced Monday.

The newest service branch, which was activated three years ago, is proposing a budget of \$30 billion for fiscal 2024, which starts Oct. 1. In addition to more troops, the funding boost would pay for five additional launches and a nearly two-fold increase in money for low and medium orbit missile-tracking satellites.

Space Force's budget is nested within the Department of the Air Force's total funding proposal of more than \$215 billion for fiscal 2024.

The overall Defense Department budget request is \$842 billion, which is up 3.2% from fiscal 2023. The \$26 billion increase from this year's funding includes a 5.2% salary bump for troops — the highest in 20 years. That increase would include Space Force civilians as well, according to the service's budget presentation Monday.

The Space Force has a vital role to play in the National Defense Strategy, which has a primary focus to sustain and strengthen

"Defending the nation requires constant vigilance in all domains."

Kristyn Jones
acting undersecretary of the U.S. Air Force

deterrence against China, said Kristyn Jones, acting undersecretary of the Air Force.

"Defending the nation requires constant vigilance in all domains," she said.

As with previous budgets, the Space Force proposal focuses on research and development. The service requested more than \$19 billion for 2024. The Resilient Missile Warning, Missile Tracking program for low and medium orbits and a program to prototype new technologies are slated for \$1.1 billion each in funding.

Procurement is planned to receive \$4.7 billion with space launches to increase from 10 to 15 in fiscal 2024.

Under the 2024 budget plan, the Space Force will take control of Joint Tactical Ground Stations from the Army, said Maj.



Rocio Romo/U.S. Space Force

Space Launch Delta 30 provided range support for the successful launch of the Tactically Responsive Launch-2 mission for Space Force in June 2021 from Vandenberg Space Force Base, Calif.

Gen. Michael A. Greiner, deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force for the budget. These forward deployed stations receive, process and disseminate direct down-linked infrared data from overhead sensors and provide real-time warning on ballistic missile launches.

The transition of these sites and 100 jobs is "ultimately consolidating global missile warning under a single military service," Greiner said.

Space Force also requested \$3.2 million to spend on retention bonuses and another \$1.5 million in assignment incentive pay.

MILITARY

Army’s budget focuses on recruiting

Top priorities in service’s proposal also include China and modernizing the force

By DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Army’s budget request for fiscal 2024 seeks \$185 billion that includes funding increases to attract and retain soldiers, stabilize the Indo-Pacific region and procure new weapons, service officials said Monday.

The service’s budget proposal, which is a slight increase from 2023, accounts for less than 25% of the Defense Department’s overall budget of \$842 billion for the next fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1. Army officials said the discretionary funding request for next year is centered mostly on modernization, personnel and improving readiness.

“As [China] races to modernize its military, this budget will sharpen our edge by making critical investments across all timeframes, theaters, and domains,” defense officials said in a statement. “This budget makes the department’s largest-ever investments in readiness and procurement — and our largest investment in research and development.”

Many of the Army’s year-to-year budget items in the proposal do not increase from 2023 funding, but the service is requesting more than \$15 billion in additional spending for personnel matters to make greater investments in troops, families and civilian staffers amid ongoing struggles with recruiting.

“People are our No. 1 priority,”



Lt. Gen. Daniel Karbler administers the oath of enlistment Jan. 21, to six recruits during Military Appreciation Night at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Undersecretary of the Army Gabe Camarillo told reporters at the Pentagon. “There are significant uncertainties regarding the recruiting market.”

Last year, the Army aimed for 60,000 new recruits but attracted only about 45,000. This year, its recruiting goal is 65,000. Officials said Monday that the new budget request includes almost \$390 million to fund marketing and advertising portfolios in a bid to attract enlistees.

Last week, the Army announced a rebranding campaign that included a refreshed logo and the resurrection of its famous slogan — “Be All You Can Be.”

Also part of the 2024 budget request is \$13 million to expand the Army’s Future Soldier Prep Course, a program designed to

educate young American students about military life and help them prepare for and pass the military’s academic and physical eligibility requirements. Instituted in 2022, officials said the program has been highly successful so far. Fewer than 25% of all young Americans between the ages of 17 and 24 can meet military eligibility requirements, according to the most recent Pentagon data.

About \$290 million will fund enhancing operations within the Army’s recruiting command and the budget request aims to fund a force of 452,000 active-duty soldiers in fiscal 2024.

Camarillo said the Army expects “it will take several years” to overcome its current recruiting challenges — something that Army Secretary Christine Wormuth

has also acknowledged.

Other priorities laid out in the Army’s budget blueprint include \$72 billion for operations and maintenance, \$23 billion for weapons procurement and \$16 billion for research and development.

Some of the weapons priorities in the Army’s budget include about \$1.4 billion to procure Patriot and Tomahawk missiles, \$220 million for 155 mm artillery shells and almost \$500 million on the Next Generation Squad Weapon — a new rifle that’s been in development for years — and ammunition. If Congress approves the funds, they will pay for more than 18,000 of the new rifles and 21 million rounds of ammo.

“[The Army’s proposed budget] enables us to continue our momentum on the modernization programs, fully fund our efforts to address recruiting and to effectuate the National Defense Strategy,” Camarillo said.

The Pentagon’s National Defense Strategy, issued last fall, identified China as the top pacing challenge for the U.S. and underscored the importance of maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific region — something the Army’s budget also aims to do.

Concerns about China expanding its influence in the region have risen in recent months with the discovery of a Chinese surveillance balloon over the United States and occasional provocative movements in the South China Sea, including the Taiwan Strait.

Beijing has long claimed Taiwan as a breakaway territory and has expressed a desire to “reunify” with the island.

The Army’s budget request also includes almost \$1.5 billion for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, a program designed to develop advanced capabilities, new operational concepts and build a more resilient force posture in the Indo-Pacific. Also included is funding for “contested logistics” and efforts to expand the Army’s engagement in the region.

Here are a few other priorities from the Army’s budget request for fiscal 2024:

- \$1.9 billion on continued investment in future vertical lift helicopters.
- \$1.1 billion on continued investment in the long-range hypersonic weapons.
- \$287.5 million for five new barracks projects.
- \$709 million on efforts to expand access to child care.
- \$290 million to strengthen prevention of sexual assault and response.
- \$230 million to implement suicide prevention measures.
- \$583 million on Army community services and morale, welfare and recreation.
- \$900 million for 115 military exercises worldwide, including 33 in Indo-Pacific.
- More than \$500 million on cybersecurity tools and infrastructure.

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New Baumholder special operations hub allocated \$64M in DOD proposal

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The transformation of a rural Army garrison in western Germany into a special operations hub would move forward under the military’s 2024 budget, which calls for \$64 million in various upgrades.

It allocates \$41 million for a special operations company operations facility at the Army’s garrison in Baumholder and \$23 million for a joint parachute rigging site.

The moves build on other recent special operations projects in Baumholder, which eventually will serve as a home for hundreds of Green Berets and SEALs.

Last year, about \$78 million was directed toward buildings and facilities to support special operations teams headed to the area.

While a precise timeline hasn’t been announced for the relocation of special operators from the congested metropolitan region of Stuttgart to the more remote Baumholder, the move is a long time coming.

Army and special operations leaders have advocated for the shift, which would give troops easy access to Baumholder’s large training ranges.

The move also would provide relief to a German community in the Stuttgart area that has long complained about the crackle of gunfire at ranges within earshot of well-to-do neighborhoods.

The looming influx of special operators to Baumholder, along with other projects supporting soldiers already based there, are a boost to an area that not long ago was on the Army’s chopping block

as part of a long post-Cold War drawdown.

The uncertainty of the Army’s future in Baumholder meant that for years, little funding was put into the garrison’s aging facilities. As a result, troops and their families lived in old, rundown barracks and stairwell-style housing buildings.

However, over the past several years, tens of millions of dollars have been pumped into public works projects.

In the Army’s 2024 budget, \$78.7 million was earmarked for new family housing at Baumholder.

That follows the expenditure of \$130 million in the 2023 budget on various housing improvements.

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Russian fighter jet knocks USAF drone into Black Sea

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A Russian fighter jet collided with a U.S. drone Tuesday over the Black Sea, forcing the unmanned aircraft to crash into international waters, U.S. European Command said.

At about 7 a.m., two Russian Su-27 aircraft conducted “an unsafe and unprofessional intercept” with a U.S. Air Force drone, the Stuttgart, Germany-based EUCOM said.

One of the Su-27s struck the propeller of the MQ-9 during the incident, EUCOM said. That forced the aircraft’s controllers to bring it down into the Black Sea, the command said. Several times before the collision, the Su-27s dumped fuel on and flew in front of the MQ-9 in a reckless, environmentally unsound and unprofessional manner, the EUCOM statement said.

“Our MQ-9 aircraft was conduct-

ing routine operations in international airspace when it was intercepted and hit by a Russian aircraft, resulting in a crash and complete loss of the MQ-9,” Gen. James Hecker, U.S. Air Forces Europe and Air Forces Africa commander, said in a statement. “In fact, this unsafe and unprofessional act by the Russians nearly caused both aircraft to crash.”

In recent years, there have been repeated close encounters between U.S. and Russian aircraft, after which the American military accused the Russians of carrying out unsafe maneuvers or harassing naval vessels on patrol. None of those encounters resulted in a collision.

The collision over the Black Sea comes more than a year after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

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MILITARY



ALEXANDER RIEDEL/Stars and Stripes

Investigators launch a drone Friday to collect aerial images of the scene where a bus carrying Defense Department school students overturned near Weilerbach, Germany.

Prosecutors investigating after school bus rollover near Ramstein

By ALEXANDER RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Charges were pending Tuesday against the school bus driver who was arrested last week on suspicion of drunken driving after the bus flipped over an embankment along a rural road near Ramstein Air Base, leaving the students to break a back window and free themselves.

“Currently, we are investigating the incident from all conceivable angles,” Kaiserslautern lead prosecutor Udo Gehring said. “We are not limited to a certain accusation.”

The 60-year-old driver, whose name wasn’t disclosed in accordance with German privacy rules, was released from custody following Friday’s rollover.

Police tested his blood alcohol level and the results should be available to prosecutors soon, law enforcement officials said.

Students from the Defense Department’s Kaiserslautern elementary, middle and high schools who were aboard the bus at the time said the driver had been acting erratically.

The rollover happened just before 4 p.m. on District Road 19 between Weilerbach and Erzenhausen.

At one point, “the driver stopped in the middle of the road, stood up and said something while pounding his chest and crying,” Bryan Muniz-Diaz, 17, said Friday. “His face was all red. He then kept on driving.”

Beyond investigating the crash, prosecutors will have to determine whether the driver’s actions afterward constituted a crime.

Video shared on Facebook on Monday shows a group, including first responders, surrounding a person on a field a few hundred yards away from the wreckage.

Students and parents who were gathered at the Weilerbach firehouse Friday said the driver had tried to flee. But a police statement Monday said he may have been running around the field in shock.

“At the moment, everything revolves around determining the complete circumstances, including his behavior after the accident,” Gehring said. “But we expect to be able to report an update soon.”

German police said the driver is under investigation on suspicion of endangering road traffic and doing bodily harm to passengers. There were 16 students aboard the contracted bus, said Stephen Smith, a Department of Defense Education Activity-Europe spokesman.

Bus service has resumed on the K-204 route with a second adult on board for now “to provide added reassurance,” Louis D’Angelo,

DODEA-Europe East District chief of staff, said in a letter to parents Tuesday.

Counseling is also available to those who need it, the letter said.

“This incident is completely unacceptable and we will continue to work with our contractors to ensure this does not happen again,” D’Angelo wrote.

The contractor is cooperating with both DODEA and investigators, D’Angelo added.

A spokesman for bus operator Schary Reisen, Lukas Schary, said on Tuesday that the crash was “deeply regrettable, and we will do everything in our power to fully clarify what happened that day.

“We are currently unable to answer questions ... until we ourselves are fully aware of the sequence of events.”

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Threat: Piracy also in sights in exercise

FROM PAGE 1
figure rose dramatically to 19 in 2022, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project.

This year’s U.S. Flintlock, a two-week event, is taking place amid growing anti-French sentiment in West Africa. Mali and Burkina Faso have ended their military cooperation with France, complaining that the French military presence over several years has done little to stem the growth of jihadi violence. The military juntas ruling Mali and Burkina Faso are now getting military support from Russia, and Mali is also working with the private mercenary outfit, the Wagner Group.

The U.S. says it wants to help African countries stem the extremist threat before it spreads further across the region.

“If the instability gets too broad or too bad then it opens the aperture for other malign actors to try and influence and try and corrupt the messaging to gain access to some of these governments,” said U.S. Col. Rob Zyla, deputy commander for Special Operations Command Africa.

While the U.S. isn’t expanding the number of its soldiers, U.S. special operations forces will con-

tinue to conduct joint training with partners based on their needs and requests, he said.

For the first time at Flintlock there is a site dedicated to maritime training where military forces practice search and seizure and other tactics, in order to stave off the growing threat of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

Ghanaian military officials say they worry jihadis will soon work with the pirates to make the waters unsafe.

“We already know that they have intent to link up with piracy and enhance operations,” said Col. William Nortey with the Ghanaian army. “That would be a game changer for the littoral (coastal) states so we need to prevent this at all costs,” he said.

As the extremist violence spreads south, Ghana is investing money to beef up security along its border, buying more than 100 armored personnel carriers, among other equipment, President Nana Akufo-Addo said in his State of the Nation address last week.

“The reality of the state of affairs in our neighborhood demands that the government goes to great lengths to ensure the security, safety and stability of our nation,” he said.



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Australia to buy nuclear-powered subs from US

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — President Joe Biden and the leaders of Australia and the United Kingdom on Monday announced that Australia will purchase nuclear-powered attack submarines from the U.S. to modernize its fleet amid growing concern about China’s influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Biden flew to San Diego to appear with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak as they hailed an 18-month-old nuclear partnership given the acronym AUKUS — for Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The partnership, announced in 2021, enables Australia to access nuclear-powered submarines, which are stealthier and more capable than conventionally powered vessels, as a counterweight to China’s military buildup.

“The latest joint statement issued by the U.S., U.K., and Australia shows that the three countries have gone further down the wrong and dangerous path for their own geopolitical self-interest, completely ignoring the concerns of the international community,” China Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told reporters at a Tuesday briefing.

Wang said the agreement arises from the “typical Cold War mentality which will only motivate an arms race, damage the international nuclear nonproliferation regime, and harm regional stability and peace.”

Biden, appearing sensitive to tensions with China and its criticism of the deal, stressed that the submarines are “nuclear po-



From left, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese speaks as President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak listen at Naval Base Point Loma, Monday in San Diego.

wered, not nuclear armed.”

“These boats will not have any nuclear weapons of any kind of them,” he said at an outdoor ceremony at Naval Base Point Loma in San Diego, where he was flanked by Albanese and Sunak. Two submarines, the USS Missouri and the USS Charlotte, were tied up at the next pier in the Pacific Ocean behind the leaders.

Wang repeated China’s claims that AUKUS poses a “serious risk of nuclear proliferation and violating the object and purpose of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.”

“The three countries claim that they will abide by the highest nu-

clear non-proliferation standards, which is pure deception,” Wang said, accusing the three of “coercing” the International Atomic Energy Agency into giving its endorsement.

Albanese said the agreement “represents the biggest single investment in Australia’s defense capability in all of our history.” It’s also the first time in 65 years that the U.S. has shared its nuclear propulsion technology, “and we thank you for it,” he said.

Sunak called AUKUS “the most significant multilateral defense partnership in generations.” He said the U.K. also will share its 60 years of experience running its

own submarine fleet with Australian engineers “so they can build their own fleet.”

On Tuesday, Australia’s defense minister said AUKUS was necessary to counter the biggest conventional military buildup in the region since World War II. Australian officials said the deal will cost up to \$245 billion over the next three decades and create 20,000 jobs.

Richard Marles, the defense minister, said Australia had made a huge diplomatic effort for months ahead of Monday’s announcement of the deal, including making more than 60 calls to regional and world leaders. Australia

had even offered to keep China in the loop, he said.

“We offered a briefing. I have not participated in a briefing with China,” Marles said.

Speaking in a video call with reporters late Monday, U.S. Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel J. Kritenbrink said the degree of transparency involved was one of the key features of the arrangement.

Australia is buying three, and possibly up to five, Virginia-class boats as part of AUKUS. A future generation of submarines will be built in the U.K. and in Australia with U.S. technology and support.

The U.S. will also increase its port visits in Australia to provide it with more familiarity with the nuclear-powered technology before it has such subs of its own. The USS Asheville was docked in Perth, Australia, on Monday, Biden said.

The secretly brokered AUKUS deal included the Australian government’s cancellation of a \$66 billion contract for a French-built fleet of conventional submarines, which sparked a diplomatic row within the Western alliance that took months to mend.

San Diego is Biden’s first stop on a three-day trip to California and Nevada.

He will discuss gun violence prevention in Monterey Park, Calif., where 11 people were killed in a January mass shooting, and his plans to lower prescription drug costs in Las Vegas.

The trip will include fundraising stops as Biden steps up his political activity before an expected reelection announcement next month.

US sees consumer price increases ease slightly

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. consumer price increases eased slightly from January to February but still pointed to an elevated inflation rate that is posing a challenge for the Federal Reserve at a delicate moment for the financial system. The government said Tuesday that prices increased 0.4% last month, just below January’s 0.5% rise. Yet excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called core prices rose 0.5% in February, slightly above January’s 0.4% gain. The Fed pays particular attention to the core measure as a gauge of underlying inflation pressures.

Even though prices are rising much faster than the Fed wants, some economists expect the central bank to suspend its yearlong streak of interest rate hikes when it

meets next week. With the collapse of two large banks since Friday fueling anxiety about other regional banks, the Fed, for now, may focus more on boosting confidence in the financial system than on its long-term drive to tame inflation.

When measured against prices a year ago, inflation has been easing for eight months. In February, consumer prices climbed 6% from 12 months earlier, down from January’s 6.4% year-over-year increase and well below a recent peak of 9.1% in June. Yet it remains far above the Fed’s 2% annual inflation target. Core prices in February rose 5.5% from 12 months ago, down slightly from 5.6% in January.

Nearly three-quarters of last month’s price increase was driven by housing costs. But most economists expect rental cost increases



EDUARDO MUNOZ ALVAREZ / AP

A Walmart employee organizes items. U.S. consumer prices for February eased slightly.

to slow in the coming months.

Prices in the economy’s sprawling service sector continued to accelerate last month. Restaurant prices rose 0.6% from January to February. Auto insurance jumped 0.9%, hotel costs a dramatic 2.3%.

Air fares, after easing for several months, soared 6.4% just in February and are up 27% from a year ago. The Fed is heavily focused on services, which are labor-intensive and whose price increases are largely driven by higher wages.

Silicon Valley Bank parent, CEO face class-action suit

Associated Press

A class-action lawsuit is being filed against the parent company of Silicon Valley Bank, its CEO and its chief financial officer, saying that company didn’t disclose the risks that future interest rate increases would have on its business.

The lawsuit against SVB Financial Group, CEO Greg Becker and CFO Daniel Beck was filed in the U.S. district court for the Northern district of California. It is looking for unspecified damages to be awarded to those who invested in SVB between June 16, 2021, and March 10, 2023.

The lawsuit from shareholders led by Chandra Vanipenta says some quarterly and annual financial reports from SVB didn’t fully account for warnings from the Federal Reserve about interest rate hikes.

In particular, the lawsuit said that annual reports for 2020 through 2022, “understated the risks posed to the company by not disclosing that likely interest rate hikes, as outlined by the Fed, had the potential to cause irrevocable damage to the company,” the lawsuit stated.

It also claims that the company “failed to disclose that, if its investments were negatively affected by rising interest rates, it was particularly susceptible to a bank run.”

The collapse of Silicon Valley Bank has shaken the technology industry and worried small businesses and individuals with deposits at the financial institution. The Biden administration’s move guaranteeing all Silicon Valley Bank’s deposits above the insured limit of \$250,000 per account has brought relief to some.

NATION

Northeast braces for powerful winter storm

Associated Press

The start of a winter storm with heavy, wet snow caused a plane to slide off the runway and led to hundreds of school closings, canceled flights and thousands of power outages in parts of the Northeast on Tuesday.

The storm's path included parts of New England, upstate New York, northeastern Pennsylvania and northern New Jersey. Snow totals by the time it winds up Wednesday were expected to range from a few inches to a few feet, depending on the area.

"This is shaping up to be a unique winter storm for our small state in that there will be big differences in snowfall amounts depending on where you are located," said Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont, who ordered all executive branch state office buildings closed. "Some towns may receive a significant snowfall total, while others may receive a fraction of that amount or maybe even just rain."

The storm in the Northeast came as California continued to face severe weather. Crews there rushed to repair a levee break on a storm-swollen river in California's central coast as yet another atmospheric river arrived this week with the potential to wallop the state's swamped farmland and agricultural communities.

A Delta Air Lines plane veered



BEN GARVER, THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE (PITTSFIELD, MASS)/AP

A passerby uses an umbrella while crossing a snow-covered street Tuesday in Pittsfield, Mass. The New England states and parts of New York are bracing for a winter storm due to last into Wednesday.

off the runway as it taxied for take-off from a Syracuse, N.Y., airport Tuesday morning. The aircraft slid into a grassy area along the runway, forcing 61 passengers off the plane and a return back to the terminal, according to airport officials.

More than 400 flights traveling to, from or within the U.S. were canceled Tuesday, with Boston and New York City area airports seeing

the highest number of scrubbed flights, according to the flight tracking website FlightAware.

The National Weather Service said that in New York 2 inches of snow per hour or more was falling in higher elevations, in the eastern Catskills through the mid-Hudson Valley, central Taconics and Berkshires.

Wet, heavy snow snapped tree branches and downed power lines

across New York's capital region with power outages hitting homes and businesses in the Albany area. Snow was falling especially heavy in New York's Catskills, where about 20 inches have piled up in some areas — and more to come, according to the National Weather Service in Albany.

The snowfall totals will be among the highest of the season, said meteorologist Andrew Orri-

son of the weather service office in College Park, Md.

"It has been below average for snowfall across the Northeast this year, and so this nor'easter will be very impactful," he said.

While higher elevations get snow, authorities warned residents in coastal areas to watch for possible flooding because of heavy rains. The National Weather Service in New York said wind gusts could reach 50 mph across Long Island and lower Connecticut.

Rain was turning into snow across parts of New England with winds picking up and power outages reported across the region. In New Hampshire, it was Election Day for town officeholders, but more than 70 communities postponed voting because of the storm.

One community that did not postpone voting was Londonderry, a town of about 24,000 people in the southern part of the state, where steady snow was falling. The polls had opened at 6 a.m. and were scheduled to close at 8 p.m.

Many voters opted to turn in an absentee ballot Monday, in advance of the storm, town moderator Jonathan Kipp said. Some diehard residents braved the elements.

"Some are like, 'Hey, this is New England, you know, what do you expect?' And others are not happy with the decision, but they still came out," he said.

Key levee rupture grows as new storm threatens California coast

Associated Press

WATSONVILLE, Calif. — Crews rushed to repair a levee break on a storm-swollen river in California's central coast as yet another atmospheric river arrived Monday with the potential to wallop the state's swamped farmland and agricultural communities.

The Pajaro River's first levee rupture grew to at least 400 feet since it failed late Friday, officials said. More than 8,500 people were forced to evacuate, and about 50 people had to be rescued as the water rose that night.

Still, some stayed behind in Pajaro, an unincorporated community that's known for its strawberry crops and is now mostly flooded. The largely Latino farmworker community there is already struggling to find food with so many roads and businesses closed in the storm's aftermath.

"Some people have nowhere to go and maybe that's why there's still people around," resident Jorbelit Rincon said Monday. "Pretty much they don't know where to go and don't have money to provide for themselves."

A second breach opened up an-

other 100 feet of the levee closer to the Pacific coast, providing a "relief valve" for the floodwaters to recede near the mouth of the river, officials said Monday during a news conference.

Built in the late 1940s to provide flood protection, the levee has been a known risk for decades and had several breaches in the 1990s. Emergency repairs to a section of the berm were undertaken in January. A \$400 million rebuild is set to begin in the next few years.

Forecasters warned of more flooding, wind damage and potential power outages from the new atmospheric river that came ashore Monday evening in northern and central parts of the state and was expected to move south over several days. California has been pummeled this winter by 10 atmospheric rivers, which are long, narrow plumes of moisture that turn into rain and snow when they make landfall.

Along the Southern California coast, evacuation orders took effect at 8 a.m. Tuesday in Santa Barbara County for several areas that were burned by wildfires in recent years. Burned soil can be water-repellent,

increasing the risk of flash floods and flows of debris such as downed trees, according to the National Weather Service.

Water from the newest storm will likely go over the Pajaro River's levee — but crews were working to make sure the rupture doesn't get any larger, said Shaunna Murray of the Monterey County Water Resources Agency. Over the weekend, crews had to build access roads to get to the site of the breach, and bring in rocks and boulders to plug the gap.

The river separates Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, about 70 miles south of San Francisco. Several roads were closed including a stretch of coastal Highway 1, a main route between the two counties.

Monterey County officials also warned that the Salinas River could cause significant flooding of roadways and agricultural land, cutting off the Monterey Peninsula from the rest of the county. The city of Monterey and other communities are located on the peninsula.

Authorities had not received reports of any deaths or missing persons related to the storm as of Monday afternoon.

EPA to limit toxic 'forever chemicals' in drinking water

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency on Tuesday proposed limiting the amount of harmful "forever chemicals" in drinking water to the lowest level that tests can detect, a long-awaited protection the agency said will save thousands of lives and prevent serious illnesses, including cancer.

The plan marks the first time the EPA has proposed regulating a toxic group of compounds that are widespread, dangerous and expensive to remove from water. PFAS, or per- and polyfluorinated substances, don't degrade in the environment and are linked to a broad range of health issues, including low birth-weight babies and kidney cancer. The agency says drinking water is a significant source of PFAS exposure for people.

"The science is clear that long-term exposure to PFAS is linked to significant health risks," Radhika Fox, assistant EPA administrator for water, said in an interview.

Fox called the federal proposal a "transformational change" for improving the safety of drinking water in the U.S. The agency estimates the rule could reduce PFAS exposure for nearly 100 million Americans.

The chemicals had been used since the 1940s in consumer products and industry, including in non-stick pans, food packaging and fire-fighting foam. Their use is now mostly phased out in the U.S., but some still remain.

The proposal would set strict limits of 4 parts per trillion, the lowest level that can be reliably measured, for two common types of PFAS compounds called PFOA and PFOS. In addition, the EPA wants to regulate the combined amount of four other types of PFAS. Water providers will have to monitor for PFAS.

The public will have a chance to comment, and the agency can make changes before issuing a final rule, which is expected this year.

The Association of State Drinking Water Administrators said the proposal is "a step in the right direction" but compliance will be challenging. Despite available federal money, "significant rate increases will be required for most of the systems" that must remove PFAS, the group said Tuesday.

Public concern has increased in recent years as testing reveals PFAS chemicals in a growing list of communities that are often near manufacturing plants or Air Force bases.

NATION

NYC bike path killer given life sentence

BY LARRY NEUMEISTER

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A split among jurors means there will be no death penalty for an Islamic extremist convicted of maniacally racing a truck along a popular New York City bike path, killing eight people and maiming others.

The decision means Sayfullo Saipov, 35, an Uzbekistan citizen who lived in New Jersey, gets an automatic sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole in the October 2017 attack. Jurors told the judge Monday that they were unable to reach the unanimous verdict required for a death sentence.

Jurors and attorneys left the courthouse afterward without speaking to reporters gathered in the rain outside. Before he was escorted out by U.S. marshals, Saipov seemed relaxed and shook the hands of one defense lawyer.

In a statement, U.S. Attorney Damian Williams thanked the families of the dead and the survivors “for their patience and understanding as the legal process



ELIZABETH WILLIAMS/AP

Judge Vernon Broderick, far upper left, addresses the jury foreperson, who is seated right holding the verdict form, Monday, in New York.

played out.”

The verdict was the culmination of a trial that featured emotional testimony from survivors of the attack and relatives of the five tourists from Argentina, two Americans and a Belgian woman who were killed. A formal sen-

tencing date will be set in the future when Saipov can address the court, although his fate is decided.

The same federal jury convicted Saipov in January of 28 charges including murder in aid of racketeering and supporting a terrorist organization.

It returned last month for a penalty phase to decide if he would be sentenced to death or to spend the rest of his life at a maximum-security prison in Florence, Colo.

Inside the courtroom Monday, victims’ relatives observed as

Judge Vernon S. Broderick read a lengthy verdict form in which jurors made clear that they unanimously agreed prosecutors had successfully proven that Saipov carried out the deadly act to support the Islamic State; that he wanted to instill fear in New Yorkers and those who use the bike path; and that he had no remorse.

But they were not in agreement that he was likely to be violent in prison despite the prosecution’s attempt to prove he would put guards at risk there.

They unanimously agreed with nearly all mitigating factors offered by the defense, including that life in prison would be harsh, that ISIS targeted Uzbek migrants and was manipulative in creating terrorists.

All 12 jurors agreed that life in prison provides hope that Saipov may one day understand the wrongfulness of his conduct, and seven agreed there were factors in his life, personal traits, character or background or other circumstances that made them favor a life sentence.

Cohen testifies before grand jury in investigation on Trump hush money

BY MICHAEL R. SISAK

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Donald Trump’s former lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen testified Monday before a Manhattan grand jury investigating hush money payments made on the former president’s behalf.

A Trump loyalist turned adversary, Cohen spent around three hours answering questions in the secret proceeding. He was scheduled to return for more testimony Wednesday, his lawyer said as the pair emerged from the courthouse.

“Michael has spent a long and productive afternoon answering all questions, all facts, and completely responsive,” said Cohen’s lawyer, Lanny Davis.

The testimony comes at a critical time, as the Manhattan district

attorney’s office weighs whether to seek charges against Trump over payments made during his 2016 campaign to two women who alleged affairs or sexual encounters with him.

Before entering the courthouse for the session, Cohen, who orchestrated those payoffs, said his goal was simply “to tell the truth,” dismissing a suggestion that he might be motivated by a desire to see Trump behind bars.

“This is not revenge,” he said. “This is all about accountability. He needs to be held accountable for his dirty deeds.”

Trump denies being involved with either of the women, the porn actor Stormy Daniels and model Karen McDougal.

Cohen has given prosecutors evidence, including voice record-

ings of conversations he had with a lawyer for one of the women, as well as emails and text messages. He also has recordings of a conversation in which he and Trump spoke about an arrangement to pay the other woman through the supermarket tabloid the National Enquirer.

Prosecutors appear to be looking at whether Trump committed crimes in how the payments were made or how they were accounted for internally at Trump’s company, the Trump Organization.

One possible charge would be falsifying business records, a misdemeanor unless prosecutors could prove it was done to conceal another crime. No former U.S. president has ever been charged with a crime.

Appearing Monday on ABC’s



YUKI IWAMURA/AP

Michael Cohen

“Good Morning America,” Trump lawyer Joseph Tacopina said it is unlikely the former president will accept an invitation, extended by prosecutors last week, to testify.

McConnell released and headed to therapy facility

WASHINGTON — Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell was discharged from the hospital Monday after suffering a concussion and a minor rib fracture from a fall last week.

Following advice from his physician, the Kentucky Republican will go to an inpatient rehabilitation facility for physical therapy treatment before returning home, McConnell spokesman David Popp said in a statement.

McConnell tripped at a dinner event last Wednesday and was admitted to the hospital that night. He was being treated for a concussion when his medical team discovered this weekend that he also suffered a minor rib fracture.

Popp said McConnell’s recovery from his concussion is “proceeding well” and he is also being treated for the rib fracture.

From wire reports

Trump claims violence he inspired on Jan. 6 was Pence’s fault

The Washington Post

Donald Trump on Monday sharply rebuked Mike Pence’s assertion that history would hold him accountable for the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, telling reporters that his former vice president should shoulder the blame for the violent riot that day by Trump’s supporters.

“Had he sent the votes back to the legislatures, they wouldn’t

have had a problem with Jan. 6, so in many ways you can blame him for Jan. 6,” the former president said, referring to Pence’s refusal to reject the electoral college votes in Congress as Trump wanted him to do that day. “Had he sent them back to Pennsylvania, Georgia, Arizona, the states, I believe, number one, you have had a different outcome. But I also believe you wouldn’t have had ‘Jan. 6’ as we

call it.”

A pro-Trump mob attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6 following months of false claims by Trump that the election was stolen from him. He also used incendiary and false rhetoric about the election at a rally at the Ellipse shortly before the rioters stormed the Capitol.

Trump was responding to remarks Pence made Saturday, where he said unequivocally that

Trump had been “wrong” to demand he overturn the elections, something Pence maintained he had no power to do. “His reckless words endangered my family and everyone at the Capitol that day,” Pence said during a speech at the white-tie Gridiron dinner in Washington. “And I know that history will hold Donald Trump accountable.”

Speaking to reporters aboard

his plane as he made his way to Iowa for his first visit since announcing his presidential bid last year, Trump suggested that Pence’s condemnation was driven by his single-digits showings in recent surveys of potential 2024 Republican presidential contenders.

Pence has not officially announced his candidacy, even as he has made moves toward entering the race.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Man stalked couple, killed them

WA REDMOND — A longhaul truck driver from Texas who became obsessed with a software engineer in Washington state after meeting her through a social media chatroom app killed her, her husband and himself after stalking them for months, police said.

Zohreh Sadeghi, 33, and her husband, Mohammad Milad Naseri, 35, were shot to death in their suburban Seattle home by Ramin Khodakaramrezaei, 38, according to Redmond Police Chief Darrell Lowe. He said officers spent a week trying to serve a protection order on Khodakaramrezaei but had not been able to find him before the killings.

In a written statement, the police department said the suspect began communicating with Sadeghi after listening to her podcasts. Lowe clarified that the two became acquainted because he heard her in an audio chatroom on the app Clubhouse, where he said she facilitated a discussion for Farsi speakers seeking work in the tech industry.

3 officers injured in fight with man at coffee shop

AZ MESA — Three Mesa police officers were injured while fighting a man who refused to leave a coffee shop, authorities said.

Officers were called to the scene and said Tegan Williams, 21, refused to leave when asked by police, who used a stun gun on him before a six-minute fight ensued.

As Williams was being arrested, he allegedly squeezed an officer's hand with such force to break bones and require surgery to repair.

Police said another officer was kicked while apparently unconscious while a third officer needed X-rays on his injured hand.

Former student at college charged in threats case

WI MADISON — A former University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate student threatened students, staff members and professors at the university, telling some of them via email before he traveled to the U.S. that he planned to kill their children, according to court documents.

Arvin Raj Mathur, 32, was in Michigan's St. Clair County Jail following his arrest after traveling from Copenhagen, Denmark, where he has been enrolled at a university, court records and on-line jail records showed.

Mathur is accused of threatening nine people, most of them graduate students, staff or professors at the Madison campus. Among those emails were one to an anthropology professor saying that two of the other people he had threatened should "sue me right away," authorities said.



ANDREE KEHN, SUN JOURNAL/AP

Chatting over cookies

Hazel Ackley, right, and her granddaughter Katherine Ackley work on cookie decorating at a Spring Decorating workshop at Lil Jam Cookies, on Sunday, in Lisbon, Maine. The group decorated a set of six spring themed cookies with instructions from bakery owner Febecca Singleton. The Ackleys took over an entire table with family members, as Tricia Dau sits on the left and in the foreground is Meghan Ackley.

“Otherwise, I will murder their children. Call the police and a lawyer, otherwise, I will kill their children and hide their flesh inside of their burger meat,” he added in the email, court records showed.

Choctaws announce expansion at casino

MS SANDERSVILLE — The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians is expanding a casino in southeast Mississippi.

The Hattiesburg American reported the band will expand its Bok Homa Casino, which opened 12 years ago just northeast of Laurel.

The expansion will include a 60-seat restaurant and a larger sports betting area, tribal officials said at a news conference. That, in turn, will allow for more slot machines and more office space.

Director of Resort Operations Michelle York said the tribe hopes to complete construction by December.

The new restaurant will be called Red Creek, which is the English translation of Bok Homa.

School district considers 4-day week for students

AR LINCOLN — An Arkansas school district is scheduled to discuss moving to a four-day school week.

Lincoln Schools Superintendent Mary Ann Spears said the propos-

al is designed to, among other things, help attract and retain teachers for its 1,065 students.

“We have teachers that drive in from Lowell and Bentonville and spend an hour on the road each way getting to us,” Spears said. “That’s part of the piece of this. If we can do something a little bit differently and structure ourselves differently, hopefully we can recruit and retain more teachers.”

The district is proposing to have school Tuesday through Friday and add about an hour and 20 minutes to each day, with the extra time placed on both ends of a school day. The district is required to have 1,800 minutes of instruction per week, and these minutes would be spread out over four days instead of five, Spears said.

Family suit: Son suffered concussion during hazing

AL PELL CITY — Parents are suing an east Alabama school district after they said their son received a concussion when older baseball teammates hazed him by beating him with pillows.

Local news outlets reported the lawsuit was filed against the Pell City school district, the Pell City Police Department, Superintendent James Martin, the high school principal, baseball coach and others.

The parents said their son attended a “midnight madness”

event with baseball players in January. They said their son and others were beaten with pillows concealing unknown objects, injuring multiple boys.

The lawsuit said the head coach, without calling parents to tell them about the injuries or ask for permission, gave the boy medicine and told him to go to sleep until the morning.

Martin told the St. Clair Times that he and school board members are reviewing whether the district will keep sponsoring sports team sleepovers.

Lawyer J.D. Gilbert told WBRC-TV the family feels no one has been held accountable.

City approves noncitizen voting for local elections

VT BURLINGTON — Vermont’s largest city has voted to allow noncitizens who are in the country legally to vote in local elections.

The proposed charter change for Burlington now must be considered by the Legislature and the Republican governor.

Burlington would be the third city in the state to make the change. Noncitizen residents are currently allowed to vote in municipal elections in Vermont’s capital city of Montpelier, and Winooski, the most diverse community in the state.

The Republican National Committee had filed lawsuits against

the two cities asking judges to declare noncitizen voting unconstitutional and lost those challenges. Federal law prohibits noncitizens from voting in federal elections, including races for president, vice president, Senate or House of Representatives.

US grants protection for 2 freshwater mussels

MI TRAVERSE CITY — Federal regulators designated two U.S. freshwater mussels as threatened, a further sign of trouble for native mollusks that help cleanse waters by filtering out pollutants as they feed.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said it was granting protection to longsolid and round hickorynut mussels, which have declined in many Eastern and Midwestern streams.

The primary cause is habitat damage from urban sprawl, farming, oil and gas development, pipelines and mining. Other factors include competition from nonnative mussels and rising stream temperatures linked to climate change.

“Both of these mussels have suffered proverbial deaths from a thousand cuts,” said Gary Peebles, deputy supervisor of the agency’s field office in Asheville, N.C. “A lot of little things have added up.”

WORLD

Russian missile hits Ukrainian apartment

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A Russian missile struck an apartment building in the center of Kramatorsk on Tuesday, killing at least one person and wounding nine others in one of Ukraine’s major city strongholds in its eastern Donetsk region as it fights against Moscow’s invasion, officials said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr

Zelenskyy posted a video showing gaping holes in the facade of the low-rise building that bore the brunt of the strike.

The Ukrainian general prosecutor’s office and regional Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko also reported on the attack, posting photos of the building with mounds of rubble in front of it. The impact damaged nine apartment blocks, a kindergarten, a local bank

branch and two cars, Kyrylenko said.

“Russian troops are striking residential buildings, schools and hospitals, leaving cities on fire and in ruins,” Kyrylenko said on Ukrainian television. Kramatorsk houses the local Ukrainian army headquarters. Ukrainian authorities say it has been regularly targeted by Russian shelling and other attacks in the past.

Russian President Vladimir Putin,

speaking Tuesday during a meeting with workers at a helicopter factory in southern Siberia, once again cast the conflict in Ukraine as an existential one for Russia, charging that unlike the West — which, he said, is seeking to advance its geopolitical clout — it’s fighting for its existence as a state.

Russia had welcomed a Chinese peace proposal to end the fighting,

but Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday that Kyiv’s refusal to have talks leaves Moscow with only military options.

However, Moscow’s pursuit of its goals in Ukraine has been slowed by poor war management and short resources after being beaten back at the end of last year in a Ukrainian counteroffensive, military analysts say.

Garbage piles up as Paris strike continues

By ELAINE GANLEY
Associated Press

PARIS — The City of Light is losing its luster with tons of garbage piling up on Paris sidewalks as sanitation workers strike for a ninth day Tuesday. The creeping squalor is the most visible sign of widespread anger over a bill to raise the French retirement age by two years.

The malodorous perfume of rotting food has begun escaping from some rubbish bags and overflowing bins. Neither the Left Bank palace housing the Senate nor, across town, a street steps from the Elysee Palace, where waste from the presidential residence is apparently being stocked, was spared by the strike.

More than 5,600 tons of garbage had piled up by Monday, drawing complaints from some district mayors. Some piles disappeared early Tuesday with help from a private company, the TV station



Uncollected garbage near the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, on Tuesday.

BFMTV reported.

Other French cities are also having garbage problems, but the mess in Paris, the showcase of France, has quickly become emblematic of strikers’ discontent.

“It’s a bit too much because it was even hard to navigate” some streets, said 24-year-old British visitor Nadiia Turkay after touring the French capital. She added that it was “upsetting to be honest” because on “beautiful streets ... you see all the rubbish and everything. The smell.”

Turkay nevertheless sympathized with striking workers and accepted her discomfort as being

“for a good cause.”

Even the strikers themselves, who include garbage collectors, street cleaners and underground sewer workers, are concerned about what Paris is becoming in their absence.

“It makes me sick,” said Gursel Durnaz, who has been on a picket line for nine days. “There are bins everywhere, stuff all over. People can’t get past. We’re completely aware.”

But, he added, President Emmanuel Macron has only to withdraw his plan to increase the French retirement age “and Paris will be clean in three days.”

Army, resistance trade blame for Myanmar deaths

By GRANT PECK
Associated Press

BANGKOK — Myanmar’s military government has denied reports of a new mass killing of civilians by its troops, instead blaming pro-democracy resistance groups for the deaths of more than 20 people, including three Buddhist monks and a woman.

Members of armed resistance groups opposed to the military government have said the bodies of 22 people were found late Saturday in the compound of the Buddhist monastery in Nam Nein village, in the southern part of Shan State in eastern Myanmar. They blamed the army for the deaths.

No independent witnesses have emerged. The military government’s tight restrictions on travel and information make it virtually impossible to verify details of such incidents.

The village is about 50 miles east of the capital, Naypyitaw. The area is part of the Self-Administered Zone of the Pa-O ethnic minority. It is governed by the Pa-O National Organization, or

PNO, which is allied with the military government. Other Pa-O support the resistance.

Reports of the killings came about a week after accusations that troops earlier this month rampaged through several villages in western Myanmar, carrying out rapes and beheadings and killing at least 17 people.

Critics of the military say there is strong evidence that the army has repeatedly carried out war crimes since seizing power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021. Opposition to military rule has turned into what some U.N. experts have described as a civil war.

Exactly what happened Saturday morning is unclear, but the aftermath was documented in photos and video.

Those released on social media by the anti-government Karenni Nationalities Defense Force showed monks and other men with apparent bullet wounds lying near and against the wall of the monastery’s main building. They also show pools of blood and bullet holes dotting the wall.

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WORLD

China plans to reopen to tourists, resume all visas

Associated Press

HONG KONG — China will reopen its borders to tourists and resume issuing all visas Wednesday as it tries to revive tourism and its economy following a three-year halt during the COVID-19 pandemic.

China is one of the last major countries to reopen its borders to tourists. The announcement Tuesday came after it declared a “decisive victory” over COVID-19 in February.

All types of visas will resume from Wednesday. Visa-free entry also will resume at destinations such as Hainan island as well as for cruise ships entering Shanghai that had no visa requirement before COVID-19.

Foreigners holding visas issued before March 28, 2020, that are

still valid will be allowed to enter China. Visa-free entry will resume for foreigners entering Guangdong in southern China from Hong Kong and Macao. The notice didn’t specify whether vaccination certificates or negative COVID-19 tests would be required, but Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told reporters Tuesday that China had “optimized measures for remote testing of people coming to China from relevant countries,” allowing pre-boarding antigen testing instead of nucleic acid testing.

“All these have been well implemented, and the epidemic risk is generally controllable,” Wang said at a daily briefing.

The relaxation of visa rules follows China’s approval of outbound group tours for Chinese citizens.



LOUISE DELMOTTE/AP

A practitioner performs a “villain hitting” ceremony under the Canal Road Flyover in Hong Kong Monday.

‘Villain hitting’ draws crowds to Hong Kong

Associated Press

HONG KONG — People holding a grudge may have found a way to release it in Hong Kong’s “villain hitting” ritual.

To relieve themselves from a bad mood, customers paid ritual practitioners who work underneath the Canal Road Flyover in Causeway Bay, one of the city’s shopping districts, and watched them bashing an image of their

target with a shoe. It could be anyone — rival lovers and unfriendly colleagues, or bosses and public figures.

The ritual is particularly popular in March because some people believe the best day to perform it falls on “ging zat,” as pronounced in Cantonese, a day on the Chinese lunar calendar that literally means “awakening of insects.”

This year, “ging zat” fell on

March 6. The tradition, mostly run by elderly women, attracted crowds of customers after the lifting of major COVID-19 restrictions, including the mask mandate.

“I’m hoping to cut out all the gossip around me and wish that the bad people would stay away from me,” said tourist Edison Chan, who traveled from neighboring Guangdong province.

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FACES

Redefining the road to awards

Amid ‘Everything Everywhere’ avalanche, biggest loser might have been ‘Oscar bait’

By JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

When Daniel Kwan was accepting one of the many awards for “Everything Everywhere All at Once” at Sunday night’s Academy Awards, he took a moment to assure his young son that what was happening was, to be sure, odd. “This is not normal,” said Kwan, who directed the film with his creative partner, Daniel Scheinert. “This is kind of crazy.” “Not normal” and “kind of crazy” are, increasingly, reasonable ways to describe Oscar best picture winners. Three years ago, Bong Joon Ho’s “Parasite,” a masterful Korean genre movie and class satire, became the first non-English language film to win Hollywood’s top prize. Last year, “CODA,” a modest and heartwarming indie drama released in August, took best picture, making history for the deaf community. If those films set out with little expectation of Oscar glory, the googly-eye-paved road for “Everything Everywhere All at Once” was even more unlikely. It’s not a hard and fast rule, but, historically speaking, movies with butt plug

fight and hot dog fingers don’t win Oscars. They certainly don’t win seven of them. As a story about family and immigrant life, “Everything Everywhere All at Once” may be as sentimental and old-fashioned, at heart, as plenty of Oscar winners before it. But it might be — and proudly so — the weirdest best-picture winner in the 95-year history of the Academy Awards. “Everything Everywhere,” for which Michelle Yeoh became the first Asian best actress winner, is unquestionably an Asian American milestone. But for many reasons it’s a distinctly un-Oscar-like movie that, like “CODA” and “Parasite,” never — in any multiverse — expected any of this. Yet it was striking just how resoundingly the blissfully bonkers “Everything Everywhere All at Once” trounced the competition. With acting wins for Yeoh, Ke Huy Quan and Jamie Lee Curtis, it’s only the third film to win three acting Oscars, along with “A Streetcar Named Desire” and “Network.” No film has won more “above the line” Oscars. At the same time, much of the



Daniel Kwan, left, and Daniel Scheinert toss their awards for best picture for “Everything Everywhere All at Once” as they pose in the press room at the Oscars on Sunday at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles.

old guard was absent or went home empty-handed. Tom Cruise, whose “Top Gun: Maverick” was nominated for best picture, was a no-show. So was James Cameron, whose “Avatar: The Way of Water” wasn’t considered a real challenger. Twenty-five years ago, it was Cameron who was “king of the world,” with “Titanic.” “Maverick” won just for sound, “Avatar” for effects. The puny results for two films that have together collected nearly \$4 billion in box office might have taken some viewers out of the broadcast. Academy voters signaled early in the ceremony that blockbusters

weren’t on the menu, picking Curtis for supporting actress over Angela Bassett (“Black Panther: Wakanda Forever”), who would have been the first Marvel performer to win an Oscar. Steven Spielberg and “The Fabelmans” also was shut out. Although nominated for seven awards, his most autobiographical film and the one he campaigned hardest for, didn’t win anything. Best director went to the Daniels, who at 35, are the second-youngest winners ever. The Oscars, more than ever, belong to underdogs. And the biggest loser might be Oscar bait.

Certainly, many of the winners were conventional picks. Best actor winner Brendan Fraser’s prosthetic-aided comeback performance in “The Whale” ticked many of the standard boxes. But Sunday’s Oscars suggested Hollywood — at least for now — is looking for Oscar movies that don’t seem like Oscar movies. “Everything Everywhere All at Once,” a mad rush of originality with “Raccoonnie” strapped to its head, is surely beloved for daring to be different. At the Oscars, its win might not be “not normal,” as Kwan said, after all. It might be the new normal.

New this week: ‘Ted Lasso,’ U2, ‘Boston Strangler’

Associated Press

Here’s a collection curated by The Associated Press’ entertainment journalists of what’s arriving on TV, streaming services and music platforms this week.

Television

■ “Ted Lasso” returns Wednesday to Apple TV+ with all the heart, one-liners and pop-culture references viewers have adored from its first two seasons. The Emmy-winning series starring Jason Sudeikis, Brett Goldstein, Hannah Waddingham and Juno Temple picks up a few months after the end of season two. Sudeikis, who is a co-creator of the series, has said season three is the end of this story but has not provided a clear answer as to whether the show could take a new direction, launch a spinoff or return for another season down the road. ■ Elvis Presley famously loved comic books, and now the late singer is the star of his own animated series coming to Netflix. In “Agent Elvis,” Presley — voiced by Matthew McConaughey — is still the King of Rock ‘n’ Roll but also moonlights as a government spy. Kaitlin Olson, Johnny Knoxville, Niecy Nash and Don Cheadle also voice characters. Priscilla Presley, who is a co-creator and executive



producer, plays herself. “Agent Elvis,” premiering Friday, is the first adult animated project from the studio behind “Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse.” The show is violent, profane and features a NSFW chimpanzee, so definitely not suitable for kids.

— Alicia Rancilio

Movies

■ Keira Knightley and Carrie Coon play the Boston Record American reporters Loretta McLaughlin and Jean Cole, who connected several Boston-area murders in the early 1960s to a suspect they dubbed the Boston Strangler. The serial killer sexually assaulted and killed at least 11 women between 1962 and 1964. The case has been the subject of many books and movies over the years, but writer-director Matt Ruskin’s film is the first to focus on the reporters. “The Boston Strangler” debuts on Hulu on Friday. ■ A new documentary on Netflix, “Money Shot: The Pornhub Story” arriving Wednesday, takes a look at the phenomenon of Pornhub and the accusations that the pornographic website hosted and profited from videos of rape and underage sex. The filmmakers speak to lawyers, Pornhub employees who were told that “nothing was wrong” and sex workers to delve into the complex topic. — AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr

Music

■ Appropriate for St. Patrick’s Day, a whole lot of U2 is in the works. “Bono & The Edge: A Sort of Homecoming, with Dave Letterman” is set to premiere globally on Disney+ on Friday, the same day U2 drops “Songs of Surrender,” a collection of 40 seminal U2 songs from across the Irish band’s catalog, re-recorded and reimagined. The Edge has said the project “started as an experiment” but quickly became an “obsession as so many early U2 songs yielded to a new interpretation.” “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” gets a cowboy vibe and unexpected honky-tonk electricity. “Desire” has Bono high in his falsetto against a strummy dulcimer, and the effect is hypnotic. ■ Maybe old-fashioned rock is more your speed? Look no further than hard-hitting, riff-heavy Theory of a Deadman, whose new album is “Dinosaur.” It was produced by Martin Terefe and recorded in Sweden at Atlantis Studios, made famous by ABBA. The 10-track collection from the quartet of Tyler Connolly, Dave Brenner, Dean Back and Joey Dandeneau includes the rocking title tune, the party song “Ambulance” and a reworking of the classic song “Just the Two of Us” with a darker hue called “Two Of Us (Stuck).” — AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy

HBO’s ‘The Last of Us’ draws biggest audience

“The Last of Us” fans set another ratings record for the season one finale of the apocalyptic video game adaptation. Despite airing against the Oscars on Sunday night, HBO said the finale drew in 8.2 million viewers. Viewership for “The Last of Us” has consistently grown. The series has won over gamers with high expectations, but also critics and people unfamiliar with the game. The premiere drew 4.7 million viewers in the U.S., based on Nielsen and HBO data, making for HBO’s second-largest debut, behind “House of the Dragon.” ■ Whether it was the lingering drama of “The Slap” or the prominence of blockbusters in the best picture race, a bigger audience was lured back to the Oscars this year. The awards, which aired on ABC, were viewed by an estimated 18.7 million, according to preliminary numbers released by ABC. That’s up 12% from last year’s show, but still low compared to most years.



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Stars and Stripes (USPS 0417900) is published week-days (except Dec. 25 and Jan. 1) for 50 cents Monday through Thursday and for \$1 on Friday by Pacific Stars and Stripes, Unit 45002, APO AP 96301-5002. Periodicals postage paid at San Francisco, CA. Postmaster: Send address changes to Pacific Stars and Stripes, Unit 45002, APO AP 96301-5002. This newspaper is authorized by the Department of Defense for members of the military services overseas. However, the contents of Stars and Stripes are unofficial, and are not to be considered as the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government. As a DOD newspaper, Stars and Stripes may be distributed through official channels and use appropriated funds for distribution to remote locations where overseas DOD personnel are located. The appearance of advertising in this publication does not constitute endorsement by the Department of Defense or Stars and Stripes of the products or services advertised. Products or services advertised shall be made available for purchase, use or patronage without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, physical handicap, political affiliation or any other nonmerit factor of the purchaser, user or patron.

OPINION

How AUKUS fits into the US strategy for the Pacific

By DAVID IGNATIUS
The Washington Post

Monday's announcement of the AUKUS partnership is a "present at the creation" moment for U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific. But despite China's fears, the agreement isn't a NATO-style containment pact. It's the hub of something more flexible and adaptive. President Joe Biden didn't discuss China's growing military power, the obvious motivation for AUKUS, in announcing the pact Monday in San Diego. He was flanked by British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, with an immense submarine, the USS Missouri, in the background. "This first project is only beginning. More partnerships. More potential. More peace and security in the region lies ahead," Biden said. "We're not looking to create a NATO in the Indo-Pacific," national security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters in describing the submarine-building agreement announced Monday by the three leaders. AUKUS is about sharing defense technology, but it's also part of a series of overlapping security partnerships in the region. NATO is a formal treaty alliance with a large number of countries whose actual interdependence has often been less than advertised. Think of a headstrong Turkey or France. America's emerging strategy for the Indo-Pacific is something different, with a range of coalitions to address various needs. AUKUS is a hard defense alliance, for example, while the Quad partnership of India, Japan, Australia and the United States seeks the soft coalescence of technology and politics. A way to describe the new U.S. Asia policy is as a kind of "zone defense" — a web that links

different groups of countries that all worry about China. At the center of many of these nodes is Japan, which is becoming America's most important ally in the region as it embraces rearmament. Several triangles of power are emerging: The United States is helping Japan mend fences with South Korea and form a strong tripartite security relationship. Japan is helping the United States improve relations with the Philippines, a country that had been leaning toward China but got tired of being muscled by Beijing. Similar relationships are evolving to connect the United States and Japan with such swing states as Vietnam and Indonesia. The strategy, to be sure, focuses on China. But it's not a wall of containment so much as an interdependent net. As a second senior administration official who asked not to be named to speak freely explains: "Previous Asian security policy was a series of bilateral interactions between Washington and its allies, the proverbial hub and spoke. Now we are encouraging more connections along the hub and more wheels." To use another metaphor, Cold War containment of the Soviet Union was like a chess game with a static board and a stress on offensive capabilities, this official argues. The Indo-Pacific paradigm is more like the classic Asian game of "Go," with waves of advancing and retreating action, rather than stress on an overpowering thrust. AUKUS matters partly because it brings Britain, a European power, into America's long-term defense plans for Asia. The United States will share sensitive nuclear technology to provide attack submarines for Australia and augment Britain's fleet. Britain will receive its first AUKUS subs in the late 2030s, and Australia will get them in the 2040s, Sulli-

van said. In the meantime, America will provide Australia with up to five U.S. nuclear-powered attack subs starting in 2032. A second "pillar" of AUKUS will involve sharing other advanced defense technologies among the three countries and perhaps other partners, such as Japan. Those technologies will include hypersonic flight, artificial intelligence, undersea warfare, cyberweapons, autonomous systems and electronic warfare, the senior administration official said. The missing link in this grand strategy, unfortunately, is economic policy. The Biden administration has scorned the trade alliance known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, but it hasn't come up with anything powerful to replace it. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity launched by Biden last year bolstered supply chains. But it hasn't delivered on broader goals, such as a digital agreement that would shape technology investment and development. Biden needs to recognize that America's partners in Asia depend on trade. Until he demonstrates that he's willing to defy political resistance to trade in the Democratic Party — and show Asian partners that U.S. markets will remain open to their exports — some of the benefits of the new strategy for the region will be blunted. The Biden administration is understandably celebrating its strategic initiative for Asia. But before popping the champagne corks, it should recall Dean Acheson's description in his memoir of the launch of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949. As the signatories were gathering, the Marine Band "added an unexpected note of realism" by playing two songs from "Porgy and Bess," the Broadway musical: "I Got Plenty of Nothin'" and "It Ain't Necessarily So."

Why socialism is in retreat in the Democratic Party

By RAMESH PONNURU
Special to The Washington Post

Remember Medicare-for-all? Just a few years ago, it was the Democrats' hottest idea. Now it has nearly fallen out of public discussion. Socialism, which was noisily advancing in the Democratic Party, is silently beating a retreat. A new dawn for socialism had appeared to begin with Sen. Bernie Sanders' strong insurgent campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016. Its centerpiece proposal was to replace all private health insurance with a government-run program. By 2018, 124 House Democrats, more than three-fifths of all of them, were co-sponsoring the Medicare-for-all bill. The 2018 elections saw the rise of a slew of self-proclaimed socialists. The most media-genic of them, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, beat a longtime incumbent Democrat. A moderate Democrat from yesteryear criticized her as she took office. "New party, who dis?" was her response. By the time Democrats began their presidential debates in 2019, Medicare-for-all was the leading subject, with Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., and then-Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., joining Sanders, I-Vt., in advancing variants of it. Writers on the left celebrated what they called "a progressive policy arms race" led by Warren and Sanders. But then Joe Biden, who opposed the proposal, won the nomination. His spoonful of sugar for the advocates was a promise to take several large steps toward Medicare-for-all. He said he would create a new "public option"

to let working-age Americans above the poverty level get insurance coverage from the federal government. He also promised to lower the eligibility age for Medicare from 65 to 60 and to have it cover dental and vision care. Once in office, though, Biden has walked away from these initiatives. His new budget includes no public option and doesn't let 60-year-olds into Medicare, perhaps because these policies would have been costly and disrupted many people's current health care arrangements. The White House released accompanying verbiage about working with Congress to strengthen dental and vision benefits, but the budget reserves no money for it. The dashing of progressive hopes on health care should put in perspective the much-discussed shift of the Democratic Party, and the country as a whole, to the left. Today's Democrats are indeed more left-wing than their forebears in many ways. Biden's budget foresees record levels of federal spending and debt. He has signaled more hostility to bipartisan entitlement reform than the two previous Democratic presidents did. And Republicans are eager to highlight the party's socialist turn, if only to denounce it. But it turns out the party's left wing has spent much of the past few years fooling itself about its ascendancy. Sanders did well in the 2016 primary because he was running against Hillary Clinton. He fizzled in 2020, when she wasn't in the race as a foil. Ocasio-Cortez and her closest allies in the House are in liberal districts where, as then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., remarked, "a glass of water"

with a D next to its name could win an election. They represent the voters Democrats already have, not the ones they need to win. Which helps explain why Medicare-for-all has languished. When Democrats had a House majority, from 2019 through the start of this year, it was because they prevailed in moderate districts. The number of co-sponsors for the legislation actually dropped a little. A major reason moderates shunned the bill: It requires raising taxes on the middle class, as Sanders readily admits. (He says the middle class will save more on medical bills than they pay in taxes.) Biden, like the other two Democrats who have been president in the past 40 years, has ruled that out. And that constraint on Democratic ambitions is getting tighter. In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed a bill raising taxes on couples making more than \$140,000: about \$300,000 in today's money. Biden has an even more expansive definition of the middle class: He says only couples making more than \$450,000 should pay higher tax rates. If they're willing to raise taxes only on a small slice of the population, Democrats might not be able to keep financing the government we have. They certainly cannot finance a European-style social democracy. Fans of Medicare-for-all can, however, take comfort that they will have one champion in the 2024 presidential race: Marianne Williamson.

Ramesh Ponnuru, a contributing columnist for the Washington Post, is the editor of National Review and a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Bizarro



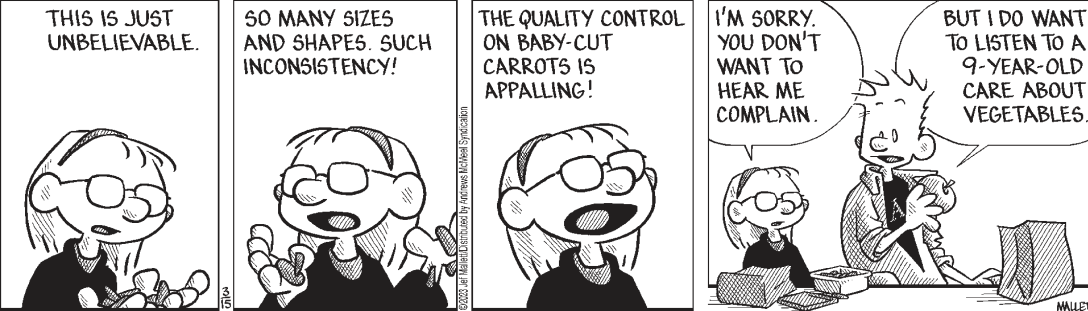
Loose Parts



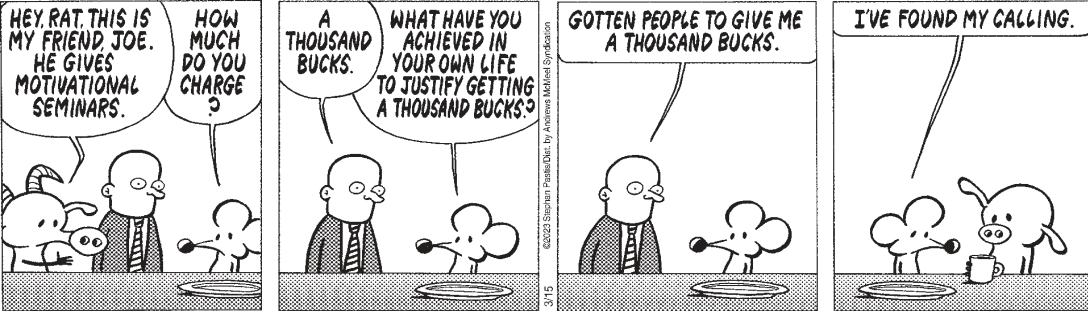
Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15					16				17			
18							19	20				
			21				22					
23	24	25		26		27		28			29	30
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36				37		38		39		40		
		41			42		43		44			
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51					52	53						
54					55				56			
57					58				59			

Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



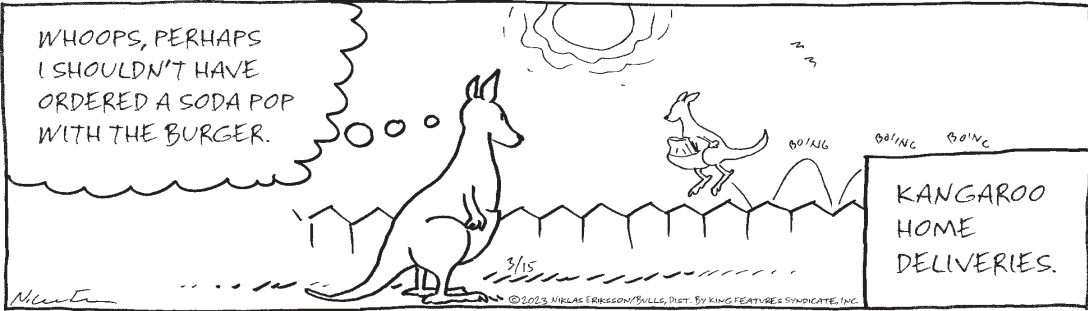
Non Sequitur



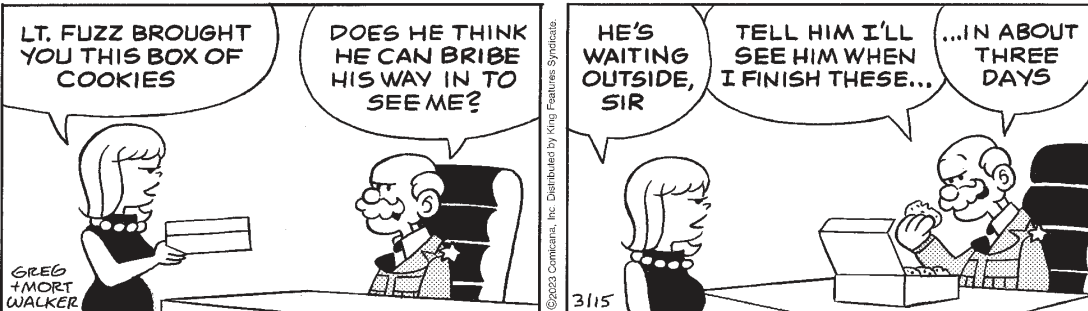
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



- ACROSS**
1 Hastens
5 Spasm
8 Raced
12 Smell — (suspect)
13 Köln cry
14 Prado display
15 Diatribe
17 Reddish horse
18 Jellied entrees
19 Stable enclosures
21 "Empire" actress Long
22 Ex-Yankee Martinez
23 URL suffix
26 Devious
28 Beer type
31 Milne bruin
33 Long, skinny fish
35 Sleeve end
36 Sleep problem
38 Entanglement
40 Timetable abbr.
41 Skater Lipinski
43 More, to Manuel
45 "Scram!"
47 Track athletes
51 Desire
52 Literary coda
54 Curved line, in music
55 Samovar
- DOWN**
1 "Funny!"
2 401(k) relatives
3 Tombstone lawman
4 Laundry woe
5 Clutter-clearing event
6 Post-op area
7 Toy container
8 Adirondack lake
9 Intro
10 List-ending abbr.
11 Cozy rooms
16 "JAG" spinoff
56 Vanished
57 Casual tops
58 Categorize
59 Bygone jets
20 Up to
23 IRS employee
24 "Alley —"
25 Capulet rival
27 Evergreen tree
29 Newt
30 "Mayberry —"
32 Warming devices
34 Migrating rodent
37 NPR's Shapiro
39 Release money
42 Enjoyed immensely
44 Trudges
45 Total failure
46 Perry's creator
48 Conceits
49 Litter's littlest
50 Beholds
53 Season opener?

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

3-15 CRYPTOQUIP

H ZTMFO ZI KAVQ KIFMG IF

KG IBDQIOIFDHZD DQND H

DQHFC H VIASO TBIWNWSG

CMMT QHK IF BMDNHFMB.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: INTERACTIVE ELECTRONIC CRITTER AVAILABLE FOR SALE ONLY IN LOUISVILLE'S STATE: KENTUCKY FURBY.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: K equals M

SCOREBOARD

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Men's AP Top 25

The top 25 teams in The Associated Press' college basketball poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, and total points based on 25 points for a first-place vote through one point for a 25th-place vote and previous ranking:

	Record	Pts	Prv
1. Alabama (48)	29-5	1508	4
2. Houston (9)	31-3	1404	1
3. Purdue (3)	29-5	1367	5
4. Kansas	27-7	1303	3
5. Texas	26-8	1276	7
6. Marquette	28-6	1244	6
7. UCLA (1)	29-5	1209	2
8. Arizona	28-6	1155	8
9. Gonzaga	28-5	1046	9
10. UConn	25-8	854	11
11. Baylor	22-10	779	10
12. Duke	26-8	763	21
13. Xavier	25-9	738	15
14. Virginia	25-7	711	13
15. Kansas St	23-9	709	12
16. Miami	25-7	581	14
17. Texas A&M	25-9	562	18
18. San Diego St.	27-6	550	20
19. Saint Mary's	26-7	426	16
20. Tennessee	23-10	381	17
21. Indiana	22-11	332	19
22. TCU	21-12	254	22
23. Missouri	24-9	171	25
24. Memphis	26-8	110	—
25. FAU	31-3	99	—

Others receiving votes: Creighton 94, Oral Roberts 58, Kentucky 39, Iowa St. 32, VCU 26, Utah St. 15, Penn St. 11, Coll of Charleston 10, Kent St. 2, Northwestern 2, Drake 2, West Virginia 2.

Men's USA Today Top 25

The USA Today Sports Top 25 men's basketball poll, with first-place votes received, team's records through Sunday, total points based on 25 for first place through one point for 25th and ranking in last week's poll:

	Record	Pts	Pvs
1. Houston (21)	31-3	777	1
2. Alabama (8)	29-5	759	5
3. Purdue (2)	29-5	728	3
4. Marquette	28-6	654	6
5. Kansas (1)	27-7	652	4
6. UCLA	29-5	649	2
7. Texas	26-8	647	7
8. Arizona	28-6	608	9
9. Gonzaga	28-5	546	8
10. Virginia	25-7	418	11
11. Baylor	22-10	399	10
12. Connecticut	25-8	391	14
13. Kansas St.	23-9	370	12
14. Xavier	25-9	369	15
15. Miami (Fla.)	25-7	342	13
16. Duke	26-8	334	21
17. Texas A&M	25-9	289	18
18. San Diego St.	27-6	266	20
19. Saint Mary's	26-7	240	16
19. Indiana	22-11	240	17
21. Tennessee	23-10	153	19
22. Creighton	21-12	118	22
23. TCU	21-12	117	23
24. Missouri	24-9	65	30
25. Florida Atlantic	31-3	54	28

Dropped out: No. 24 Kentucky (21-11); No. 25 Northwestern (21-11).

Others receiving votes: Iowa State (19-13) 47; Kentucky (21-11) 29; Penn State (22-13) 24; Northwestern (21-11) 23; Providence (21-11) 21; Oral Roberts (30-4) 20; Utah State (26-8) 14; VCU (27-7) 9; Maryland (22-12) 6; Kent State (28-6) 6; North Carolina State (23-10) 5; Memphis (26-8) 4; Charleston of Charleston (31-3) 3; Pittsburgh (22-11) 3; Michigan State (19-12) 1.

Men's NIT

First Round

Tuesday, March 14

Hofstra (24-9) at Rutgers (19-14)
Southern Miss. (25-7) at UAB (25-9)
E. Washington (22-10) at Washington St. (17-16)
Yale (21-8) at Vanderbilt (20-14)
Bradley (25-9) at Wisconsin (17-14)
Toledo (27-7) at Michigan (17-15)
Villanova (17-16) at Liberty (26-8)
Seton Hall (17-15) at Colorado (17-16)
Wednesday, March 15
Morehead St. (21-11) at Clemson (23-10)
Oklahoma St. (18-15) at Youngstown St. (24-9)
UC Irvine (23-11) at Oregon (19-14)
UCF (18-14) at Florida (16-16)
Virginia Tech (19-14) at Cincinnati (21-12)
Alcorn St. (18-13) at North Texas (26-7)
Utah Valley St. (25-8) at New Mexico (22-11)
Sam Houston St. (25-7) at Santa Clara (23-9)

Women's AP Top 25

The top 25 teams in The Associated Press' women's college basketball poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, and total points based on 25 points for a first-place vote through one point for a 25th-place vote and previous ranking:

	Record	Pts	Prv
1. South Carolina (28)	32-0	700	1
2. Indiana	27-3	649	3
3. Iowa	26-6	645	2
4. Virginia Tech	27-4	596	4
5. Stanford	28-5	568	5
6. UConn	29-5	553	7
7. Maryland	25-6	538	6
8. Utah	25-4	515	8
9. LSU	28-2	506	9
10. Villanova	28-6	412	10
10. Notre Dame	25-5	412	11
12. Ohio St.	25-7	401	12
13. Duke	25-6	343	13
14. UCLA	25-9	284	17
15. Texas	25-9	277	15
16. Oklahoma	25-6	248	14
17. Iowa St.	22-9	214	—
18. Michigan	22-9	179	18
19. Gonzaga	28-4	171	16
20. North Carolina	21-10	169	19
21. Colorado	23-8	134	20
22. UNLV	31-2	126	21
23. Washington St.	23-10	112	22
24. Tennessee	23-11	96	23
25. Arizona	21-9	71	24

Others receiving votes: Middle Tennessee 59, Creighton 31, Louisville 27, Florida Gulf Coast 19, Mississippi 12, South Dakota St. 9, South Florida 7, Toledo 7, Southern Cal 3, Princeton 3, NC State 2, Florida St. 1, Drake 1.

Women's USA Today Top 25

The USA Today Sports Top 25 women's basketball poll, with first-place votes received in parentheses, team's records through Sunday, total points based on 25 for first place through one point for 25th and ranking in last week's poll:

	Record	Pts	Pvs
1. South Carolina (32)	32-0	800	1
2. Indiana	27-3	746	2
3. Iowa	26-6	716	3
4. Stanford	28-5	680	4
5. Virginia Tech	27-4	677	6
6. LSU	28-2	623	4
7. Maryland	25-6	610	7
8. Connecticut	29-5	582	9
9. Utah	25-4	574	8
10. Villanova	28-6	479	11
11. Notre Dame	25-5	472	10
12. Ohio St.	25-7	423	13
13. Duke	25-6	411	14
14. Oklahoma	25-6	393	12
15. UCLA	25-9	325	17
16. Texas	25-9	310	16
17. Gonzaga	28-4	264	15
18. Michigan	22-9	215	18
19. North Carolina	21-10	198	19
20. Iowa St.	22-9	177	25
21. Colorado	23-8	142	21
22. Florida Gulf Coast	32-3	110	23
23. Arizona	21-9	105	22
24. South Florida	26-6	102	20
25. UNLV	31-2	100	24

Dropped out: None.
Others receiving votes: Tennessee (23-11) 69; Washington State (23-10) 38; Middle Tennessee (28-4) 24; Creighton (22-8) 7; Louisville (23-11) 7; North Carolina State (20-11) 7; South Dakota State (28-5) 7; Cleveland State (30-4) 4; Baylor (19-12) 3.

Women's NIT

First Round

Wednesday, March 15

Kent St. (21-10) at Syracuse (18-12)
Missouri St. (20-11) at Nebraska (16-14)
Thursday, March 16
Morgan St. (17-11) at Wake Forest (16-16)
Colorado St. (20-11) at N. Iowa (22-9)
Townson (21-11) at Harvard (17-11)
Illinois St. (24-8) at Missouri (17-13)
Saint Joseph's (20-10) at Seton Hall (18-14)
High Point (17-14) at Clemson (17-15)
Texas St. (23-9) at Stephen F. Austin (26-6)
Drexel (21-9) at Fordham (18-12)
Louisiana Tech (19-12) at Arkansas (21-12)
Long Beach St. (23-9) at San Diego (17-13)
UTEP (20-11) at Texas Tech (18-14)
Liberty (24-8) at Bowling Green (27-6)
Wichita St. (18-14) at Kansas St. (17-16)
UALR (21-10) at SMU (16-12)
Niagara (18-12) at Green Bay (27-5)
San Francisco (19-12) at Washington (15-14)
Jackson St. (21-9) at Memphis (20-10)
N. Arizona (21-13) at New Mexico (20-12)
Penn (17-11) at Richmond (20-10)
Belmont (23-11) at Ball St. (25-8)
Wofford (22-9) at Florida (16-14)
Friday, March 17
Tulane (18-13) at Auburn (15-14)
N. Dakota St. (18-11) at Oregon (17-14)
Rice (22-8) at BYU (16-16)
W. Kentucky (19-13) at Kansas (19-11)
UC Irvine (24-6) at San Diego St. (23-10)
Fairleigh Dickinson (24-7) at Columbia (23-5)
Texas A&M-CC (19-11) at Wyoming (22-10)
Boston U. (24-8) at Rhode Island (24-6)
Albany (NY) (22-11) at UMass (26-6)

PRO SOCCER

MLS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Atlanta	2	0	1	7	6	2
Nashville	2	0	1	7	4	0
Cincinnati	2	0	1	7	3	1
Inter Miami CF	2	1	0	6	4	1
Philadelphia	2	1	0	6	5	3
New England	2	1	0	6	4	4
Orlando City	1	0	2	5	2	1
Columbus	1	1	1	4	4	5
D.C. United	1	1	1	4	4	5
NYCFC	1	1	1	4	2	3
Toronto FC	0	1	2	2	4	5
New York	0	1	2	2	1	2
Chicago	0	1	1	1	1	2
CF Montr��al	0	3	0	0	0	5
Charlotte FC	0	3	0	0	1	7

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Saint Louis SC	3	0	0	9	8	4
LAFC	2	0	0	6	7	2
Seattle	2	1	0	6	6	1
Austin FC	2	1	0	6	5	4
San Jose	2	1	0	6	4	3
FC Dallas	1	1	1	4	4	3
Minnesota	1	0	1	4	2	1
Portland	1	2	0	3	4	5
Real Salt Lake	1	2	0	3	3	5
Sporting KC	0	1	2	2	0	1
Vancouver	0	2	1	1	3	5
LA Galaxy	0	1	1	1	1	3
Colorado	0	2	1	1	0	5
Houston	0	2	0	0	1	5

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Sunday, March 12

Los Angeles FC 4, New England 0

Saturday's games

Los Angeles FC at Seattle
Portland at Atlanta
Philadelphia at CF Montr  al
Nashville at New England
Columbus at New York
D.C. United at New York City FC
Charlotte FC at Orlando City
Miami at Toronto FC
Cincinnati at Chicago
Sporting Kansas City at FC Dallas
Austin FC at Houston
San Jose at Saint Louis City SC
Minnesota at Colorado
Vancouver at LA Galaxy

Saturday, March 25

LA Galaxy at Portland
New York at Charlotte FC
Atlanta at Columbus
New England at D.C. United
Chicago at Miami
Orlando City at Philadelphia
Colorado at Austin FC
New York City FC at Houston
Seattle at Sporting Kansas City
Vancouver at Minnesota
Cincinnati at Nashville
Saint Louis City SC at Real Salt Lake
FC Dallas at Los Angeles FC
Toronto FC at San Jose

TENNIS

BNP Paribas Open

Monday
At Indian Wells Tennis Garden
Indian Wells, Calif.
Purse: \$8,800,000
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Men's Singles
Round of 32

Tommy Paul (17), United States, def. Hubert Hurkacz (9), Poland, 4-6, 6-2, 6-4.
Felix Auger-Aliassime (8), Canada, def. Francisco Cerundolo (27), Argentina, 7-5, 6-4.
Stan Wawrinka, Switzerland, def. Holger Rune (7), Denmark, 6-2, 6-7 (5), 7-5.
Taylor Fritz (4), United States, def. Sebastian Baez (30), Argentina, 6-1, 6-2.
Marton Fucsovics, Hungary, def. Alex Molcan, Slovakia, 6-4, 6-2.
Jannik Sinner (11), Italy, def. Adrian Mannarino, France, 7-6 (7), 6-4.
Jack Draper, Britain, def. Andy Murray, Britain, 7-6 (6), 6-2.
Carlos Alcaraz (1), Spain, def. Tallon Griekspoor (31), Netherlands, 7-6 (4), 6-3.

Women's Singles

Round of 32

Sorana Cirstea, Romania, def. Bernarda Pera, United States, 6-3, 6-1.
Caroline Garcia (5), France, def. Leylah Annie Fernandez (30), Canada, 6-4, 6-7 (5), 6-1.
Karolina Muchova, Czech Republic, def. Martina Trevisan (23), Italy, 6-4, 3-6, 6-4.
Elena Rybakina (10), Kazakhstan, def. Paula Badosa (21), Spain, 6-3, 7-5.
Emma Raducanu, Britain, def. Beatriz Haddad Maia (13), Brazil, 6-1, 2-6, 6-4.
Marketa Vondrousova, Czech Republic, def. Ons Jabeur (4), Tunisia, 7-6 (5), 6-4.
Iga Swiatek (1), Poland, def. Bianca Andreescu (32), Canada, 6-3, 7-6 (1).
Varvara Gracheva, Russia, def. Daria Kasatkina (8), Russia, 6-4, 6-4.

BASEBALL

World Baseball Classic

GROUP A

	W	L	Pct.
Cuba	2	2	.500
Italy	2	2	.500
Netherlands	2	2	.500
Panama	2	2	.500
Taiwan	2	2	.500

GROUP B

	W	L	Pct.
Japan	4	0	1.000
Australia	3	1	.750
South Korea	2	2	.500
Czech Republic	1	3	.250
China	0	4	.000

GROUP C

	W	L	Pct.
United States	2	1	.667
Colombia	1	1	.500
Canada	1	1	.500
Mexico	1	1	.500
Britain	1	2	.333

GROUP D

	W	L	Pct.
Venezuela	2	0	1.000
Puerto Rico	2	1	.667
Dominican Republic	1	1	.500
Israel	1	1	.500
Nicaragua	0	3	.000

Tuesday, March 7

Netherlands 4, Cuba 2

Wednesday, March 8

Panama 12, Taiwan 5
Australia 8, South Korea 7
Netherlands 3, Panama 1

Thursday, March 9

Japan 8, China 1
Italy 6, Cuba 3, 10 innings
Czech Republic 8, China 5
Cuba 13, Panama 4

Friday, March 10

Japan 13, South Korea 4
Taiwan 11, Italy 7
Australia 12, China 2, 7 innings
Panama 2, Italy 0

Saturday, March 11

Japan 10, Czech Republic 2
Taiwan 9, Netherlands 5
Puerto Rico 9, Nicaragua 1
Colombia 5, Mexico 4, 10 innings
Venezuela 5, Dominican Republic 1
United States 6, Britain 2
South Korea 7, Czech Republic 3
Cuba 7, Taiwan 1

Sunday, March 12

Japan 7, Australia 1
Italy 7, Netherlands 1
Israel 3, Nicaragua 1
Canada 18, Britain 8, 7 innings
Venezuela 9, Puerto Rico 6
Mexico 11, United States 5
Australia 8, Czech Republic 3

Monday, March 13

South Korea 22, China 2, 5 innings
Dominican Republic 6, Nicaragua 1
Britain 7, Colombia 5
Puerto Rico 10, Israel 0, 8 innings
United States 12, Canada 1, 7 innings

Tuesday, March 14

Nicaragua at Venezuela
Canada at Colombia
Israel at Dominican Republic
Britain at Mexico

Wednesday, March 15

Australia at Cuba
Venezuela at Israel
Mexico at Canada
Puerto Rico at Dominican Republic
United States at Colombia

Thursday, March 16

Italy at Japan

Friday, March 17

Pool C Runner-Up at Pool D Winner

Saturday, March 18

Pool D Runner-Up at Pool C Winner

Sunday, March 19

Semifinalist 1 at Semifinalist 3

Monday, March 20

Semifinalist 2 at Semifinalist 4

Tuesday, March 21

NHL/NFL

NHL ROUNDUP

Tuch returns, Sabres top Maple Leafs

Associated Press

TORONTO — Alex Tuch had two goals in his return from injury and the Buffalo Sabres rallied from two goals down to beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-3 on Monday night.

Jack Quinn and Dylan Cozens also scored for Buffalo, and Owen Power and JJ Peterka each had two assists for Buffalo. Craig Anderson had 25 saves as the Sabres won for just the second time in eight games (2-5-1).

“Stayed patient,” said Tuch, who missed eight games with a lower-body injury, but has six goals and three assists in his last six appearances dating back to Feb. 15. “We just stuck to it.”

Auston Matthews had a goal and two assists, and William Nylander and Calle Jarnkrok also scored for Toronto. Mitch Marner had two assists and Matt Murray stopped 25 shots.

The Maple Leafs are all but assured of finishing second in the Atlantic Division, while the Sabres are trying to stay in contention for a wild card in the Eastern Conference.

“There’s enough to play for here, right?” Maple Leafs coach Sheldon Keefe said. “It’s still tight enough (in the standings) that if you let your foot off the gas, not only are you now losing home ice, but you’ve got other teams (chasing).”

After falling behind 2-0 early in the second period, the Sabres scored four consecutive goals over a 27-minute stretch.

“We’ve made defending a greater focal point,” Sabres coach Don Granato said. “Our guys recognized tonight ways they could impact it more and more as the game went along.”

Quinn batted the puck past Murray for the rookie forward’s 13th to get the Sabres on the scoreboard with 5:02 left in the second.

Anderson made a nice breakaway stop on Nylander on Toron-



NATHAN DENETTE, THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

Toronto Maple Leafs goaltender Matt Murray makes a save against Buffalo Sabres forward Alex Tuch during the first period Monday in Toronto. Tuch had two goals in the Sabres' 4-3 victory.

to's next shot early in the third — the Leafs went over 17 minutes without testing the Sabres' goalie — before Tuch tied things at 3:39.

Murray denied Tage Thompson on a break to keep Toronto level, but Cozens gave Buffalo a 3-2 lead near the midpoint of the period for his 26th.

With the Sabres on a power play, Tuch converted a pass from Jeff Skinner with 8:41 left for his second of the night and first 30-goal season.

The Maple Leafs finally woke up as the period wore on, but Anderson stopped Michael Bunting on a 2-on-0 with John Tavares. Nylander scored his 35th from a tight angle with 1:01 remaining, but that's as close as Toronto got despite a wild final few seconds.

“I think 50/50 battles, just a little bit careless with the puck,” Matthews said about where things turned for Toronto. “They tilted

the ice their way and now we're just kind of chasing from that point.”

Avalanche 8, Canadiens 4: Artturi Lehkonen scored twice in his team's four-goal first period to lead visiting Colorado to its third win in four games.

Valeri Nichushkin had a goal and two assists, Mikko Rantanen had a goal and an assist, and Nathan MacKinnon, J.T. Compher, Matt Nieto and Bowen Byram also scored for Colorado. Cale Makar had three assists, and Devon Toews and Logan O'Connor each had two. Alexandar Georgiev finished with 15 saves.

Josh Anderson had a goal and an assist, and Chris Wideman, Mike Matheson and Denis Gurianov also scored as the Canadiens lost their seventh straight (0-5-2). Nick Suzuki had two assists.

Jake Allen started in goal and was pulled early in the second

quarter after giving up six goals on 15 shots. Sam Montebault came on and finished with 16 saves.

Stars 5, Kraken 2: Jason Robertson scored his 39th goal of the season, the last of three power-play goals by visiting Dallas, and the Stars got their sixth win in seven games.

Jamie Benn had a goal and two assists and Miro Heisknaen had three assists as Dallas strengthened its lead atop the Central Division. The Stars moved three points in front of Minnesota with 15 games left in the regular season.

Evgenii Dadonov, Joe Pavelski and Wyatt Johnston also scored for Dallas, and the Stars swept both games as the teams played twice in three days in Seattle. Jake Oettinger made 26 saves for Dallas.

Yanni Gourde and Eeli Tolvanen scored for Seattle, and Martin Jones had 27 saves while making his first start in 11 days.

NHL scoreboard

Eastern Conference								
Atlantic Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
x-Boston	65	50	10	5	105	245	142	
Toronto	66	40	18	8	88	226	179	
Tampa Bay	67	39	22	6	84	233	206	
Florida	67	33	27	7	73	229	226	
Buffalo	66	33	28	5	71	242	239	
Ottawa	66	33	29	4	70	207	212	
Detroit	66	30	27	9	69	199	217	
Montreal	67	26	35	6	58	184	244	
Metropolitan Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Carolina	65	43	14	8	94	217	165	
New Jersey	66	44	16	6	94	235	177	
N.Y. Rangers	66	37	19	10	84	217	186	
Pittsburgh	66	34	22	10	78	217	210	
N.Y. Islanders	68	34	26	8	76	196	187	
Washington	67	32	28	7	71	208	200	
Philadelphia	66	24	31	11	59	169	217	
Columbus	65	20	38	7	47	169	244	
Western Conference								
Central Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Dallas	67	37	17	13	87	234	180	
Minnesota	67	38	21	8	84	195	178	
Colorado	65	37	22	6	80	214	185	
Winnipeg	67	38	26	3	79	210	189	
Nashville	64	33	24	7	73	186	189	
St. Louis	66	29	32	5	63	205	242	
Arizona	67	24	32	11	59	188	237	
Chicago	66	22	38	6	50	165	236	
Pacific Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Vegas	67	41	20	6	88	217	185	
Los Angeles	67	38	20	9	85	228	221	
Seattle	67	37	23	7	81	234	216	
Edmonton	67	36	23	8	80	258	228	
Calgary	67	30	24	13	73	209	205	
Vancouver	65	28	32	5	61	222	253	
Anaheim	67	22	35	10	54	172	271	
San Jose	67	19	36	12	50	193	257	
Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.								
x-clinched playoff spot								
y-clinched division								
z-clinched conference								
Monday's games								
Buffalo 4, Toronto 3								
Colorado 8, Montreal 4								
Dallas 5, Seattle 2								
Tuesday's games								
Montreal at Pittsburgh								
Tampa Bay at New Jersey								
Vegas at Philadelphia								
Washington at N.Y. Rangers								
Winnipeg at Carolina								
Detroit at Nashville								
Boston at Chicago								
Ottawa at Edmonton								
Calgary at Arizona								
Dallas at Vancouver								
Columbus at San Jose								
N.Y. Islanders at Los Angeles								
Wednesday's games								
Buffalo at Washington								
Colorado at Toronto								
Minnesota at St. Louis								
N.Y. Islanders at Anaheim								

Garoppolo heads long list of QBs on move in free agency



GODOFREDO A. VÁSQUEZ/AP

Quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo was the highest-profile quarterback to change teams, agreeing to a three-year deal with the Raiders.

Associated Press

Jimmy Garoppolo is finally out of San Francisco, ready to start the next phase of his career wearing the Raiders' silver and black. Sam Darnold is heading out West, where he'll replace Garoppolo and join Trey Lance and Brock Purdy with the 49ers. Mike White, Case Keenum and Jarrett Stidham have new teams, too.

Deshaun Watson is staying in Cleveland, but with a restructured deal with the Browns.

As for Aaron Rodgers, who is not a free agent but whose name has widely been circulated in trade rumors, his future remains

unclear because, well, he's Aaron Rodgers.

Quarterbacks took center stage on Monday as NFL free agency began with teams allowed to negotiate — and agree to deals — with unrestricted free agents. The deals can't be announced until Wednesday and therefore were confirmed to The Associated Press by people speaking on condition of anonymity.

Garoppolo was the highest-profile QB to change teams.

He agreed to a three-year, \$67.5 million contract with Las Vegas, where he'll replace Derek Carr, who signed with the New

Orleans Saints earlier this offseason after being cut by the Raiders. Garoppolo's contract includes \$34 million in guaranteed money.

White is staying within the AFC East, leaving the New York Jets for the Miami Dolphins to back up Tua Tagovailoa. Keenum is rejoining the Houston Texans, where he went 0-8 as a starter back in 2013. Stidham is going to Denver to back up Russell Wilson.

The Browns restructured Watson's record-setting guaranteed \$230 million contract to create salary cap space.

NBA

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	47	22	.681	—
Philadelphia	45	22	.672	1
Brooklyn	39	29	.574	7½
New York	40	30	.571	7½
Toronto	32	36	.471	14½
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	37	33	.529	—
Atlanta	34	35	.493	2½
Washington	31	37	.456	5
Orlando	28	40	.412	8
Charlotte	22	48	.314	15
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	49	19	.721	—
Cleveland	43	27	.614	7
Chicago	31	36	.463	17½
Indiana	31	38	.449	18½
Detroit	16	53	.232	33½
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	41	26	.612	—
Dallas	34	35	.493	8
New Orleans	33	35	.485	8½
San Antonio	17	50	.254	24
Houston	16	52	.235	25½
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Denver	46	22	.676	—
Minnesota	35	34	.507	11½
Oklahoma City	33	35	.485	13
Utah	33	36	.478	13½
Portland	31	37	.456	15
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Sacramento	40	27	.597	—
Phoenix	37	31	.544	3½
Golden State	36	33	.522	5
L.A. Clippers	36	33	.522	5
L.A. Lakers	33	35	.485	7½
Sunday's games				
Cleveland 114, Charlotte 108 Philadelphia 112, Washington 93 Oklahoma City 102, San Antonio 90 New Orleans 127, Portland 110 New York 112, L.A. Lakers 108 Brooklyn 122, Denver 120				
Monday's games				
Detroit 117, Indiana 97 Minnesota 136, Atlanta 115 Memphis 104, Dallas 88 Miami 119, Utah 115 Houston 111, Boston 109 Golden State 123, Phoenix 112 Milwaukee 133, Sacramento 124				
Tuesday's games				
Cleveland at Charlotte Detroit at Washington Denver at Toronto Brooklyn at Oklahoma City L.A. Lakers at New Orleans Orlando at San Antonio Milwaukee at Phoenix New York at Portland				
Wednesday's games				
Memphis at Miami Philadelphia at Cleveland Boston at Minnesota L.A. Lakers at Houston Sacramento at Chicago Dallas at San Antonio Golden State at L.A. Clippers				
Thursday's games				
Denver at Detroit Oklahoma City at Toronto Sacramento at Brooklyn Indiana at Milwaukee Orlando at Phoenix				
Friday's games				
Philadelphia at Charlotte Golden State at Atlanta Washington at Cleveland Minnesota at Chicago New Orleans at Houston Memphis at San Antonio Boston at Portland Dallas at L.A. Lakers				
Saturday's games				
Denver at New York Orlando at L.A. Clippers Philadelphia at Indiana Minnesota at Toronto Sacramento at Washington Miami at Chicago Golden State at Memphis Boston at Utah				

ROUNDUP

Thompson, Curry lead Warriors to win

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The Golden State Warriors were tired of losing to the division-rival Suns this season and set their mind on defending against Phoenix just as they did against the talented Bucks last game.

Klay Thompson scored 33 of his 38 points in the first half, Stephen Curry added 23 points, seven rebounds and five assists, and the Warriors beat the Suns 123-112 on Monday night.

“There’s always a little bit of extra motivation when you got smacked a couple times against a certain team, but it’s more so about our own focus,” Curry said.

Thompson made eight three-pointers and shot 14-for-23 overall.

“We knew how big a game it was and Klay knew how big it was and came out and set the tone,” coach Steve Kerr said.

Jordan Poole had 20 points and six assists off the bench for the defending champions. Kevon Looney helped the Warriors win their eighth straight home game and 12th of 13 with nine points, 10 rebounds and five assists. Golden State is 29-7 at home but 7-26 on the road.

Devin Booker scored 32 points and Deandre Ayton had 27 points and 12 rebounds for the Suns, who roared back after halftime to make it interesting.

Josh Okogie’s three with 4:59 left in the third pulled Phoenix within 85-81 and his putback a minute later made it 87-84 before Curry and Co. came on again.

Things got heated in the closing minutes when JaMychal Green and ex-Warriors guard Damion Lee received a double technical with 1:12 left. Curry’s mom, Sonya, hopped out of her seat and became emotional, yelling and making sure son-in-law Lee was OK.

“That was like old-school AAU back in the day where parents get involved,” Curry said. “Family over everything at times.”

Bucks 133, Kings 124: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 46 points and 12 rebounds as visiting Milwaukee beat Sacramento.

Morant was away from the team for a fifth consecutive game on Monday night, a 104-88 victory over Dallas that gave the Grizzlies



JEFF CHIU/AP

Golden State Warriors guard Klay Thompson, right, drives to the basket against Phoenix Suns guard Devin Booker during the first half in San Francisco on Monday.

Khrist Middleton scored 31 points and Brook Lopez added 23 for the Bucks, who are on the verge of becoming the first team to clinch a playoff berth this season. They went in needing a win and a Miami loss, but the Heat beat Utah.

Domantas Sabonis had 23 points, 17 rebounds and 15 assists for his 10th triple-double of the season for Sacramento.

De’Aaron Fox scored 35 points to lead the Kings, and Kevin Huerter had 17 of his 28 in the fourth quarter.

Grizzlies 104, Mavericks 88: Desmond Bane scored 23 points and visiting Memphis won a second consecutive game against Dallas with all three of the teams’ All-Stars out.

Luka Doncic and Kyrie Irving sat for Dallas with injuries, and Ja Morant remained away from the Grizzlies because of his issues off the court.

Rookie David Roddy scored 19 points on 8-for-11 shooting for

a sweep of a home-and-home set with the Mavericks.

Citing unidentified sources, ESPN reported during the game that Morant has entered a counseling program in Florida. Coach Taylor Jenkins declined to comment on that report.

“Outside of what I’ve said in the past, respectful to the nature of the situation and stuff, I think I said on the outset he was taking time and

responsibility to get better himself so he could be better for our team,” Jenkins said. “I’m not going to really comment further until there’s more updates necessary.”

Morant is away from the team after posting a video recently in which the 23-year-old two-time All-Star appeared to be displaying a gun at a Denver-area strip club.

The sixth game of Morant’s ab-

Memphis.

Rookie Jaden Hardy scored 28 points for the Mavericks, who dropped under .500 for the first time since December. Josh Green was the only other Dallas player in double figures with 23.

Rockets 111, Celtics 109: Jalen Green scored 28 points and rookie Jabari Smith Jr. added 24 as host Houston held off Boston.

The Rockets, who are tied with Detroit for the NBA’s fewest wins with 16, snapped a three-game skid despite allowing the Celtics’ Jaylen Brown to score a season-high 43 points.

Jayson Tatum scored 22 points but missed a potential tying layup at the buzzer for the Celtics.

Heat 119, Jazz 115: Jimmy Butler scored 24 points, Tyler Herro and Gabe Vincent each scored 18 and host Miami held off Utah.

Lauri Markkanen scored 38 points for Utah, which got 23 from Simone Fontecchio and 14 from Ochai Agbaji.

Talen Horton-Tucker put Utah on top with a short jumper with 1:16 left, and Herro gave Miami the lead right back on a three-pointer with 55.3 seconds remaining.

Timberwolves 136, Hawks 115: Anthony Edwards scored 32 points in his hometown, Kyle Anderson had his third career triple-double and visiting Minnesota beat Atlanta.

Trae Young finished with 41 points for the Hawks, who dropped to 3-5 under new coach Quin Snyder and have lost four of six. Atlanta went 4-for-22 beyond the arc and handed out 17 assists compared to 39 for Minnesota.

Pistons 117, Pacers 97: James Wiseman had 18 points and 14 rebounds as host Detroit ended an 11-game skid by beating Indiana.

The Pistons, who hadn’t won since beating San Antonio 138-131 in double overtime on Feb. 10, led by 31 points in the first half and held off an Indiana surge late in the second quarter and early in the third.

sence will be Wednesday night at Miami, but Jenkins said the club isn’t ready to indicate what will happen after that.

“There are a lot of internal dialogues going on,” Jenkins said before the game. “There are still things going on at the league level that we’re in communication with. Ja’s fully engaged in this process and whatever comes next after these two games.”

Grizzlies staying mum on Morant’s return

Associated Press

DALLAS — The Memphis Grizzlies aren’t saying when star point guard Ja Morant will return with one game remaining in a four-game sabbatical the team said he needed to deal with personal issues.

Morant was away from the team for a fifth consecutive game on Monday night, a 104-88 victory over Dallas that gave the Grizzlies

GOLF/BASEBALL

This run for Scheffler getting more attention

BY DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. — Scottie Scheffler finally won, and then he kept winning, and the question a year ago was when this incredible hot streak would finally cool.

Now comes another question: Did it ever?

Even with a green jacket that ended last year's remarkable run — four victories in six starts, capped by a Masters so dominant he four-putted the last hole and still won by three shots — he reached the top so quickly that it was tougher to appreciate it than a slow, steady rise like Dustin Johnson or Rory McIlroy or Jon Rahm.

The Players Championship brings a different view of the No. 1 player in the world.

Scheffler is on another big run, this one getting far more attention.

He won the WM Phoenix Open for the second straight year on a Sunday that featured Rahm, Justin Thomas and Nick Taylor. He was one foot away from a close birdie chance on the 18th to tie for the lead at Bay Hill.

And then against the strongest field so far this year at the TPC Sawgrass, Scheffler seized control with a 65 on Saturday and really showed his mettle by turning The Players Championship into a runaway with a five-shot victory.

Of the final four groups, his 69 was the only score under par.

"I think the team around him and the way he's wired ... he's extremely grounded," Jordan Spieth said. "He's got really good parents, great family structure. Randy Smith has been around for a long time — his coach — and he's been with him forever. So I don't see it changing. He's in a good position to be able to continue to do this for awhile."

Scheffler was easy to forget last year even while staying atop the world ranking from March to October because the Masters was his last win of the year. Easily overlooked was that he lost in a playoff at Colonial to a 45-foot putt by Sam Burns and was one putt away from a potential playoff at the U.S. Open.

More memorable was losing a six-shot lead in the final round of the Tour Championship at East Lake to McIlroy, which cost Scheffler the FedEx Cup.

"I had put myself in a position all year to where I had a chance to win the FedEx Cup, and I wasn't able to get it done," Scheffler said. "And by the time I got home, I was worn out. I was mentally, physically drained, emotionally drained."

"But the hard times make the good times that much sweeter."

Now he has six wins in his last 27 starts, and 16 finishes in the top 10 during that span.

"His top 10s are off the charts," Spieth said.

This stretch of golf could be traced to the Ryder Cup in the fall of 2021 at Whistling Straits. Steve Stricker was torn between Scheffler and good friend Sam Burns for his last picks, which doesn't seem like much of a debate now.

While it was an American rout, one of the more pivotal moments was Saturday afternoon when Scheffler made two big putts on the closing holes of a fourballs win that felt like the end for Europe (and it was). He then handed Rahm his first loss of the week in singles. That prompted Brooks Koepka to refer to him as a "big-game hunter."

Next up for Scheffler is the Dell Match Play next week in Austin, Texas, where he played for the Texas Longhorns and graduated from business school in four years. He won the Match Play a year ago. He nearly won it the year before, losing in the championship match to Billy Horschel. His record is 10-2-2 in both appearances.

And then it's on to Augusta. Would anyone be surprised to see another green jacket? The short is probably yes, because only three players have won the Masters back to back, most recently Tiger Woods in 2002.

Scheffler is on another run. For now, the difference is fans have a better understanding why.

"He's obviously just really good at pretty much every aspect of golf," Max Homa said.



CHARLIE NEIBERGALL/AP

Scottie Scheffler celebrates after putting on the 18th green in The Players Championship tournament Sunday in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.



GODOFREDO A. VÁSQUEZ/AP

The United States' Mike Trout runs the bases after hitting a three-run home run against Canada during the first inning of a World Baseball Classic game in Phoenix on Monday.

WORLD BASEBALL CLASSIC ROUNDUP

US routs Canada; pitchers are perfect for Puerto Rico

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Mike Trout hit a three-run homer, Lance Lynn threw five impressive innings and the United States used a nine-run first to cruise past Canada 12-1 on Monday night in the World Baseball Classic.

The game was called after seven innings because of the tournament's 10-run mercy rule.

The U.S. improved to 2-1 and bounced back from an 11-5 loss to Mexico on Sunday with its best offensive performance of the tournament. Canada fell to 1-1 before a crowd of 29,621 at Chase Field.

The Americans sent 12 batters to the plate in the first inning. Nolan Arenado had a two-run double to start the scoring and Trout finished it by belting a low fastball into the left-center seats.

Lynn got the win, giving up one run and two hits while saving the bullpen for the team's final game of pool play against Colombia on Wednesday. United States manager Mark DeRosa had to use eight pitchers on Sunday in the loss to Mexico.

Canada scored its lone run on Jared Young's homer. Left-hander Mitch Bratt took the loss, giving up six earned runs while getting only one out.

Puerto Rico 10, Israel 0 (8 innings): Puerto Rico bounced back from a 9-6 loss to Venezuela the previous day with a dominant display in Miami, as four Puerto

Rico pitchers combined to not allow a baserunner in 8 innings.

José De León tied a WBC record with 10 strikeouts in 5 2/3 innings, earning the win. The right-hander was lifted after he fanned Spencer Horwitz on his 64th pitch, one under the tournament limit for starting pitchers in the first round. He exited to a huge ovation from the prohibitive Puerto Rico crowd of 27,813.

Yacksel Ríos relieved De León and struck out his only batter to end the sixth. With his team up 9-0 in the seventh, manager Yadier Molina turned to Edwin Díaz, the New York Mets' star closer, and he fanned one hitter in a 1-2-3 inning. Duane Underwood Jr. retired Israel in order on 10 pitches in the eighth.

Javier Báez doubled twice and Francisco Lindor tripled and singled for Puerto Rico, which finished with 11 hits and improved to 2-1. Lindor's two-run triple keyed a three-run fifth, and Kiké Hernández's run-scoring single in the eighth ended the game.

Despite the perfection, it will not count as a perfect game in official WBC records because the game didn't go a full nine innings. That's the standard established by the Elias Sports Bureau, the official statistician for Major League Baseball.

Dominican Republic 6, Nicaragua 1: San Diego Padres stars Juan Soto and Manny Ma-

chado homered in Miami, and the Dominican Republic picked up its first win of WBC pool play.

Rafael Devers hit a two-out RBI double in the first against Nicaragua starter JC Ramirez, driving in Soto for a 1-0 lead. Eloy Jimenez's single in the second scored Soto again and gave the Dominicans a 2-0 lead.

Winning pitcher Cristian Javier allowed only two hits and struck out four in four innings.

The Dominican Republic (1-1) doubled its lead in the fourth when Francisco Mejia singled off Fidencio Flores to score Willy Adames, then Julio Rodriguez singled to drive in Jeimer Candelario.

Soto blasted a shot to right field off Junior Tellez to make it 5-0 in the fifth, and Machado tagged Tellez in the next inning with a drive to right-center.

Britain 7, Colombia 5: Jaden Rudd hit a go-ahead, two-run double in the fifth inning, Harry Ford added a solo homer and Britain won a WBC game for the first time.

Graham Spraker got the win by pitching 2 2/3 innings of scoreless relief in Phoenix, and Ian Gibaut earned the save. Colombia's Yapsan Gomez — who gave up Rudd's double in the fifth — took the loss.

Dayan Frias had two hits and two RBIs for Colombia, which fell to 1-1 in the tournament. Britain improved to 1-2.

WOMEN’S NCAA TOURNAMENT

Many teams have international flair

By PAT EATON-ROBB
Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. — When star guard Paige Bueckers went down with a season-ending knee injury last August, UConn went searching far and wide for a late addition to its roster.

The Huskies found one overseas in Inês Bettencourt, a point guard from Portugal’s mid-Atlantic Azores Islands. An assistant coach had noticed her playing at the Division B U18 European Championships.

A couple of months later, the Huskies announced the signing of a player they hope will be their next dominant forward: Jana El Alfy, who is 6-foot-4 and from Egypt. She enrolled in January and joined the team but will not play until next season.

The Big East champions are headed to the NCAA Tournament as a No. 2 seed with six international players on the roster after having just 10 others since Geno Auriemma began coaching the team in 1985.

“There was very little video of them back then,” Auriemma said. “Today, we have video and those kids have video of everything; they see everything. They watch every one of our games and we have a chance to see them during the summer more because there’s more international competitions.”

“It’s not the answer to everything,” he added. “But in certain situations it is, for us, the exact right way to go.”

It’s also a trend across women’s college basketball.

The NCAA, citing numbers provided by FIBA, said there were 731 international women playing Division I college basketball in 2022, up nearly 350% from 212 in 2012.

Pac-12 Tournament champion Washington State, a No. 5 seed, has nine international players on



DAVID BECKER/AP

All five starters for No. 5 seed Washington State are international players, including senior guard Johanna Teder from Estonia.

its roster, including all five starters.

Johanna Teder, a senior guard from Estonia, said she thinks there is something in the makeup of players willing to go halfway around the world to pursue their dreams that has contributed to her team’s success.

“It’s a big decision,” she said. “Us internationals, we’re more experienced and like independent, if that makes sense. So, maturity plays a big role.”

South Florida won the American Athletic Conference regular-season title and is a No. 8 seed in the NCAA tourney, with eight international players.

USF coach Jose Fernandez has been recruiting heavily overseas for the past two decades. He said he started looking to Europe and elsewhere because his program was having a hard time competing with bigger names in college basketball for top players in the U.S.

What he found, he said, is a bunch of very talented kids who were often more emotionally and intellectually prepared for college basketball than their American counterparts.

“I don’t think I’ve had an international player ever graduate with less than a 3.5 GPA, which is amazing with English being their second language,” he said. “There’s also no entitlement, right? A lot of these international recruits they’re not getting two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight pairs of shoes, and four or five different jerseys.”

He said he used to see three or four other U.S. college coaches at international competitions but now sees about 40 or 50.

El Alfy began getting noticed by U.S. college coaches as a member of her national team, which is coached by her father, while attending camps sponsored by the NBA.

“Us internationals, we’re more experienced and like independent, if that makes sense.”

Johanna Teder
Washington State player from Estonia

“They really helped me a lot with everything, especially with their camps all around the world, not just in Africa,” she said.

The NBA, which has been running its residential NBA Academy for male international players for years, began sponsoring camps for elite international girls in 2018 and has held camps in India, Mexico, Senegal and the U.S.

Chris Ebersole, associate vice president of the NBA and head of the league’s Elite Basketball programs, said the idea is to gather the top talent from around the world and expose them to great coaching and opportunities while educating them about their options.

“We’ve seen that there’s actually a ton of untapped potential in terms of international women’s basketball, through those Basketball Without Borders camps in Africa, in Europe and Latin America and in Asia,” he said.

About 40 players in Division I have come through those camps, he said, including UConn’s El Alfy, Nika Mühl (Croatia) and Aaliyah Edwards (Canada).

Mühl said the camps helped her make the decision to attend college rather than go straight to professional basketball in Europe.

“It gave me a little glimpse of like, what life in America would be, you know, different people from different cultures playing together, which is what we have here,” she said. “But ultimately, the thing that made me come here is UConn itself and coach Geno

Auriemma. There’s nothing else like the history and the culture of this place.”

Lou Lopez Sénéchal, a Mexican national who grew up in France, spent four years at Fairfield before transferring to UConn for a graduate season.

She said for her and other international players, the draw of playing in the United States had a lot to do with being able to stay in school and play with people her own age, rather than going pro and competing against older women.

Fernandez said there are many things that make the U.S. more attractive for international players than playing for a club or professional team closer to home. He noted that “with ESPN+ and everything else,” parents can watch their kids from afar.

Dorka Juhász (Hungary), who transferred from Ohio State before the 2021-22 season, said the international students have formed a bond at UConn. The older ones, she said, help the younger ones deal with issues that arise, such as homesickness, doing taxes, visas and how to get celebrity endorsement deals without jeopardizing their status.

“It’s good to have somebody to rely on and you’re not the only one,” she said. “It’s also good to see that UConn loves international players. Just seeing so many other faces that are here from different countries, and how they’re loving it here. I think that’s just showing how much they care about us here.”

Scoreboard

FIRST FOUR Wednesday, March 15 At South Bend, Ind. Illinois (22-9) vs. Mississippi St. (20-10) At Stanford, Calif. Sacred Heart (18-13) vs. Southern U. (18-14) Thursday, March 16 At Columbus, Ohio Purdue (19-10) vs. St. John's (22-8) At Bloomington, Ind. Monmouth (NJ) (18-15) vs. Tennessee Tech (22-9) SEATTLE 4 First Round Friday, March 17 At Stanford, Calif. Stanford (28-5) vs. Sacred Heart-Southern U. winner Mississippi (23-8) vs. Gonzaga (28-4) At Iowa City, Iowa Florida St. (23-9) vs. Georgia (21-11) Iowa (26-6) vs. SE Louisiana (21-9) Saturday, March 18 At Austin, Texas Louisville (23-11) vs. Drake (22-9) Texas (25-9) vs. East Carolina (23-9) At Durham, N.C. Colorado (23-8) vs. Middle Tennessee
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(28-4) Duke (25-6) vs. Iona (26-6) Second Round Sunday, March 19 At Stanford, Calif. Stanford—Sacred Heart-Southern U. winner vs. Mississippi-Gonzaga winner At Iowa City, Iowa Iowa-SE Louisiana winner vs. Florida St.-Georgia winner Monday, March 20 At Austin, Texas Texas-East Carolina winner vs. Louisville-Drake winner At Durham, N.C. Duke-Iona winner vs. Colorado-Middle Tennessee winner GREENVILLE 2 First Round Saturday, March 18 At Bloomington, Ind. Indiana (27-3) vs. Monmouth (NJ)-Tennessee Tech winner Oklahoma St. (21-11) vs. Miami (19-12) At Bryn Mawr, Pa. Washington St. (23-10) vs. Florida Gulf Coast (32-3) Villanova (28-6) vs. Cleveland St. (30-4) Friday, March 17 At Baton Rouge, La.
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Michigan (22-9) vs. UNLV (31-2) LSU (28-2) vs. Hawaii (18-14) At Salt Lake City NC State (20-11) vs. Princeton (23-5) Utah (25-4) vs. Gardner-Webb (29-4) Second Round Monday, March 20 At Bloomington, Ind. Indiana—Monmouth (NJ)-Tennessee Tech winner vs. Oklahoma St.-Miami winner At Bryn Mawr, Pa. Villanova-Cleveland St. winner vs. Washington St.-Florida Gulf Coast winner Sunday, March 19 At Baton Rouge, La. LSU-Hawaii winner vs. Michigan-UNLV winner At Salt Lake City Utah-Gardner-Webb winner vs. NC State-Princeton winner GREENVILLE 1 First Round Friday, March 17 At Columbia, S.C. South Carolina (32-0) vs. Norfolk St. (26-6) S. Florida (26-6) vs. Marquette (21-10) At South Bend, Ind. Creighton (22-8) vs. Illinois-Miss. St. win-

ner Notre Dame (25-5) vs. S. Utah (23-9) At College Park, Md. Arizona (21-9) vs. West Virginia (19-11) Maryland (25-6) vs. Holy Cross (24-8) Saturday, March 18 At Los Angeles Oklahoma (25-6) vs. Portland (23-8) UCLA (25-9) vs. Sacramento St. (25-7) Second Round Sunday, March 19 At Columbia, S.C. South Carolina-Norfolk St. winner vs. South Florida-Marquette winner At South Bend, Ind. Notre Dame-S. Utah winner vs. Creighton—Illinois-Mississippi St. winner At College Park, Md. Maryland-Holy Cross winner vs. Arizona-West Virginia winner Monday, March 20 At Los Angeles UCLA-Sacramento St. winner vs. Oklahoma-Portland winner SEATTLE 3 First Round Friday, March 17 At Blacksburg, Va. Virginia Tech (27-4) vs. Chattanooga (20-
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12) Southern Cal (21-9) vs. S. Dakota St. (28-5) Saturday, March 18 At Knoxville, Tenn. Iowa St. (22-9) vs. Toledo (28-4) Tennessee (23-11) vs. Saint Louis (17-17) At Columbus, Ohio North Carolina (21-10) vs. Purdue-St. John's winner Ohio St. (25-7) vs. James Madison (26-7) At Storrs, Conn. Baylor (19-12) vs. Alabama (20-10) UConn (29-5) vs. Vermont (25-6) Second Round Sunday, March 19 At Blacksburg, Va. Virginia Tech-Chattanooga winner vs. Southern Cal-S. Dakota St. winner Monday, March 20 At Knoxville, Tenn. Tennessee-Saint Louis winner vs. Iowa St.-Toledo winner At Columbus, Ohio Ohio St.-James Madison winner vs. North Carolina—Purdue-St. John's winner At Storrs, Conn. UConn-Vermont winner vs. Baylor-Alabama winner
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MEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT

Drake's DeVries among under-the-radar stars

BY STEVE MEGARGEE
 Associated Press

Drake's Tucker DeVries was an interested spectator when the father-son team of Greg McDermott and Doug McDermott helped Creighton make consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances in 2013 and 2014.

DeVries' father, Darian, was an assistant on Greg McDermott's Creighton staff back then as Doug McDermott led the nation in scoring and earned national player of the year honors. Now it's Darian DeVries who will be coaching his son on the March Madness stage.

Tucker DeVries is the Missouri Valley Conference player of the year after turning down some high-major offers to enroll at Drake. DeVries said watching the McDermotts helped give him an idea of what it might be like to play for his dad.

"I think there was a lot to be learned from, being able to experience and see how that relationship worked," the sophomore guard/forward said. "Part of what went into me wanting to come and play for my dad here is being able to have a little taste of that myself."

So far, it's been just about everything DeVries could have imagined.

DeVries averages 19 points and 5.6 rebounds per game, and he has shot 38.7% (87-for-225) from three-point range. He was named the most outstanding player in the Missouri Valley Conference Tournament.

"I grew up at Creighton my whole life," DeVries said. "When they decided to recruit me, it was tough to turn that down — playing in the Big East where I grew up. Iowa State, 45 minutes away. Oregon. Just some of those schools are obviously schools you grow up watching on TV, dreaming about playing for. But I don't think any of them had what was home for me here."

Now he has the chance to find out what it's like to play for his father in the NCAA Tournament. Drake (27-7) is the No. 12 seed in the Midwest Region and will face Miami (25-7) on Friday.

"To be able to experience it with my dad as a coach is definitely pretty cool and special — to be able to experience it together," DeVries said.

DeVries is one of several players from one-bid conferences who bear watching this week. Here's a look at some others:

Max Abmas, Oral Roberts
 Abmas already has shown he can make an impact in March. Abmas averaged 26.8 points in the 2021



JACOB KUPFFERMAN/AP

North Carolina-Asheville's Drew Pember, left, a transfer from Tennessee, is the first player to lead the Big South in scoring (20.4), rebounding (9.2) and blocks (2.3) in one season.

NCAA Tournament while leading Oral Roberts to the Sweet 16. This season, the 6-foot senior ranks seventh among all Division I players in points per game (22.2) and sixth in three-pointers per game (3.5). The two-time Summit League player of the year has scored over 22 points per game each of the last three seasons. **First-round game: Thursday vs. Duke.**

Jordan Brown, Louisiana-Lafayette
 Brown isn't the typical under-the-radar recruit who ends up at a mid-major program. The 6-foot-11 forward was a 2018 McDonald's All-American. He began his college career at Nevada and was a Pac-12 sixth man of the year at Arizona last season before transferring to his third school. Brown earned first-team all-Sun Belt honors while averaging 19.4 points and 8.7 rebounds, including 20 points in a loss to Texas. **First-round game: Thursday vs. Tennessee.**

Sincere Carry, Kent State
 Carry has earned first-team all-Mid American Conference honors and has made the league's all-defensive team each of the last two seasons. He was named MAC player of the year last season. He has averaged over 17½ points each of the last two seasons at Kent State after transferring from Duquesne. The 6-1 guard has scored at

least 21 points in four of his last five games. **First-round game: Friday vs. Indiana.**

Ray Harrison, Grand Canyon
 Harrison helped Grand Canyon get here by collecting 31 points, eight rebounds and eight assists against Southern Utah in the Western Athletic Conference Tournament championship game. The 6-4 guard has scored at least 25 points in four of his last six games. Harrison, a Presbyterian transfer, has averaged at least 17 points each of the last three seasons. He has 17.7 points, 4 rebounds and 3.6 assists per game this season. **First-round game: Friday vs. Gonzaga.**

Drew Pember, UNC-Asheville
 This Tennessee transfer has emerged as a star in two seasons at UNC-Asheville. This year, he became the first player to lead the Big South in scoring (20.4), rebounding (9.2) and blocks (2.3) in one season. Pember leads all Division I players in free throws made (262) and attempted (314). The 6-11 forward averaged 29.7 points and 11.3 rebounds in three Big South Tournament games. **First-round game: Thursday vs. UCLA.**

Tucker Richardson, Colgate
 Richardson had a triple-double in the Patriot League Tournament championship game with 14 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists as Colgate defeated



JEFF ROBERSON/AP

Drake's Tucker Devries is the Missouri Valley Conference player of the year after turning down some high-major offers to play for a Drake team that's coached by his father.

Lafayette, 79-61. The 6-5 guard was named the Patriot League's overall player of the year and defensive player of the year. He's the first player in league history to combine 1,600 career

points, 700 rebounds and 600 assists. Richardson had 15 points and seven rebounds last year in an NCAA Tournament loss to Wisconsin. **First-round game: Thursday vs. Texas.**

Scoreboard

FIRST FOUR At Dayton, Ohio Tuesday, March 14 Texas A&M-CC (23-10) vs. SE Missouri (19-16) Miss. St. (21-12) vs. Pittsburgh (22-11) Wednesday, March 15 Texas Southern (14-20) vs. Fairleigh Dickinson (19-15) Arizona St. (22-12) vs. Nevada (22-10) EAST REGIONAL First Round Thursday, March 16 At Orlando, Fla. Duke (26-8) vs. Oral Roberts (30-4) Tennessee (23-10) vs. Louisiana-Lafayette (26-7) Friday, March 17 At Columbus, Ohio Purdue (29-5) vs. Texas Southern-Fairleigh Dickinson winner Memphis (26-8) vs. FAU (31-3) Michigan St. (19-12) vs. Southern Cal (22-10) Marquette (28-6) vs. Vermont (23-10) At Greensboro, N.C. Kentucky (21-11) vs. Providence (21-11) Kansas St. (23-9) vs. Montana St. (25-9) Second Round Saturday, March 18 At Orlando, Fla. Tennessee-Louisiana-Lafayette winner vs. Duke-Oral Roberts winner Sunday, March 19 At Columbus, Ohio Purdue—Texas Southern-Fairleigh Dickinson winner vs. Memphis-FAU winner Marquette-Vermont winner vs. Michigan St.-Southern Cal winner At Greensboro, N.C. Kansas St.-Montana St. winner vs. Kentucky-Providence winner SOUTH REGIONAL First Round Thursday, March 16 At Birmingham, Ala. Alabama (29-5) vs. Texas A&M-CC-SE Missouri winner Maryland (21-12) vs. West Virginia (19-14) At Orlando, Fla. San Diego St. (27-6) vs. Charleston (31-3) Virginia (25-7) vs. Furman (27-7) At Sacramento, Calif. Missouri (24-9) vs. Utah St. (26-8) Arizona (28-6) vs. Princeton (21-8) Friday, March 17 At Denver Creighton (21-12) vs. NC State (23-10) Baylor (22-10) vs. UC Santa Barbara (27-7) Second Round Saturday, March 18 At Birmingham, Ala. Alabama—Texas A&M-CC-SE Missouri winner vs. Maryland-West Virginia winner At Orlando, Fla. Virginia-Furman winner vs. San Diego St.-Coll. of Charleston winner At Sacramento, Calif. Arizona-Princeton winner vs. Missouri-Utah St. winner	Sunday, March 19 At Denver Baylor-UC Santa Barbara winner vs. Creighton-NC State winner MIDWEST REGIONAL First Round Thursday, March 16 At Birmingham, Ala. Houston (31-3) vs. N. Kentucky (22-12) Iowa (19-13) vs. Auburn (20-12) At Des Moines, Iowa Texas A&M (25-9) vs. Penn St. (22-13) Texas (26-8) vs. Colgate (26-8) Friday, March 17 At Albany, N.Y. Miami (25-7) vs. Drake (27-7) Indiana (22-11) vs. Kent St. (28-6) At Greensboro, N.C. Iowa St. (19-13) vs. Mississippi St.-Pittsburgh winner Xavier (25-9) vs. Kennesaw St. (26-8) Second Round Saturday, March 18 At Birmingham, Ala. Houston-N. Kentucky winner vs. Iowa-Auburn winner At Des Moines, Iowa Texas-Colgate winner vs. Texas A&M-Penn St. winner Sunday, March 19 At Albany, N.Y. Indiana-Kent St. winner vs. Miami-Drake winner At Greensboro, N.C. Xavier-Kennesaw St. winner vs. Iowa St.—Mississippi St.-Pittsburgh winner WEST REGIONAL First Round Thursday, March 16 At Des Moines, Iowa Kansas (27-7) vs. Howard (22-12) Arkansas (20-13) vs. Illinois (20-12) At Sacramento, Calif. Northwestern (21-11) vs. Boise St. (24-9) UCLA (29-5) vs. UNC-Asheville (27-7) Friday, March 17 At Albany, N.Y. Saint Mary's (Cal.) (26-7) vs. VCU (27-7) UConn (25-8) vs. Iona (27-7) At Denver TCU (21-12) vs. Arizona St.-Nevada winner Gonzaga (28-5) vs. Grand Canyon (24-11) Second Round Saturday, March 18 At Des Moines, Iowa Kansas-Howard winner vs. Arkansas-Illinois winner At Sacramento, Calif. UCLA-UNC-Asheville winner vs. Northwestern-Boise St. winner Sunday, March 19 At Albany, N.Y. UConn-Iona winner vs. Saint Mary's (Cal.)-VCU winner At Denver Gonzaga-Grand Canyon winner vs. TCU—Arizona St.-Nevada winner
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MEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT

PICK SIX: BACKCOURT WIZARDS

Success depends on strong guard play

BY STEVE MEGARGEE
Associated Press

Anyone trying to fill out their NCAA Tournament brackets ought to start by figuring out which teams have the best backcourts.

This has been a guard's event for years.

When Kansas' Ochai Agbaji helped the Jayhawks win the national title last season, he became the eighth straight guard to be selected as a Final Four's most outstanding player. The list started with UConn's Shabazz Napier in 2014 and continued with Duke's Tyus Jones, Villanova's Ryan Arcidiacono, North Carolina's Joel Berry II, Villanova's Donte DiVincenzo, Virginia's Kyle Guy and Baylor's Jared Butler.

Occasionally a big man can dominate the college basketball landscape the way Anthony Davis did while leading Kentucky to the 2012 title, but they're the exceptions. The NCAA Tournament generally is all about guard play.

Here's a look at six backcourts that merit watching.

Baylor: L.J. Cryer, Adam Flagler and Keyonte George.

Baylor won the NCAA Tournament two years ago behind its outstanding backcourt and will try to do it again with a different set of guards. All three of them score at least 14.5 points per game. Flagler was one of five finalists for the Jerry West Award given to the nation's top shooting guard. He also earned AP first-team all-Big 12 honors. George, the best pro prospect in the trio, was a second-team all-Big 12 pick. Baylor ranks second in Division I



CHRIS JONES/AP

Guard Keyonte George, the best pro prospect in Baylor's backcourt, is a second-team all-Big 12 pick.

in adjusted offensive efficiency, a metric measured by college basketball stats guru Ken Pomeroy that essentially translates to points scored per 100 possessions when adjusted for the level of competition.

Houston: Marcus Sasser and Jamal Shead.

Sasser is one of 10 semifinalists for the Naismith Award given to the national player of the year. He's eager for this NCAA Tournament showcase after a foot injury ended his 2021-22 sea-

son after just 12 games. He injured his groin in the American Athletic Association Tournament and didn't play in Sunday's championship game, so it remains to be seen how close he is to full strength. Sasser has scored over 17 points per game each of the last two seasons. Shead has nearly three times as many assists as turnovers.

Kansas: Gradey Dick, Dajuan Harris and Kevin McCullar Jr.

The defending national champions had to replace virtually their entire nu-

cleus from last year but still put together an outstanding backcourt to complement forward Jalen Wilson, the AP Big 12 player of the year. Dick, a freshman, is a Jerry West Award finalist, scoring nearly 15 points per game; he arguably is more a small forward at 6-foot-8, but Kansas lists him as a guard. Dick and McCullar both were AP second-team all-Big 12 selections. McCullar, a Texas Tech transfer, has scored in double figures three straight seasons and is pulling down over seven rebounds per

game. Harris is dishing out more than six assists per game and ranks third among all Division I players in assist-turnover ratio.

Marquette: Kam Jones, Tyler Kolek and Stevie Mitchell.

Kolek, a Naismith Award semifinalist and the Big East player of the year, has 7.7 assists per game and has well over three times as many assists as turnovers. He was named the Big East Tournament MVP. Jones, a second-team AP all-Big East selection, leads Marquette in scoring and makes nearly three three-pointers per game. Mitchell has over seven points per game but is best known for his defense. This group helped Marquette win its first Big East outright regular-season title and first Big East Tournament championship.

Miami: Jordan Miller, Nijel Pack and Isaiah Wong.

This trio helped Miami win a share of the Atlantic Coast Conference regular-season title and earn the No. 1 seed in the ACC Tournament for the first time since 2013. Wong is a Jerry West Award finalist and AP first-team all-ACC pick. He was named ACC player of the year by a 75-member panel including coaches and media representatives. Wong, Miller and Pack are each scoring more than 13 points per game.

Xavier: Souley Boum, Colby Jones and Adam Kunkel.

This trio helped Xavier lead all Division I teams in assists per game. Boum and Jones are each averaging over four assists per game, while Kunkel has three per game. They're also scoring about a combined 42 points per game. Boum, an AP first-team all-Big East selection, ranks second in the conference in scoring. Jones was an AP second-team all-Big East pick.

Not: Kolek transferred to Marquette after one season at George Mason

FROM PAGE 24

"I've just got to be a chip-on-my-shoulder kind of guy," Kolek said. "That's where I feel like it comes from. Just being that underdog, that under-recruited guy, you've got to have some gumption to you."

Kolek definitely has that. It was apparent well before the season.

When he was asked at Big East media day what he thought about the league's coaches picking Marquette to finish ninth out of 11 teams, Kolek offered a two-word response. The second word was an abbreviated version of "them." The first word was an expletive.

"I thought that was hilarious," his brother said. "It just goes to show who he is. He doesn't really care about what anybody says. He's going to do what he's got to do, no matter what."

Kolek has the game to back up his bravado.

Marquette boasts one of the nation's most efficient offenses because its starting lineup features two outstanding passers in Kolek and 6-foot-9 forward Oso Ighodaro.



JOHN MINCHILLO/AP

Tyler Kolek, center, was named the Big East Tournament's most outstanding player after Marquette beat Xavier in the championship game in New York.

Kolek ranks among the top five Division I players in assists per game (7.7) and assist-turnover ratio (3.22).

Kolek inherited those passing skills from his father, Kevin Kolek, who dished out six

assists per game from 1984-88 while helping UMass Dartmouth earn three straight Division III NCAA Tournament appearances.

"He knows what the defense is going to do, and he can just read what's going to happen two, three steps ahead," teammate David Joplin said.

Kolek already had proved himself as a distributor last year by collecting 5.9 assists per game. The questions surrounded his shooting, which led to a rare crisis in confidence.

After Kolek played one season at George Mason, the firing of Dave Paulsen caused him to enter the transfer portal. Marquette coach Shaka Smart said he called Kolek to make his pitch the day he got the job.

Kolek shot just 32% overall and 28.1% from three-point range his first year at Marquette after shooting 39.9% overall and 35.8% from beyond the arc at George Mason. For once in his life, that swagger was missing.

"I was miserable last year, honestly," Kolek said. "I kind of let basketball determine

my whole mood on and off the court. As you grow and learn as a person, you understand you're more than just the game. You're a human being, too."

Kolek's father had faith Tyler's shot would return because he knew his son's work ethic.

Kevin Kolek noted how he came back from dinner one recent Saturday night at about 11 p.m. and called his son, who was in the gym even though Marquette had played a game early that afternoon.

"He lives in the gym," Kevin Kolek said. "I knew it would turn around."

Sure enough, Kolek is shooting 48.3% from the floor and 39.4% from three-point range, helping his scoring average improve from 6.7 last season to 13.3 this year.

"It's so much fun to see him out there with no hesitation," Smart said. "Because that was the biggest challenge last year. When he got off to a tough start, he hesitated a little bit when he was open, and then it snowballed a little bit. This year, particularly during the second half of the season, there's been none of that."

SPORTS

US hammers Canada

Trout's three-run blast caps nine-run first inning » **World Baseball Classic, Page 20**



MEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT

Not to be overlooked

Confident Kolek leads Marquette to No. 2 seed in March Madness

BY STEVE MEGARGEE
Associated Press

Tyler Kolek adopted the acuity and audacity that defines his game with every bruise he took playing against his older brother while growing up in Rhode Island.

Kolek was two years younger than his brother, Brandon, but wanted to prove he was every bit as good. The two brothers stopped playing one-one-one by the time they reached high school since each matchup inevitably ended with a scuffle.

"We were both really competitive," recalled Brandon Kolek, who just finished his final season at Division II school Franklin Pierce. "I'd be bigger than him so I would post him up, and he would get mad that I'm doing that and he can't stop it. So a couple of punches are thrown, a couple of elbows are thrown and it would just turn to an all-out fight after that."

Kolek's fearlessness has been a hallmark of Marquette's stunningly successful season.

The approach also helped Kolek develop from a mid-major prospect into the Big East player of the year who led Marquette to its first Big East outright regular-season title and tournament championship since joining the conference for the 2005-06 season. Now he wants to help Marquette get beyond the opening round of the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2013.

Marquette (28-6) is the No. 2 seed in the East Region and faces Vermont (23-10) on Friday.

SEE NOT ON PAGE 23

Marquette guard Tyler Kolek ranks among the top five Division I players in assists per game (7.7) and assist-turnover ratio (3.22).

JEFF DEAN/AP



Tuch returns, leads Sabres past Maple Leafs » NHL, Page 18

