

US employers add 916K jobs in March

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — America's employers unleashed a burst of hiring in March, adding 916,000 jobs in a sign that a sustained recovery from the pandemic recession is taking hold as vaccinations accelerate, stimulus checks flow through the economy and businesses increasingly reopen.

The March increase — the most since August — was nearly double February's gain of 468,000, the Labor Department said Friday. The unemployment rate declined from 6.2% to 6%.

Even with last month's robust increase, the economy remains more than 8 million jobs short of the number it had before the pandemic erupted a little over a year ago. But with the recovery widely expected to strengthen, many forecasters predict enough hiring in the coming months to recover nearly all those lost jobs by year's end.

Regaining all those jobs, though, will be a daunting task.

"We can rejoice in these numbers, but we still have a lot of work to do," said Jane Oates, president of WorkingNation and a former Labor Department official. "There are millions of workers we need to get back into jobs."

Bond investors sent yields higher, a sign that financial markets are optimistic about a solid recovery that could produce higher prices for some goods and services. The yield on the 10-year U.S. Treasury note rose from 1.68% to 1.71%. Stock markets are closed for Good Friday.

The brightening outlook for the labor market follows a year of epic job losses, waves of coronavirus infections and small business closures. Numerous signs suggest that the economy is improving. Consumer confidence in March reached its highest level since the pandemic intensified.

A survey found that manufacturing grew in March at its fastest pace since 1983. And vaccinations are increasingly being administered, although new confirmed infections have risen from lower levels in recent weeks.

Speaking after the government issued the jobs report, President Joe Biden said it showed that his \$1.9 trillion financial rescue package — which included \$1,400 checks to most adults — was already boosting the economy. Biden argued, though, that further assistance in the form of the infrastructure package his administration unveiled this week, was needed to sustain the gains.

"The fight's far from over," the president said in televised remarks. "The progress

we've worked so hard to achieve can be reversed."

Yet many Republican lawmakers have already pointed to the burgeoning economy as evidence that further government support isn't needed.

Last month, hiring strengthened across the economy. Restaurants, hotels and bars — the sector most damaged by the virus — added 216,000 jobs. Construction companies, aided by better weather after severe storms in February, gained 110,000.

Manufacturers added 53,000. And professional and business services, which include such well-paying fields as engineering and architecture, gained 66,000.

The pandemic recession inflicted job losses disproportionately on racial minorities and lower-income workers. Wealthier and well-educated workers have been far less likely to lose jobs, in large part because of a greater ability to work from home. Much of the hiring now occurring at bars, restaurants and other areas of the hospitality industry is helping to close that gap, though there's still a long way to go.

Last month, in an encouraging sign, about 500,000 women returned to the workforce and found jobs, in part a reflection of school re-openings around the country.

US, Iran say indirect talks on nuclear program set

Associated Press

The United States and Iran said Friday that they would begin negotiations through intermediaries next week to try to get both countries back into an accord limiting Iran's nuclear program, nearly three years after President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the deal.

The announcement marked the first major progress in efforts to return both countries to the 2015 accord, which bound Iran to restrictions on its nuclear programs in return for relief from U.S. and international sanctions. President Joe Biden came into office saying that getting back into the accord was a priority. But Iran and the United States have disagreed over Iran's demands that sanctions be

lifted first, and the stalemate threatened to become an early foreign policy setback for the Biden administration.

State Department spokesperson Ned Price called the resumption of negotiations, scheduled for Tuesday in Vienna, "a healthy step forward." But Price added, "These remain early days, and we don't anticipate an immediate breakthrough as there will be difficult discussions ahead."

Trump pulled the U.S. out of the accord in 2015, opting for a "maximum pressure" campaign of stepped-up U.S. sanctions and other tough actions. Iran responded by intensifying its enrichment of uranium and building of centrifuges, while maintaining its insistence that its nuclear development was for civilian

and not military purposes. Iran's moves increased pressure on major world powers over the Trump administration's sanctions and raised tensions among U.S. allies and strategic partners in the Middle East.

Agreement on the start of indirect talks came after the European Union helped broker a virtual meeting of officials from Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and Iran, which have remained in the accord, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Price said next week's talks will be structured around working groups that the European Union was forming with the remaining participants in the accord, including Iran.

Russian FM: Relations with West have 'hit the bottom'

BY VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV
Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russia's top diplomat said Thursday that the country's relations with the United States and its allies have "hit the bottom" and no date has been set for sending the Russian ambassador back to Washington.

Russia recalled its ambassador to the United States after U.S. President Joe Biden was asked in an interview if thought Russian President Vladimir Putin was a "killer" and replied, "I do."

Addressing the issue Thursday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called Biden's remarks "appalling" and said they had forced Moscow to rethink its ties with Washington.

Lavrov also voiced regret about Washington's rejection of Putin's offer to ar-

range a quick public call with Biden to help defuse the tension over the remarks.

"The confrontation has hit the bottom," the Russian minister said in televised remarks. "But on the other hand, there is a hope that they are all grown-up people who realize the risks linked with inciting more tensions. I hope that common sense will prevail."

Lavrov said it would be up to Putin to decide when Ambassador Anatoly Antonov returns to Washington.

Biden has said the days of the U.S. "rolling over" to Putin are done. And he has taken pains to contrast his approach with that of former President Donald Trump, who avoided direct confrontation with Putin and frequently spoke about the Russian leader with approval.

Army suspends instructors in sex assault case

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — Multiple members of the training cadre at Fort Sill, Okla., were suspended this week after a soldier in training reported she was sexually assaulted at the base, said Maj. Gen. Ken Kamper, commander of the base and the Fires Center of Excellence.

"This past Saturday, a soldier assigned to Fort Sill reported she was the victim of sexual assault, involving Fort Sill cadre members. This information was immediately reported to law enforcement," Kamper said Thursday during a news conference.

Within hours, agents with Army Criminal Investigation Command, known as CID, began investigating the report and interviewing potential suspects and witnesses. Kamper declined to say exactly what day the soldier said the assault occurred, in what capacity the training personnel might have been involved or exactly how many personnel have been suspended because of the assault.

"What's important is, we've taken immediate action. With a cadre member who has been named and possibly involved in this allegation, we've removed them from their normal duties, they've been suspended. They are working outside the training environment to protect the well-being of all the other soldiers," he said.

The soldier who made the report has been assigned a special victims counsel, has access to all services and is "absolutely safe," Kamper said.

"We're proud of the courage she displayed coming forward with these allegations," he said. "We're also committed to protecting the privacy of this soldier."

Fort Sill is home to the Army's Fires Center of Excellence, which conducts training and education for enlisted soldiers and officers working in the fields of air defense artillery and field artillery.

In his experience, Kamper said it is not common to see cadre members involved in sexual assault allegations.

"That's the significance here," he said. "Sexual assault will not be tolerated. It tears at the fabric of our community."

Biden, 'Jobs Cabinet' to sell plan for infrastructure as GOP resists

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden set about convincing America it needs his \$2.3 trillion infrastructure plan on Thursday, deputizing a five-member "jobs Cabinet" to help in the effort. But the enormity of his task was clear as Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's vowed to oppose the plan "every step of the way."

Speaking in Kentucky, McConnell said he personally likes Biden and they've been friends a long time. But the president will get no cooperation from the GOP, which objects to the corporate tax increases in the plan and says they would hurt America's ability to compete in a global economy.

"We have some big philosophical differences, and that's going to make it more and more difficult for us to reach bipartisan agreements," the Republican leader said.

White House chief of staff Ron Klain said the key to any outreach is that the proposal's ideas are already popular. Americans want smooth roads, safe

bridges, reliable public transit, electric vehicles, drinkable water, new schools and investments in manufacturing, among the plan's many components, he said.

"We kind of think it's just right," Klain said in a televised interview with the news organization Politico. "But we're happy to have a conversation with people, less about the price tag, more about what are the elements that should be in the plan that people think are missing."

Biden told his Cabinet at its first meeting that he is enlisting several of them to help with the push: Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Marcia Fudge, Labor Secretary Marty Walsh and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

"Working with my team here at the White House, each Cabinet member will represent me in dealings with Congress, engage the public in selling the plan and help organize the details as we refine it and move forward," Biden said.

Sergeant: Cops could have ended Floyd hold

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — A Minneapolis police supervisory sergeant who was on duty the night George Floyd died testified that he believes the officers who restrained Floyd could have ended it after he stopped resisting.

David Pleoger testified Thursday at the trial of since-fired officer Derek Chauvin, who is charged with murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death. He noted that officers are trained to roll people on their side to help with their breathing after they have been restrained in the prone position.

"When Mr. Floyd was no longer offering up any resistance to the officers, they could have ended the restraint," Pleoger said.

"And that was after he was handcuffed and on the ground and no longer resistant?" prosecutor Steve Schleicher asked.

"Correct," replied Pleoger, who's now retired.

Chauvin, 45 and white, is accused of kill-

ing Floyd by pinning his knee on the 46-year-old Black man's neck for 9 minutes, 29 seconds, as he lay face-down in handcuffs.

His death triggered large protests around the U.S., scattered violence and widespread soul-searching over racism and police brutality. The most serious charge against Chauvin carries up to 40 years in prison.

On Friday, Minneapolis police Sgt. Jon Edwards, the overnight supervisor the night Floyd died, said he secured the scene at the request of Pleoger, who was still at the hospital with Floyd. Edwards said Pleoger told him the encounter had the potential to become a "critical incident," which could mean someone died or was injured and might later die.

Edwards, who was not Chauvin's supervisor, said he didn't have details about what happened at that time but arrived to find two of the officers involved in Floyd's arrest — Thomas Lane and J. Kueng — still at the

intersection, and had them put up crime scene tape.

He called other officers to the scene and instructed them to go door to door looking for possible witnesses. Edwards learned later that Floyd had died, after homicide investigators arrived.

The defense has argued that Chauvin did what he was trained to do when he encountered Floyd last May and that Floyd's death was caused by drugs, his underlying health conditions and his own adrenaline. An autopsy found fentanyl and methamphetamine in his system.

Floyd's girlfriend Courtney Ross said she and Floyd struggled with addiction throughout their relationship — testimony that could help prosecutors blunt the argument that drugs killed Floyd. Medical experts have said that while the level of fentanyl in his system could be fatal, people who use the drug regularly can develop a tolerance.

GOP official apologizes for calling Dems 'witches'

Associated Press

DETROIT — Michigan Republican Chairman Ron Weiser has apologized for comments calling the three highest-ranking elected female leaders in the state "witches" who should be "ready for the burning at the stake."

The comments Weiser made during an event Thursday in Oakland County about Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, Attorney General Dana Nessel and Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson came in addition to others raising the idea of "assassination" in reference to U.S. Reps. Fred Upton and Peter Meijer, two Republicans who voted in favor of impeaching former President Donald Trump.

"In an increasingly vitriolic political environment, we should all do better to treat each other with respect, myself included. I fell short of that the other night," Weiser said in a statement Saturday.

"I apologize to those I offended for the flippant analogy about three women who are elected officials and for the off-hand comments about two other leaders. I have never advocated for violence and never will. While I will always fight for the people and policies I believe in, I pledge to be part of a respectful political dialogue going forward," Weiser said.

Whitmer spokesman Bobby Leddy said while Weiser "had an opportunity to retract his remarks and publicly apologize, he instead doubled down on the same repulsive and divisive rhetoric that so many Michiganders are tired of hearing."

Jake Rollow, a spokesman for Benson, said "the people of Michigan deserve more than a half-apology when the leader of one of our two major political parties suggests violence over democracy."

Driver shot after car rams Capitol barricade

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A car rammed a barricade outside the U.S. Capitol on Friday afternoon, injuring two Capitol Police officers and leading to the driver being shot, two law enforcement officials told The Associated Press.

At least one officer was in serious condition, while the driver was in critical condition.

The crash and shooting happened at a checkpoint near the Capitol as Congress is on recess. It comes as the Washington region remains on edge nearly three months after a mob of armed insurrectionists stormed the Capitol as Congress was voting to certify Joe Biden's presidential win.

Capitol Police say that someone "rammed a vehicle into two USCP officers" and that a suspect was taken into custody. At least one of the officers was seriously injured, the officials said.

The law enforcement officials told the AP that the suspect was shot and was being taken to the hospital in critical condition. One of the officers who was injured was taken by police car to the hospital; the other was being transported by emergency medical crews, the officials said.

The officials could not discuss the matter publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

The U.S. Capitol complex was placed on lockdown after the shooting and staff were told they could not enter or exit buildings.

The incident occurred about 100 yards from the entrance of the building on the Senate side of the Capitol.

Fencing that prevented vehicular traffic near that area was recently removed as the Capitol has started to open up after the Jan. 6 riots.

Mo. governor won't require vaccine passports

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Gov. Mike Parson on Thursday said he won't require so-called vaccine passports in Missouri but is comfortable with private companies adopting them.

Vaccine passports, also known as health certificates or travel passes, are documents that show a traveler has been vaccinated against COVID-19 or recently tested negative for the coronavirus.

"If the private sector wants to do that, I'm fine with that," Parson told reporters. "As far as the state goes, we won't mandate vaccine passports."

Technology companies and travel-related trade groups are developing and testing various versions of vaccine passports to encourage travel.

Some Republican state senators in Missouri on Wednesday railed against the concept as unduly restricting freedom of travel, proposing that the state preemptively ban vaccine passports.

The state health department on Thursday reported another 2,145 confirmed COVID-19 cases between March 23 and March 29, which is about 306 new cases a day on average. That's roughly the same number of cases as the week before.

Tennessee

NASHVILLE — One million Tennesseans have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, the state's Department of Health announced Thursday.

According to a news release, roughly 22% of the state's approximate 7 million population has received at least one dose.

"We celebrate this milestone and expect to see this number increase as vaccine is more widely available," said Health Commissioner Lisa Piercey in a statement. "The hard work and dedication of our local health departments and statewide vaccine partners have helped us reach this significant moment in

our fight against COVID-19."

The department says more than half of Tennesseans over the age of 60 have received a first dose, and nearly two-thirds of those over the age of 70 have received their initial dose. The agency also noted that vaccinations among Tennessee's Black and Hispanic populations have also increased.

Tennessee is expanding COVID-19 eligibility to people aged 16 and older on April 5.

Arizona

PHOENIX — With the number of COVID-19 cases continuing to decline around Arizona, Gov. Doug Ducey on Thursday eased restrictions on elective surgeries and long-term care facilities.

"At the beginning of the pandemic, we took necessary measures to protect vulnerable populations and all Arizonans. Now the vaccine is out far and wide, and we have much better knowledge of the virus than we did before," Ducey said in a statement.

In March 2020, Ducey issued an executive order that temporarily halted nonessential or elective surgeries. A month later, he issued an order resuming elective surgeries if certain criteria were met.

Ducey's order Thursday provides hospitals with the flexibility to conduct elective surgeries.

He said the state acted on the best available science and federal recommendations to institute rules in April 2020 to protect vulnerable residents of long-term care facilities.

Wisconsin

MADISON — A conservative law firm wants state corrections officials to relax COVID-19 safety protocols and allow volunteer ministers to visit prison inmates.

The Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty sent a letter Thursday to Department of Corrections Secretary Kevin Carr complaining about the no-vis-

itor policy the department adopted in March 2020 as the pandemic was taking hold. The firm argued that the policy bars volunteer ministers from visiting inmates, amounting to a violation of state law that gives clergy the right to visit inmates at least weekly and is likely unconstitutional.

The firm demands the department restore the inmates' rights or face a lawsuit.

Texas

SAN ANTONIO — San Antonio has become the last major Texas city to establish a sign-up portal for scheduling COVID-19 vaccinations.

City Council voted on Wednesday to set up the portal, allowing residents to be notified when vaccination appointments become available.

The San Antonio Express-News reported this is a capability that other Texas cities such as Austin, Houston and Dallas, have had for months. The online portal was delayed in San Antonio as the city's top health officials resisted the idea of a registry, believing it would do little to ease people's anxiety about obtaining an appointment, given the limited supply of vaccine.

Minnesota

MINNEAPOLIS — Minnesota exceeded more than 2,000 daily cases of the coronavirus on Thursday for the first time in months as cases in recent weeks continue to trend upward.

The Minnesota Department of Health reported 2,140 new cases and 12 more people have died due to the coronavirus, putting the state's totals at 521,667 cases and 6,860 deaths since the start of the pandemic. More than 400 patients are hospitalized due to COVID-19, including 105 in intensive care.

State health officials said case growth is being driven by more contagious mutations of the coronavirus, specifically a variant

that was first detected in the United Kingdom in January. Officials expressed concern over growth in cases and hospitalizations due to transmission of the variant within communities across the state as the test positivity rate climbed over the caution threshold of 5% earlier this week.

Massachusetts

BOSTON — The state is planning to launch a new strategy to bring COVID-19 vaccine shots to some of the state's hardest hit areas.

Beginning next week and ramping up over time, mobile and pop-up clinics will take to the streets of Chelsea, Revere, Boston, Fall River and New Bedford.

Vaccine doses will be picked up by mobile vaccination teams at the Hynes Convention Center — one of the state's mass vaccination sites — and then distributed and administered in the communities.

Most of the mobile units and pop-up clinics will be set up in city parks, parking lots, and other community locations identified by the municipalities as easy to access for community members.

Vermont

The state of Vermont is expecting to expand eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine to out-of-state college students and second homeowners on April 30 if there is an adequate supply of vaccines.

Gov. Phil Scott announced the policy change Wednesday after he initially said vaccines in the state would be reserved for residents.

For the purposes of being vaccinated, Vermont defines residents as people who have lived there for six months, including college students who plan to spend the summer in the state.

On April 19, Vermont is expanding vaccinations to everyone over 16.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman critical after jumping from patrol car

WA VANCOUVER — A woman who jumped out of the backseat of a moving sheriff's patrol car on Interstate 5 in southwestern Washington is in critical condition.

A spokesman for the Washington State Patrol said Tuesday that Sara Gottwig-Carr was arrested Monday on suspicion of fourth-degree assault, domestic violence and interfering with a 911 call, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported.

The Clark County Sheriff's Office said while she was handcuffed in the back of a deputy's car, Gottwig-Carr unfastened her seat belt and jumped out of the passenger side window while the car was traveling at "freeway speeds" in Vancouver.

The deputy driving the car, identified as Billy Childers, was placed on critical incident leave. The Washington State Patrol will lead an investigation into what happened.

Woman subdues attacking fox with bat

ME BRUNSWICK — A Maine woman escaped injury after a fox attacked her outside her home in Brunswick.

Kimberly Bashant was on her deck smoking when the animal came up the stairs and bit her leg, the Times Record reported.

Bashant says she managed to knock the fox unconscious with a baseball bat before it was able to break the skin on her leg.

Bashant's neighbors killed the animal after they heard her

yelling and came over to help, according to Cmdr. Paul Hansen.

Hansen said that no one could have been exposed to rabies since the fox didn't break skin so the animal will not be tested.

"I've always kept a bat out there by my chair just in case an animal or someone came up and attacked me," Bashant said. "I never thought it would actually happen."

Dog show won't have spectators due to virus

NY NEW YORK — America's top dogs won't have their pack of fans on hand at this year's Westminster Kennel Club dog show.

The club announced that spectators and vendors won't be allowed this year because of coronavirus limitations. No tickets will be sold.

It's the latest in a series of pandemic shakeups to the nation's most prestigious canine competition. It's been moved from its longtime February date to June 12-13, and from New York City's Hudson River piers and Madison Square Garden to an outdoor setting at a riverfront estate in suburban Tarrytown, about 25 miles north of Manhattan.

Firefighter put on leave after spraying activist

OH AKRON — An Akron firefighter who used a fire hose to spray an activist who was filming him as he cleaned a sidewalk after a stabbing has been put on administrative leave while the matter is investigated, fire officials said.

It's not clear why the firefighter sprayed the activist, who apparently wasn't injured in the incident. Their names have not been released.

City Fire Chief Clarence Tucker told City Council members that he was "truly appalled" after seeing the video, the Akron Beacon Journal reported.

Police: Teens stole holy water from church

NE LINCOLN — A group of three teenagers was caught on video stealing a vessel of holy water from a Catholic church in Lincoln last weekend.

Lincoln Police Officer Erin Spilker said the thieves took the vat of holy water and the tool used to sprinkle holy water during a Mass in the gym of St. Michael Catholic Church in southeast Lincoln.

Officials estimate the stolen items were worth \$200.

Police hope to use the video of the theft to identify the juveniles who were involved.

Woman says she set fires because of snakes

LA LEESVILLE — A Louisiana woman accused of setting fires told investigators she and her boyfriend were trying to get rid of snakes, the state Department of Agriculture and Forestry says.

Robert Lee Ramirez, 34, of Leesville, faces two counts of arson and remained at large, department spokesman Veronica Mosgrove said in an email.

Laura Ashley Lee, 34, also of Leesville, was released on \$3,500 bond after being arrested

March 18 on one count of arson, a news release said.

The two are boyfriend and girlfriend, Mosgrove said in an email.

According to the statement, investigators say Ramirez set multiple fires along the road and in woods owned by others around their home.

Man gets pistol from car to thwart robbery

AK FAIRBANKS — A Fairbanks man stopped an attempted robbery at a gas station by pointing his gun at the suspect and holding him until law enforcement arrived.

Nick Moore said he was standing in line at a Holiday store with his breakfast and energy drink when a teen walked in with a knife.

"I kind of backed up a little bit to see what he was going to do, but I kind of already had an inkling in my mind of what was going to happen," Moore told Fairbanks television station KTVF.

His suspicion turned out to be correct; the teen told employees he was robbing the store.

"I put my stuff on the counter, snuck out the door, ran to my car, grabbed my pistol and came back up to the door," Moore said. "He just turned to look at me. I racked my slide on my pistol and pointed it at him and he put his hands up."

Moore had the teen put down the knife and lay face-down on the floor until Alaska State Troopers arrived. Officers arrested the unidentified teen, who faces attempted robbery and assault charges.

Associated Press

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Opening day sees fans back in stands

Associated Press

Miguel Cabrera took a trot, eventually, in the snow at Comerica Park. Mookie Betts started the champion Los Angeles Dodgers with a hit at Coors Field. And the Bleacher Creatures did their thing at Yankee Stadium.

All-Stars on the diamond for opening day, fans in the socially distanced stands eager to cheer them.

“Just having those smells hit you, walking in and having that experience back, it’s invigorating,” Tonia Smith of Sussex, Wis., said Thursday before Milwaukee hosted Minnesota.

Along with the hits, runs and errors, there was a stark reminder of what baseball went through last year.

The New York Mets’ game in Washington — a prime pitching matchup between Jacob deGrom and Max Scherzer — was

postponed because of a COVID-19 outbreak. Nationals general manager Mike Rizzo later said three players had tested positive for the virus and a fourth was considered a “likely positive.”

“It’s one of those things that brings it to light that we’re not through it yet,” Atlanta manager Brian Snitker said. “We’re still fighting this. We have to tend to business and not let up. It’s just a reminder that this thing is still out there and real.”

45 games were postponed because of the coronavirus last season during the shortened, 60-game schedule, when fans weren’t allowed. No games were lost in spring training this year, but that streak didn’t last long.

At Fenway Park, the opener between the Boston Red Sox and Baltimore was called because rain was in the forecast.

They started up Friday instead.

There were flurries in Cincinnati, where St. Louis newcomer Nolan Arenado singled during a six-run burst in the first inning during of an 11-6 win. It was 36 degrees at Wrigley Field as heralded rookie Ke’Bryan Hayes homered to help Pittsburgh beat the Chicago Cubs 5-3.

And the field looked better suited for snowballs than baseballs in Detroit where it was 32 degrees when Cabrera connected for the first home run of the new MLB season and the 488th of his career. The flakes were coming down so hard, Cabrera couldn’t tell if the ball left the park, and he slid into second base, just in case.

“It was almost kind of laughable for everybody that we were playing baseball in an environment like that,” new Tigers manager AJ Hinch said after a 3-2 win over Cleveland. “It’s al-

ways fun on opening day to take those mental snapshots and enjoy the moment.”

The crowd varied at each park. There were 10,850 fans at Yankee Stadium, 20% of capacity. Fans had to show proof of complete vaccination at least two weeks earlier or a recent negative virus test, and masks were required.

In the Bronx, the Bleacher Creatures did their Roll Call in the right-field seats and the PA announcer called out “welcome back to Yankee Stadium!”

The whole scene caught Blue Jays rookie reliever Julian Merryweather a bit off-guard.

“It was definitely weird,” Merryweather said after earning a save in a 3-2, 10-inning win. “I asked a few people: What are all these people doing here? Who are these people? But it was great to have fans again.”

Segura’s single lifts Phillies over Braves in 10th

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Jean Segura hit an RBI single with two outs in the 10th inning to lift the Philadelphia Phillies over the Atlanta Braves 3-2 in their season opener Thursday.

After Nate Jones (0-1) intentionally walked Didi Gregorius, Segura hit a bouncer down the third-base line to score Bryce Harper, who began the inning as the automatic runner at second base and advanced to third on a grounder.

In the top of the 10th, center fielder Roman Quinn made a perfect throw to the plate to retire Ozzie Albies, who was trying to score on Marcell Ozuna’s fly ball. Catcher J.T. Realmuto caught the ball and slid in front of the plate in one slick motion, successfully blocking Albies’ path.

Astros 8, Athletics 1: Zack Greinke pitched six shutout innings, Michael Brantley and Alex Bregman homered back-to-back in the eighth, and Houston hushed an unwelcoming Oakland crowd in beating the reigning AL West champions.

Blue Jays 3, Yankees 2 (10): Randal Grichuk led off the 10th with an RBI double and visiting Toronto took advantage of the sec-

ond year of starting extra innings with a runner on second to beat New York.

Rockies 8, Dodgers 5: On an afternoon Cody Bellinger had a homer negated due to a baserunning mistake, host Colorado played plenty of small ball to beat the defending World Series champions, scoring runs courtesy of a squeeze play, two wild pitches, a groundout, an error and three RBI singles.

Padres 8, Diamondbacks 7: Eric Hosmer had a homer among his three hits and drove in three runs, newcomer Victor Caratini also had three RBIs and San Diego gave up four long balls in the fifth inning to blow a five-run lead before beating visiting Arizona to open one of the most anticipated seasons in franchise history.

Brewers 6, Twins 5 (10): Lorenzo Cain scored the winning run in the 10th after Travis Shaw sparked a ninth-inning comeback and host Milwaukee beat Minnesota.

Royals 14, Rangers 10: Michael A. Taylor homered, drove in three runs and threw out two players at the plate from center field, leading Kansas City past visiting Texas in a wild season opener.

Pirates 5, Cubs 3: Ke’Bryan Hayes hit a two-run homer and Pittsburgh’s relievers

dominated in a two-hitter on a chilly opening day in Chicago.

Cardinals 11, Reds 6: Paul Goldschmidt and newcomer Nolan Arenado combined for six hits in a boosted St. Louis lineup, roughing up Luis Castillo for six runs in the first inning to beat host Cincinnati.

Rays 1, Marlins 0: Austin Meadows’ home run with two outs in the eighth inning was all visiting Tampa Bay needed, and the reigning AL champions started their season with a win over Miami.

Tigers 3, Indians 2: Miguel Cabrera homered through the snow in his first at-bat of the season, then added a sparkling play at first base to lift Detroit over visiting Cleveland.

Angels 4, White Sox 3: At Anaheim, Calif., Mike Trout delivered the tying single and Shohei Ohtani scored the go-ahead run on Albert Pujols’ groundout in the eighth inning, leading Los Angeles’ rally to a victory over Chicago.

Mariners 8, Giants 7 (10): Jake Fraley walked with the bases loaded in the 10th inning to score Evan White with the winning run, and Seattle rallied from a five-run deficit to beat visiting San Francisco.

Baylor, Houston programs on rebound

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The redemption journeys involving Houston coach Kelvin Sampson and the Baylor program he faces at the Final Four on Saturday have roots in far-from-comforting places — courtrooms, prison cells, the NCAA compliance office.

They are vastly different tales, one about a coach, Sampson, kicked out of the sport and labeled a serial cheater, the other about the near-destruction of a program tainted by murder, rule-breaking and a cover-up.

But they are similar, too, in how much work the protagonists were willing to take on to pick up the pieces and start over. The latest reward is this trip to the Final Four, a destination that seemed nothing short of fantastical when these journeys began.

“I felt led to come here,” Baylor coach Scott Drew said when recounting his decision to take over a program that had sunk lower than low when he became coach in 2003. “I really believed in the vision of the school, from the president and the adminis-

trators during that time and what they wanted Baylor to continue to grow and become.”

It was hard to see it then.

The Baylor scandal began in the wake of the 2003 murder of player Patrick Dennehy, who was found shot and buried in a gravel pit in Waco, Texas. A teammate, Carlos Dotson, eventually pleaded guilty to the murder.

In the aftermath, an NCAA investigation uncovered a sordid laundry list of transgressions, punctuated by an investigation into improper payments to Dennehy, and then coach Dave Bliss’s made-up story of Dennehy really having earned the money by dealing drugs.

The NCAA stripped away scholarships, made Baylor skip its non-conference schedule for a season and put it on probation through 2010. Four players left, and when Drew arrived in 2003 to pick up the pieces, he barely had a program: seven scholarship players and three walk-ons were all that were left.

Among the believers was Sampson, who knew Drew to be an up-and-comer after he took

over for his father, Homer, for a year at Valparaiso.

“These days, Baylor was lucky to get a coach as good as Drew,” Sampson said after the hiring while he was nearby, reaching a peak at Oklahoma.

Sampson took the Sooners to the Final Four in 2002 and back to the Elite Eight a year later.

But he ran into a multitude of NCAA problems, both at Oklahoma, then at his next job with Indiana. Most centered around hundreds of impermissible phone calls to recruits. By 2008, Indiana was on probation and Sampson had been kicked out of the game, handed a “show-cause” penalty from the NCAA that would bar him for five years.

Many of the lines Sampson stepped over then would not be considered NCAA violations today. Ousted from the college ranks, he essentially went on a rehab tour for six years as an assistant coach in the NBA. He didn’t envision returning until the Cougars — a team with a colorful history punctuated by the “Phi Slama Jama” years in the ’80s but not much in the pre-

sent — came calling in 2014.

“I was angry after Indiana,” Sampson said in a 2019 interview with *The Washington Post*. “I was angry at myself. I blamed myself. I was mad about how it all went down. I had a lot of emotions, but I also had a wife and a family. I had to take care of my family. That was my No. 1 goal. I’ve always said this to them and to a lot of people: You’re not a loser in anything until you quit. Don’t quit.”

Now, Sampson finds himself back on college basketball’s biggest stage, 19 years after his last visit. He is living proof that if you work hard and know your job inside and out, there is almost always a second chance looming somewhere.

He will be seeking a title game berth just an hour’s drive up the highway from the scene of his lowest moments at Indiana. He revived his own career and, in doing so, built Houston back from the ground up. When Sampson took over, the once-proud program had made one NCAA Tournament appearance over the previous 22 seasons.

AP selects Garza as college basketball player of year

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Luka Garza knew what everyone expected before returning for a final run as Iowa’s unquestioned star.

Pressure? Garza felt it, all right, enough to know his mental health required the same attention as his game.

“I needed meditation to lean on, to be able to mainly just go out there and be myself and not worry about anything else,” Garza said.

That best explains why the 6-foot-11, 265-pound senior is *The Associated Press* men’s college basketball national player of the year after finishing second last season. He was the runaway

choice for the award announced Thursday, receiving 50 of 63 votes from AP Top 25 voters.

Ayo Dosunmu, who led Illinois to the Big Ten Tournament title and a No. 1 NCAA seed, was second with six votes, followed by Oklahoma State freshman Cade Cunningham with three. Gonzaga’s Corey Kispert and Baylor’s Jared Butler each earned two votes.

Garza ranked second nationally by averaging 24.1 points with 8.7 rebounds.

Garza led the Hawkeyes to a No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament, then accounted for nearly half their points (36 of 80) in a second-round upset loss to Ore-

gon. The native of Washington, D.C., finished as the career scoring leader (2,306) at Iowa, which will retire his No. 55 jersey.

In other college basketball news:

■ Michigan coach Juwan Howard was named *The Associated Press* men’s college basketball coach of the year on Thursday, receiving 35 of 63 votes from a national media panel. Gonzaga’s Mark Few was second with 16 votes, and Baylor’s Scott Drew and Alabama’s Nate Oats each received five.

The 48-year-old Howard returned to coach his alma mater after John Beilein left for the NBA in 2019. He led the Wolve-

rines to 19 wins before the 2019-20 season was canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic and took another, bigger step this season.

The Wolverines reached as high as No. 2 in the AP Top 25 and finished No. 4 after a 19-3 regular season. Michigan lost starting guard Isaiah Livers to a foot injury during the Big Ten Tournament and lost to Ohio State in the semifinals, but still had a good enough résumé to earn a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

The Wolverines reached the Elite Eight, but fell just short of their second Final Four the past three NCAA Tournaments with a 51-49 loss to UCLA.

Double OT: Young, Hawks top Spurs

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Clint Capela had 28 points and 17 rebounds, Trae Young had 28 points and 12 assists, and the Atlanta Hawks overcame two late meltdowns to beat the San Antonio Spurs 134-129 in double overtime Thursday night.

Young had a driving floater roll off the rim as regulation ended. Even though he was exhausted, Young dug a little deeper to make sure he didn't let the Hawks down again.

"Very personal," Young said of the miss. "I feel I should have hit that floater and won the game. I definitely feel I let the team down on that one."

He responded by scoring 15 points in the overtime periods as Atlanta snapped a two-game skid. Young said his knee was sore in the first half, but he was fine after keeping it warm following halftime.

Bogdan Bogdanovic added 28 points while shooting 4-for-5

on three-pointers.

San Antonio veteran DeMar DeRozan had 36 points and nine assists, and Derrick White had a career-high seven three-pointers en route to 29 points.

DeRozan tied it at 110 with 2.7 seconds remaining with a short jumper before Young's miss.

76ers 114, Cavaliers 94: Shake Milton scored 27 points, Dwight Howard had 18 points and 15 rebounds, and visiting Philadelphia finished a six-game road trip without injured star center Joel Embiid by beating Cleveland.

The Sixers, who were beaten twice by the Cavs earlier this season, went 4-2 on their trip as they wait for Embiid to get back from a knee injury.

Nuggets 101, Clippers 94: Jamal Murray scored 23 points and visiting Denver led all the way in beating Los Angeles for its fourth straight victory.

The Nuggets dominated the

first three quarters on a night when Nikola Jokic didn't reach double figures until hitting a three-pointer with 5:20 left in the game. He finished with 14 points, seven rebounds and seven assists.

Heat 116, Warriors 109: Jimmy Butler scored 22 points, Duncan Robinson scored 21 and host Miami held off Golden State to win its third straight outing and move back over the .500 mark at 25-24.

Tyler Herro scored 20 points, Bam Adebayo had 19, Trevor Ariza added 10 and Andre Iguodala — the 2015 NBA Finals MVP for Golden State — had 10 in the fourth quarter to help seal the win against his former club.

Nets 111, Hornets 89: Jeff Green outscored visiting Charlotte by himself in Brooklyn's overpowering first quarter before finishing with 21 points, and his team got a strong debut from LaMarcus Aldridge in a

route.

Aldridge started at center and had 11 points, nine rebounds and six assists, looking like a good fit for a Nets team that won for the 20th time in its last 23 games. They signed him last month after he reached a buyout agreement with San Antonio.

Magic 115, Pelicans 110 (OT): Terrence Ross hit two key jumpers late in overtime, Wendell Carter III scored 21 points and visiting Orlando beat short-handed New Orleans.

The Pelicans played without Zion Williamson, Brandon Ingram and Lonzo Ball.

Pistons 120, Wizards 91: Josh Jackson scored 19 of his season-high 31 points in the first half and host Detroit went on to rout Washington.

The Pistons overcame Russell Westbrook's 18th triple-double of the season. Westbrook finished with 16 points, 12 assists and 11 rebounds.

Pittsburgh wins in Boston for first time since 2014

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Mike Matheson scored a highlight-reel goal after a lengthy rush, and the surging Penguins beat the Bruins 4-1 Thursday night for Pittsburgh's first win in Boston in more than six years.

Zach Aston-Reese, Jason Zucker and Jake Guentzel also scored for the Penguins, who won their fifth straight game and improved to 11-2-1 in their last 14. Casey DeSmith stopped 30 shots. It was Pittsburgh's first win in Boston since an overtime win on Nov. 24, 2014, ending a span of 10 games (0-8-2).

The Bruins had gone 12-0-1 in their last 13 games in TD Garden against the Penguins.

Islanders 8, Capitals 4: Mathew Barzal had three goals and two assists, Jordan Eberle scored twice, and host New York

beat Washington.

Brock Nelson, Casey Cizikas and Josh Bailey also scored to help the Islanders improve to 14-1-2 at home and move back into a tie with Washington and Pittsburgh atop the East Division with 50 points. The Capitals have a game in hand on both the Islanders and Penguins.

Rangers 3, Sabres 2 (OT): Mika Zibanejad one-timed in Artemi Panarin's pass 4:32 into overtime, and visiting New York overcame giving up a late goal to beat Buffalo.

Filip Chytil and Colin Blackwell also scored and Igor Shesterkin stopped 21 shots in a game New York persevered after Buffalo's Tage Thompson forced overtime by scoring with 4 seconds left.

Canadiens 4, Senators 1: Jake Allen made 22 saves, Phil-

lip Danault and Brendan Gallagher each had a goal and an assist, and visiting Montreal won its third straight.

Paul Byron and Corey Perry provided the rest of the offense for Montreal.

Panthers 3, Red Wings 2 (OT): Alex Wennberg scored 1:25 into overtime to lift host Florida.

Frank Vatrano had a goal and an assist and Noel Acciari also scored for the Panthers.

Stars 4, Predators 1: Anton Khudobin made 21 saves to lead visiting Dallas past Nashville.

Esa Lindell, Jason Robertson, Jamie Benn and Miro Heiskanen scored for Dallas.

Lightning 3, Blue Jackets 2: Brayden Point scored twice, including the third-period winner, and host Tampa Bay rallied past Columbus.

Ross Colton and Point scored 1:06 apart in the third period to erase a one-goal deficit and snap a three-game losing streak for the Lightning.

Hurricanes 4, Blackhawks 3: Jesper Fast scored with 29 seconds remaining in regulation, Warren Foegele added two goals, and visiting Carolina beat Chicago.

Fast beat goaltender Kevin Lankinen from 15 feet, rebounding Vincent Trochek's drive from the right side for the winner in the second game in three nights between the teams.

Wild 3, Golden Knights 2 (SO): Kevin Fiala scored in the shootout and visiting Minnesota beat Vegas.

Fiala scored in the second round of the tiebreaker and Cam Talbot stopped Alex Tuch on the Golden Knights' final attempt.