

## Trump surrenders to authorities in NY

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — Former President Donald Trump surrendered to authorities Tuesday at a Manhattan courthouse ahead of his arraignment on criminal charges stemming from a hush money payment to a porn actor during his 2016 campaign.

Trump himself described the experience as “SURREAL” as he traveled from Trump Tower to a lower Manhattan courtroom, where he was to face a judge as the first former president in American history to be criminally prosecuted.

A stone-faced Trump entered the courtroom shortly before 2:30 p.m. without saying anything.

The arraignment, though procedural in nature, amounts to a remarkable reckoning for Trump after years of investigations into his personal, business and political dealings. The

case is unfolding against the backdrop not only of his third campaign for the White House, but also against other investigations in Washington and Atlanta that might yet produce even more charges.

The booking and appearance before Judge Juan Merchan was expected to be brief as Trump learns for the first time the charges against him. Trump will plead not guilty, according to his lawyers, and is expected to enter the plea himself, as is standard in the court.

Trump, who was impeached twice by the U.S. House but was never convicted in the U.S. Senate, is the first former president to face criminal charges. The nation’s 45th commander in chief was escorted from Trump Tower to the courthouse by the Secret Service and may have his mug shot taken.

“He is strong and ready to go,” Trump lawyer Joe Tacopina told The Associated Press.

Earlier, Tacopina said in a TV interview that the former president wouldn’t plead guilty to lesser charges, even if it might resolve the case. He also said he didn’t think the case would make it to a jury.

Trump is scheduled to return to his home in Florida on Tuesday evening to give remarks.

A conviction would not prevent Trump from running for or winning the presidency in 2024.

The indictment contains multiple charges of falsifying business records, including at least one felony offense, two people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press last week.

The investigation is scrutinizing six-figure payments made to porn actor Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal. Both have said they had sexual encounters with Trump.

## NATO doubles land border with Russia as Finland joins

**By JOHN VANDIVER**

*Stars and Stripes*

NATO’s eastern flank grew stronger Tuesday as Finland became the alliance’s 31st member, adding military muscle in the Arctic region, where allies said they are now better positioned to check any further Russian aggression.

The accession of Finland, which possesses one of the largest artillery arsenals in Europe and a conscription ground force capable of fielding up to 1 million reservist troops in a crisis, upended decades of military nonalignment for the Nordic state.

“I am tempted to say this is maybe the one thing we can thank Mr. Putin for because he once again precipitated something he claims to want to prevent,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday at NATO headquarters in Brussels, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Russia lashed out after the formal induction.

“The Kremlin believes that this is yet another escalation and that NATO’s expansion is posing a threat to our security and the interests of the Russian Federation,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian reporters Tuesday. “We will take countermeasures to ensure our own security, both tactically and strategically.”

For NATO, Finland’s entry builds on a relationship that has grown closer over many years.

It was Russia’s invasion of Ukraine last year that became the impetus for Helsinki to join NATO, which it resisted doing throughout the Cold War.

Finnish President Sauli Niinisto told those gathered at alliance headquarters that it was a “historic day” for his country, which he said would add to security in Europe.

Putin’s repeated threats and warnings about the perils of joining NATO were part of the rationale for seeking out membership, he said.

“Russia tried to create this fear,” Niinisto said.

For the Kremlin, Finland’s alliance membership amounts to a strategic blow, since it means NATO just more than doubled its land border with Russia.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Putin sought to “slam NATO’s door shut” with his war in Ukraine.

But instead of less NATO on his border, Putin now has more, Stoltenberg said.

“He is getting more troop(s), more readiness, more forces, land, sea and air in the eastern part of the alliance,” Stoltenberg said.

Up next for NATO is getting Sweden, which aimed to enter the alliance simultaneously with Fin-

land, into the fold. So far, Sweden’s NATO ambitions have been stymied by Turkish opposition.

Stoltenberg said efforts are ongoing to resolve the dispute between Sweden and Turkey. Ankara’s opposition revolves around its position that Sweden has given sanctuary to people it has said are Kurdish militants.

While Finland’s accession gives a military boost to the alliance, it’s not likely to cause a dramatic shift in day-to-day military activities, officials said.

Niinisto said collaboration with NATO has increased year after year.

“The change is not that radical. ... In daily life I do not believe people (will) see very many changes,” he said.

But he said Finns themselves will feel more secure within the alliance.

“That is most important for us,” Niinisto said.

# 2 Navy pilots picked for historic mission to moon

By **DOUG G. WARE**  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Three of the astronauts chosen to fly to the moon next year aboard Artemis II are former military pilots, and two were Navy aviators who have decades of collective flying experience.

NASA on Monday announced the Artemis II crew at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. The four-person crew includes commander Gregory Reid Wiseman, pilot Victor Jerome Glover, mission specialist Christina Koch and mission specialist and former Canadian air force pilot Jeremy Roger Hansen.

Wiseman, 47, started flying in the Navy in 1999 and piloted multiple aircraft, including the F-14 Tomcat and F/A-18 Super Hornet. He also later became a test pilot and left the Navy as a captain.

"Following his initial training, Reid was assigned to Fighter Squadron 31 ... and made two deployments to the Middle East, supporting Operations Southern Watch, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom," NASA said of Wiseman's military service. "He was at sea when he was selected for astronaut training."

Wiseman joined NASA in 2009 as part of the agency's 20th astronaut group. Glover was part of the 21st group four years later.

Glover, 46, earned his wings in 2001 and

also flew the F/A-18 Super Hornet, along with dozens of other aircraft. He flew in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in the mid-2000s and later graduated from U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School as a Navy exchange pilot. He left the service as a captain.

"During the one-year experimental test piloting course, he flew more than 30 aircraft in the U.S. and Italy," NASA said of Glover's military background. "Glover accumulated 3,000 flight hours in more than 40 aircraft, over 400 carrier arrested landings and 24 combat missions."

Following his selection on Monday, Glover — who will be the first Black man to leave low-Earth orbit and circle the moon — tweeted a photo that showed the flag patches on each crew member's flight suit, three American flags and one Canadian.

Collectively, Glover and Wiseman have spent more than 330 days in space.

The main function of Artemis II is to test the Space Launch System and Orion spacecraft with a human crew, and the mission will take Wiseman, Glover, Koch and Hansen for a "flyby" around the moon before they return to Earth. The crew, who will spend 10 days in space, is scheduled to launch in late 2024. Artemis III, the first human landing on the moon since 1972, is scheduled for late 2025.

## DOD: no sign of nuclear testing from N. Korea

By **DAVID CHOI**  
*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. military "hasn't seen any indications" of an imminent nuclear weapons test by North Korea, though it continues to monitor the communist regime's testing facilities, a Pentagon spokeswoman said Monday.

"We continue to assess and work with our allies and partners in the region," deputy press secretary Sabrina Singh told reporters in Washington, D.C. "Our goal and our allies' goal is the full denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

For the past year, U.S. and South Korean intelligence officials have warned that North Korea has fully prepared to conduct its seventh nuclear test. The communist regime last detonated what it claimed was a hydrogen device on Sept. 3, 2017.

The director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Army Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier, told reporters on March 22 that North Korea did not appear to be conducting a nuclear test soon.

"There are a bunch of different factors that play into [North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's] decision calculus on that," he said. "And there are a bunch of things that we watch in terms of indications and warning. Those two haven't aligned."

North Korea's state-run Korean Central News Agency released images on March 28 of what it described as new Hwasan-31 nuclear warheads.

## Spy balloon didn't collect data satellites couldn't get

By **DOUG G. WARE**  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Chinese surveillance balloon that hovered over the United States two months ago might have picked up some intelligence from sensitive military sites, but it would be nothing more valuable than what Beijing could already collect with its satellites, the Pentagon said Monday.

"We are still doing an assessment of what, exactly, the intel was that China was able to get," Sabrina Singh, the deputy Pentagon press secretary, said. "But we do know the steps we took provided little additive value

for what they have been able to collect from satellites before."

The high-altitude balloon was first spotted off the coast of Alaska in late January and later floated through parts of Canada before reaching the U.S. mainland. The airship floated from the northwestern states across the Great Plains to the southeastern states. U.S. jets shot it down on Feb. 4 when it reached the Atlantic Ocean off the South Carolina coast. But an NBC News report Monday citing unnamed sources stated the balloon was able to collect data from sensitive military sites — including Malmstrom Air Force Base in north-central Montana —

and transmit it back to China before the U.S. government could block it. The 341st Missile Wing of the Air Force Global Strike Command, which stores some of the military's Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles, is headquartered at the base.

"I think what we said at the very beginning still holds true," Singh said. "As soon as we realized they were collecting intelligence and hovering over our sensitive sites, we took measures that limited the additive value that the balloon could collect on."

"I wouldn't be able to say they were able to transmit back to Beijing," she added. "That is not confirmed at this point."

# Taiwan defiant on China before talk

*Associated Press*

Taiwan pushed back against threats of retaliation by China, ahead of an expected meeting between the island's president and the U.S. House speaker Wednesday that will underscore her government's claim to sovereignty.

President Tsai Ing-wen is finishing a tour of Taiwan's remaining diplomatic allies in Latin America, Belize and Guatemala. The most politically sensitive part of her trip will be a meeting with U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in Los Angeles while she transits on her way back home. China views Taiwan as its own territory and treats any dealings between U.S. and Taiwanese officials as a challenge to its sovereignty. Tsai's tour is a bid to demonstrate that her government has international support.

Belize and Guatemala are two of just 13 countries that formally recognize Taiwan, a

number that has dipped as China has put pressure on and funneled money into isolating the island. Tsai's trip comes just a week after Honduras announced it was cutting ties with Taiwan in favor of China, potentially prompted by a \$300 million hydroelectric dam project in central Honduras built by a Chinese company.

Last week, and again on Monday, China threatened with countermeasures if Tsai met with McCarthy.

The Chinese Consulate in Los Angeles issued a statement Monday saying it opposed any "any form of contact" between Taiwan authorities and the U.S.

"The reality and current situation that both sides of the (Taiwan) Strait belong to one China is very clear," the statement said.

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said at a news briefing Tuesday that China "will closely follow the develop-

ments and resolutely defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that it has never been part of China, and that China's recent criticism has become increasingly "absurd."

"Taiwan, the Republic of China, is a sovereign country, and has the right to make its own determination in developing relations with other countries in the world," it said. "It does not accept interference or suppression by any country for any reason, and will not limit itself because of intimidation or interference."

The United States' longstanding "one-China" policy acknowledges that the Chinese claim Taiwan as their territory. However, the U.S. does not endorse that claim and remains Taiwan's most important provider of military hardware and other defense assistance.

## Forecast warns of more storms in South, Midwest

*Associated Press*

DES MOINES, Iowa — Forecasters are warning of more severe weather, including tornadoes, Tuesday and Wednesday in parts of the South and Midwest hammered just days ago by deadly storms.

That could mean more misery for people sifting through the wreckage of their homes in Arkansas, Iowa and Illinois. Dangerous conditions Tuesday also could stretch into parts of Missouri, southwestern Oklahoma and northeastern Texas. Farther south and west, fire danger will remain high.

"That could initially start as isolated supercells with all hazards possible — tornadoes, wind and hail — and then over time typically they form into a line (of thunderstorms) and continue moving eastward," said Ryan Bunker, a meteorologist with the National Weather Center in Norman, Okla.

Hours before the biggest storms were expected to hit, strong thunderstorms swept

through the Quad Cities area of Iowa and Illinois on Tuesday morning with winds up to 90 mph and baseball size hail. No injuries were reported but trees were downed and some businesses were damaged in Moline, Ill.

The tornado risk in the Upper Midwest was expected to be highest in the late afternoon and evening Tuesday, and areas of southern Missouri and Arkansas were most at risk overnight.

In Keokuk County, Iowa, where 19 homes were destroyed Friday, emergency management official Marissa Reisen worries how those cleaning up the damage will cope if another storm hits.

"All of the people who have been impacted by the storms Friday night are doing all this work, to clean up, to gather their stuff, to pile up the debris," Reisen said. "If a storm comes through and hits them again and throws all that hard work all over the place again, it will be so deflating to those people."

## Speeding and alcohol drive up traffic deaths

*Associated Press*

DETROIT — Nearly 43,000 people died in U.S. traffic crashes in 2021, the highest number in 16 years with deaths due to speeding and impaired or distracted driving on the rise.

The 2021 final numbers, released Monday by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, confirmed earlier estimates by the agency showing a 10.5% increase in deaths over 2020. That's the highest number since 2005.

Data shows a 12% rise in fatal crashes involving at least one distracted driver, with 3,522 people killed. That prompted the agency to kick off a \$5 million advertising campaign in an effort to keep drivers focused on the road. Agency officials said such cases likely are under-reported by police.

The number of pedestrians killed rose 13%, and cyclist fatalities were up 2% for the year. The number of unbelted passengers killed rose 8.1%, while

fatalities involving alcohol-impaired driving were up 14%.

Speeding-related deaths increased 7.9%, while crash deaths involving large trucks weighing over 10,000 pounds were up 17%.

At a news conference Monday in Seattle, NHTSA focused on distracted driving fatalities, which speakers said are entirely preventable if people stop using their cellphones, eating, or doing other things that divert attention from the road.

Steve Kiefer, a retired General Motors executive whose son, Mitchel, was killed in a 2016 distracted driving crash, said cellphones are a primary cause of distraction. But technology is available to prevent it including "do not disturb" modes, as well as apps and in-car systems that watch drivers to make sure they're paying attention.

"All of this technology is available today, and there's no reason we can't use it and roll it out quickly," Kiefer said.



# Police: Tennessee shooter planned attack for months

*Associated Press*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — As students across Nashville walked out of class on Monday to protest gun violence at the Tennessee Capitol following a school shooting last week, police said the person who killed six people, including three 9-year-old children, had been planning the massacre for months.

Police have not established a motive for the shootings at The Covenant School, a small Christian elementary school where the 28-year-old shooter was once a student, according to a Monday news release from the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department. Both Nashville police and FBI agents continue to review writings left behind by Audrey Hale, both in Hale's vehicle and home, police said.

"It is known that Hale considered the actions of other mass murderers," police said.

The three children who were killed in the shooting were Evelyn Dieckhaus, Hallie Scruggs and William Kinney. The three adults were Katherine Koonce, 60, the head of the school, custodian Mike Hill, 61, and 61-year-

old substitute teacher Cynthia Peak.

Outside the state Capitol on Monday, thousands rallied in a call for gun reform, many of them students from Nashville-area schools who walked out of their classes. Some other students sat outside the House speaker's office in the legislative building.

The crowd outside the Capitol echoed chants such as "thoughts and prayers are not enough" and sang along to songs like "All You Need is Love"—adding to it, "and action!" At one point, they sat for a moment of silence, raising posters above their heads that read, "Thoughts and prayers are useless to dead children" and "2nd graders over 2nd amendment."

Vivian Carlson, a senior at Hume-Fogg High School in Nashville, helped organize her school's walkout. Like many others who addressed the crowd, she called for changes to Tennessee's gun laws, including a "red flag" law. Red flag laws generally allow law enforcement to temporarily confiscate weapons from people whose statements or behavior are deemed to make them a danger to themselves or others.

## Tenn. GOP members move to oust 3 Dems after protest

*Associated Press*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Tennessee Republican lawmakers took the first steps Monday to expel three Democratic members from the GOP-dominant House for their role in a recent gun control protest at the state Capitol.

The extraordinarily rare move resulted in a chaotic and fiery confrontation between lawmakers and supporters opposing the move and has further fractured an already deep political division inside the Tennessee Legislature.

Resolutions have been filed against Reps. Gloria Johnson, Justin Jones and Justin Pearson after they led chants from the House floor with supporters in the gallery last Thursday.

The resolution declared that the three had participated in "disorderly behavior" and "did knowingly and intentionally bring disorder and dishonor to the House of Representatives."

Republican Reps. Bud Hulsey, Gino Bulso and Andrew Farmer filed the resolutions. They successfully requested Monday that the House expedite the process and vote on the resolutions Thursday.

Despite support from the Republican supermajority, their requests sparked outrage among supporters watching in the gallery. Their loud jeers led House Speaker Cameron Sexton to demand they be removed by state troopers.

Also during the turmoil, several lawmakers engaged in a confrontation on the House floor. Jones later accused another member of stealing his phone and trying to "incite a riot with his fellow members."

Sexton deemed Jones out of order and cut off Jones' microphone.

Hundreds of protesters packed the Capitol last week calling for the Republican-led Statehouse to pass gun control measures in response to the Nashville school shooting that resulted in the deaths of six people. As the chants echoed throughout the Capitol, Jones, Johnson and Pearson approached the front of the House chamber with a bullhorn.

As the three shared the bullhorn and cheered on the crowd, Sexton, a Republican, quickly called for a recess. He later vowed the three would face consequences. Meanwhile, House Minority Leader Karen Camper described their actions as "good trouble," a reference to the late U.S. Rep. John Lewis' guiding principle.

By Monday, Sexton confirmed the three lawmakers had been stripped of their committee assignments and said more punishments could be on the way. A few hours later, House Republican Caucus Chairman Jeremy Faison referred to Jones as the "former representative" during the evening session.

## Wanted ex-Maryland political aide dead after manhunt

*Associated Press*

BALTIMORE — A former Maryland political aide wanted on corruption charges died Monday after he was wounded while being confronted by law enforcement agents, his lawyer said, following a manhunt that was launched when the man failed to appear for trial.

Attorney Joseph Murtha said the FBI confirmed Roy

McGrath's death to him. He added that it was not immediately clear if McGrath's wound was self-inflicted or came during an exchange of gunfire with agents.

The FBI had said earlier that McGrath, once a top aide to a former Maryland governor, had been hospitalized following an agent-involved shooting, but declined to elaborate.

According to an email earlier

from FBI Supervisory Special Agent Shayne Buchwald in Maryland, McGrath was wounded during "an agent-involved shooting" around 6:30 p.m. in a commercial area on the southwestern outskirts of Knoxville, Tenn. Buchwald said McGrath was taken to a hospital.

McGrath, 53, served as chief of staff to former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan. He was declared a

wanted fugitive after his disappearance, and the FBI has said he was considered an international flight risk.

McGrath was indicted in 2021 on accusations he fraudulently secured a \$233,648 severance payment by falsely telling the agency's board the governor had approved it. He was also accused of fraud and embezzlement. McGrath pleaded not guilty.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Teacher charged with stalking mayor

**IL** CHICAGO — Prosecutors have accused a Chicago Public Schools teacher of stalking Mayor Lori Lightfoot.

WBBM-TV reported Sunday that the 36-year-old teacher has been charged with two felony counts of stalking and six misdemeanor counts including disorderly conduct and resisting arrest. According to a complaint filed by the mayor, the teacher showed up at her home four or five times over two days last week. He questioned the size of the Chicago Police Department unit that protects her. He was asked to leave several times but kept coming back.

He's due in court on Thursday.

## Officials warn of wildfire risk as area dries out

**NM** ALBUQUERQUE — Snowcapped mountains in the Southwestern U.S. signal a possible delayed start to the wildfire season for some higher elevations, but officials in New Mexico and Arizona are warning that dry, windy conditions in other areas are increasing wildfire risks and prompting red flag warnings.

New Mexico's governor said recently that if the state wants to avoid a historic wildfire season like last year's when more than 1 million acres burned, everyone will have to be prepared.

"You can start to think about the landscape in New Mexico and the extreme drought here," Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham told those gathered at the Rio Grande Nature Center State

Park. "We are at extreme risk."

New Mexico already has seen more than 100 fires this year, and officials in neighboring Arizona have reported responding to dozens of starts over the last month, all human-caused.

"We hope that's not an indication of what's to come, but with the heavy grass crop down there, we are staying vigilant and on alert," Tiffany Davila with the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management said of the southern part of the state.

## 2 charged with cutting fiber optic cables

**CT** NORWALK — Connecticut police have charged two people with cutting more than 2,000 fiber optic cables, leaving over 40,000 homes and businesses without internet service in the southwestern part of the state.

Norwalk police said they arrested Asheville, N.C., residents Jillian Persons and Austin Geddings on Saturday during a surveillance operation. Both were charged with larceny and criminal mischief crimes, as well as interfering with police. Persons also was accused of giving a false statement to police.

The outages have since been restored, according to Optimum's website.

## Man charged after many 'swatting' calls reported

**WA** SEATTLE — U.S. authorities on Thursday said they arrested a Washington state man who made more than 20 "swatting" calls around the country and in Canada, prompting real emergency responses to his fake re-

ports of bombs, shootings or other threats.

Ashton Connor Garcia, 20, of Bremerton, used voice-over-internet technology to conceal his identity as he placed the calls last year — and he treated them as entertainment, broadcasting them on the social media platform Discord, federal prosecutors said. He faces 10 felony counts filed in U.S. District Court in Tacoma, Wash.

Prosecutors say that, in several cases, Garcia collected personal information about his victims and threatened to send emergency responses to their homes unless they turned over money, credit card information or sexually explicit images.

## Austal execs accused of inflating earnings

**AL** MONTGOMERY — Three current and former executives of a shipbuilder that constructs vessels for the U.S. Navy have been indicted on accounting fraud charges accusing them of falsely inflating the company's reported earnings, federal prosecutors said Friday.

Craig Perciavalle, 52; Joseph Runkel, 54; and William Adams, 63; all of Mobile, Ala., where Austal USA LLC is based, are accused of misleading shareholders and investors. They are each charged with one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and wire fraud affecting a financial institution, five counts of wire fraud, and two counts of wire fraud affecting a financial institution, the U.S. Department of Justice said in a news release.

Austal USA LLC is a subsidiary of Australia-based Austal Limited and builds littoral com-

bat ships for the Navy.

Perciavalle resigned as Austal USA's president in 2021 following an investigation by federal and Australian authorities into practices dating back more than four years, the company said at the time. Adams is the former director of the littoral combat ships program, according to the SEC. Runkel is the director of financial analysis.

Prosecutors alleged the men manipulated an accounting metric to hide growing costs in order to maintain and increase the share price of Austal Limited's stock, hurt U.S. investors.

## Some could be missing mail after keys stolen

**CA** SAN FRANCISCO — Thousands of San Francisco residents may be missing mail after a postal carrier was robbed last month of keys to boxes used to store incoming and outgoing letters and packages, authorities said.

The carrier was robbed by two men on March 11, said Matt Norfleet with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. The carrier was not hurt, he said.

The incident affects mail in the 94110 ZIP code, which includes the Mission and Bernal Heights neighborhoods, the San Francisco Chronicle reported Saturday.

Mail was reported missing from blue postal collection boxes as well as from green relay boxes, which store mail heading to residents' mailboxes and usually are accessed only by carriers, Norfleet said.

— From wire reports

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# UConn wins national title over SDSU

*Associated Press*

HOUSTON—After six games and 240 minutes of pure dominance that ran through March, then part of April, it finally became clear there was only one thing that could stop the UConn Huskies.

The final buzzer.

The team from Storrs, Conn., topped off one of the most impressive March Madness runs in history Monday night, clamping down early, then breaking things open late to bring home its fifth national title with a 76-59 victory over San Diego State.

“We knew we were the best team in the tournament going in, and we just had to play to our level,” said Dan Hurley, who joined Jim Calhoun and Kevin Ollie as the third coach to lead UConn to a title.

UConn’s lanky star forward, Adama Sanogo, won Most Outstanding Player honors, finishing with 17 points and 10 rebounds in the final. Tristen Newton also had a double-double with 19 points and 10 rebounds.

The Huskies (31-8) became the fifth team since the bracket expanded in 1985 to win all six NCAA Tournament games by double digits on the way to a championship. They won those six games by an average of an even 20 points, only a fraction less than what North Carolina did in sweeping to the title in 2009.

UConn built a 16-point lead late in the first half, only to see the Aztecs (32-7) trim it to five with 5:19 left. But Jordan Hawkins (16 points) — whose cousin, Angel Reese, won MOP honors the night before to help LSU take the women’s title — answered with a three-pointer to trigger a 9-0 run.

“It’s absolutely amazing that we both get this opportunity,” Hawkins said. “The family reunion is going to be crazy.”

Keshad Johnson scored 14 points for San Diego State, which came up one win shy in this, its first trip to the Final Four. Darrion Trammell and Lamont Butler, he of buzzer-

beater fame in the semifinal against Florida Atlantic, had 13 apiece.

San Diego State coach Brian Dutcher was an assistant with Michigan back in the Fab Five days, when the Wolverines lost in the final two years in a row. One of the Fab Five, current Wolverines coach Juwan Howard, was there to console his former coach.

“We had to be at our best. We weren’t at our best,” Dutcher said. “A lot had to do with UConn.”

UConn, the favorite and best-seeded team at No. 4 for this Final Four full of underdogs, set the stage for this win over an 11:07 stretch in the first half during which the Aztecs didn’t make a basket. Unable to shoot over or go around this tall, long UConn team, they missed 14 straight shots from the floor.

They went from leading by four to trailing by 11, and when they weren’t getting shots blocked (Alex Karaban had three and Sanogo had one) or al-

tered on the inside, they were coming up short — a telltale sign of a team that was out of hops after that 72-71 buzzer-beater win two nights earlier.

UConn fan Bill Murray, whose son is an assistant for the Huskies, was one of the few celebrities on hand to watch them make it 5-for-5 in title games. This one marked the last that Jim Nantz called after 37 years behind the mic.

Even with that brief bout of uncertainty midway through the second half, UConn never truly let the fifth-seeded Aztecs, who overcame a 14-point deficit in the semifinal, start thinking about any more last-second dramas.

This was a team built strictly for 2023 — replenished by Hurley, who went to the transfer portal to find more outside shooting after back-to-back first-round exits in the tournament. Despite the rebuild, UConn was in the “others receiving votes” category in Week 1 of the AP poll.

## Sanogo snags ball, MOP honors after Huskies’ victory

*Associated Press*

HOUSTON — Adama Sanogo stood on the sideline watching his UConn teammates dribble out the final seconds to secure the program’s fifth NCAA championship. He looked eager, ready to sprint in at the first chance.

When the horn sounded, reserve Andrew Hurley used both hands to spike the basketball near midcourt and start the celebration — only to see Sanogo run straight in and secure it like a fair catch.

“I need that ball. That’s a ball I want to save for my kids, my grandkids,” Sanogo told The Associated Press. “I need that ball.”

It was fitting for the first souvenir to go to the big man

who had been the rugged interior presence all season for the Huskies.

Sanogo finished with 17 points and 10 rebounds in Monday night’s 76-59 win against San Diego State in the national title game. The 6-foot-9, 245-pound big man from Mali was named the Most Outstanding Player of the Final Four after tallying his fourth double-double in six tournament games, making him the centerpiece of the Huskies’ dominant run to title No. 5 — just as he had been all season, really.

While teammates cut down the nets, Sanogo confessed that he had been planning all day to keep track of the ball at the horn if UConn completed

its dominant tournament run.

“He was sitting on that one, I guess, before the game,” Hurley said with a chuckle.

And with Sanogo’s play, was there really any question who deserved that ball?

“Oh, he has every right to keep it,” guard Nahiem Alleyne said when told Sanogo snagged the ball. “He’s the most outstanding player of this tournament. He’s been a dominant force this whole tournament. I mean, without this guy, we wouldn’t be here, simple as that.”

After coming into the game averaging team highs of 17.2 points and 7.6 rebounds, he was efficient, going 5-for-9 from the field and 7-for-8 from the foul line. He was ac-

tive, with five of his rebounds coming on the offensive glass. And it all came from a player who has spent recent weeks managing a strict fast from dawn until sunset to observe Ramadan as a Muslim.

“He wanted to step up,” forward Alex Karaban said. “He wanted this moment so badly.”

For Sanogo, it was the end of a yearlong push after a first-round exit from the NCAA Tournament in a loss to New Mexico State. That included getting to visit with former UConn great Emeka Okafor — the top big man on the program’s 2004 title winner — last fall and picking his brain about what it would take to win a championship.



# Giants hit 7 home runs to rout White Sox

Associated Press

CHICAGO — The San Francisco Giants were looking for a spark from their offense. And did they ever get one.

David Villar hit two of San Francisco's seven home runs, Anthony DeSclafani tossed three-hit ball over six scoreless innings and the Giants pounded the Chicago White Sox 12-3 on Monday afternoon.

"I think it was just continuing to get our 'A' swings off," Villar said. "The important thing for us is continuing to get those really good swings off and not being hesitant about making them. If we're going to make a swing, let's make it with intent. I think that really showed today, one through nine."

Villar hit a solo homer in the fifth and his first career grand slam in the ninth. Joc Pederson, Michael Conforto, Thairo Estrada, Mike Yastrzemski and Bryce Johnson also went deep for San Francisco, which hit its most home runs since July 2, 2002, at Colorado. The team record is eight at Milwaukee on April 30, 1961, when Willie Mays hit four.

DeSclafani picked up his first win since Oct. 1, 2021. The 32-year-old right-hander was limit-

ed to five starts last season because of a right ankle injury. But he felt like he was showing more of the form during spring training that made him a 13-game winner in 2021.

"It sure feels good to throw a good game, especially after last year and dealing with what I did," he said. "Good for Game 1."

**Angels 7, Mariners 3:** Shohei Ohtani hit his second home run of the season, Taylor Ward added a two-run shot and visiting Los Angeles topped Seattle.

Ohtani drove a 1-1 pitch from George Kirby (0-1) an estimated 431 feet into the right-center seats in the fifth inning for a 4-2 lead. Kirby gave up only one long ball during the final three months last season.

**Padres 5, Diamondbacks 4:** Pinch-hitter David Dahl and Kim Ha-seong hit consecutive home runs to start the bottom of the ninth inning as host San Diego stunned Arizona.

The Padres won their third straight game and became the first team in major league history with a walk-off win on back-to-back homers by its No. 8 and No. 9 batters, according to OptaSTATS.

**Brewers 10, Mets 0:** Brewers rookie Brice Turang hit a

grand slam for his first major league homer, capping a seven-run fifth inning that sent host Milwaukee past New York in its home opener.

**Twins 11, Marlins 1:** Max Kepler hit a leadoff homer, Joey Gallo added a three-run shot and visiting Minnesota routed Miami to remain unbeaten this season.

**Rays 6, Nationals 2:** Luke Raley homered twice, Drew Rasmussen pitched six shutout innings and visiting Tampa Bay defeated Washington for the first 4-0 start in team history.

**Reds 7, Cubs 6:** Jason Vosler hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the fifth inning and host Cincinnati held off Chicago.

**Yankees 8, Phillies 1:** Gleyber Torres hit his 100th career homer and reached base five times, Anthony Rizzo added a two-run shot and host New York blew out winless Philadelphia.

**Pirates 7, Red Sox 6:** Bryan Reynolds hit two solo homers, Jason Delay added another and visiting Pittsburgh edged Boston.

**Royals 9, Blue Jays 5:** Brady Singer pitched five effective innings, MJ Melendez hit a two-run homer and host Kansas City beat Toronto for its first victory

of the season.

**Orioles 2, Rangers 0:** Texas outfielder Josh Smith was taken to a hospital after he was hit in the face by a pitch against visiting Baltimore.

Gunnar Henderson and Jorge Mateo homered for the Orioles, and Tyler Wells provided a lift with five hitless innings in relief.

**Braves 8, Cardinals 4:** Ronald Acuña Jr. hit a three-run homer and finished a triple shy of the cycle to power visiting Atlanta past St. Louis.

**Tigers 7, Astros 6 (11):** Matt Vierling made a sprawling, bases-loaded catch and hit a tie-breaking, two-run homer in the 11th inning as visiting Detroit rebounded from a meltdown in the ninth to beat Houston for its first win after an 0-3 start.

**Dodgers 13, Rockies 4:** Jason Heyward slammed a two-run homer as part of a seven-run rally with two outs in the fifth inning that carried host Los Angeles past Colorado on a chilly, windy night.

**Guardians 12, Athletics 11 (10):** José Ramírez hit a go-ahead single in the 10th inning after his RBI triple in the eighth gave his team the lead, and visiting Cleveland rallied to beat Oakland.

# Robertson hits 100 points as Stars clinch playoff berth

Associated Press

DALLAS — Jason Robertson became the first Dallas player to have a 100-point season with another big-scoring night as the Stars clinched a playoff spot.

After being on the road when he broke Dallas' single-season scoring record that had been held by Hall of Fame center Mike Modano, Robertson got to hear the chants of "Robo!, Robo!" at home when he scored his 100th point — and then his 101st — in a 5-1 win over the Nashville Predators on Monday. His 43rd goal accounted for the 100th point, and he also had three assists.

"Glad I have an easy nickname ... it's really special," Robertson said.

The 23-year-old Robertson, who is in his third NHL season, makes scoring look easy.

He has 10 points (two goals, eight assists) in the last three games.

"He's so gifted at producing and shooting and just making players around him better," said Tyler Seguin, whose 20th goal of the season came on Robertson's third assist against the Predators.

Joe Pavelski added a power-play goal and an assist, while backup Scott Wedgewood stopped 26 shots in his first game since Feb. 19 after being sidelined by a lower body injury.

**Golden Knights 4, Wild 3 (SO):** Pavel Dorofoyev scored twice in regulation, including the tying goal with 34.2 seconds left, and then had one of visiting Vegas' three scores in the shootout victory over Minnesota.

Keegan Kolesar also scored in regulation,

and Jack Eichel and Reilly Smith had shootout goals as Vegas briefly delayed Minnesota's chance to clinch a playoff spot.

Matt Boldy had a goal and assist, reaching the 30-goal mark in his first full NHL season for the Wild, who ended up clinching a playoff spot shortly after the game when Dallas beat Nashville. Minnesota is tied with Dallas atop the Central Division with 98 points.

**Kraken 8, Coyotes 1:** Jared McCann scored two goals in his 500th NHL game, helping high-powered host Seattle rout Arizona.

Jordan Eberle, Carson Soucy, Will Borgen, Oliver Bjorkstrand, Morgan Geekie and Ryan Donato also scored for Seattle, which is three points up on Winnipeg for the top wildcard playoff spot in the Western Conference.

# LIV's Smith happy to get warm welcome

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Cameron Smith returned to the Masters on Monday with a small measure of trepidation, an unusual feeling for someone who has contended two of the last three years and who refers to Augusta National as his “happy place.”

Smith is with LIV Golf, the last big name to defect to the Saudi-funded tour. And having heard so much noise and sensed so much acrimony, he didn't know what kind of reception he would receive when he walked onto the range.

To his relief, it was the usual dose of hugs and handshakes.

“And it was nice,” Smith said to the largest gathering of the day in the interview room.

The British Open champion was the only LIV golfer on the interview schedule, a courtesy Augusta National affords all the reigning major champions regardless of where they play.

What was he expecting?

“I wasn't really sure, to be honest,” Smith said. “I was just kind of letting it all happen naturally—went out to the range and did my stuff and yeah, it was just

a really nice experience. ... I think there's a lot of stuff going on at the moment that doesn't need to be going on, especially in the media. I think it's definitely wound up a little bit too much.”

This Masters has a full plate of activity, and LIV Golf would appear to be the main course.

Smith has not competed against the best of the PGA Tour since the Tour Championship last August. For the likes of Dustin Johnson, it's been a little longer.

It didn't take long for the mix of players from two tours to cause a stir. The practice round tee sheet listed a most tantalizing foursome of Tiger Woods, Fred Couples, Tom Kim and Bryson DeChambeau, who complained only last week that Woods had cut him off ever since the former U.S. Open champion went to LIV.

Turns out it was a Masters mix-up. The fourth was Rory McIlroy, the loudest PGA Tour supporter over the past year.

Couples has made his thoughts clear, recently saying at a PGA Tour Champions breakfast that Phil Mickelson

was a “nut bag” and Sergio Garcia a “clown.”

Couples, the 1992 Masters champion and still immensely popular, said he has no personal beef with either and would have no trouble sitting with them at the Masters Club dinner on Tuesday night or playing in the same group.

“I have no problem with any of them,” Couples said. “Just please do not bash a tour that I have 43 years invested in. It bothers the hell out of me. They don't bother me. They really don't. They're golfers. I'm a golfer. I respect them all.”

The Masters typically releases tee times on Tuesday afternoon, and that has become an event to see which LIV players — 18 of them are at the Masters — will be in the same group as PGA Tour loyalists.

Shane Lowry played with two LIV golfers — Mickelson and Louis Oosthuizen — at the U.S. Open last summer. Adam Scott played with Johnson and Marc Leishman at St. Andrews.

“Look, obviously there's going to be some pairings that are going to be interesting this week,”

Lowry said. “I always say this about professional golfers. We all work in the same office. If you work in the same office, you're not going to like everyone in there. Same way as this. I met Dustin on the range — I always get on well with Dustin. It was good to see him.”

One question about LIV golfers is how much they're playing, as the new circuit has had only three events in 2023. Smith played five times going into the Masters last year, and he briefly challenged Scottie Scheffler until the Texan pulled away to win his first major.

This year he has played four times — the only 72-hole event was the Saudi International on the Asian Tour, where he missed the cut. That was followed by three 54-hole LIV events, the last two finishing out of the top 20.

Brooks Koepka is coming off a one-shot victory last week in LIV Golf-Orlando, where the greens were crusty and brown and fast. It was played on the Crooked Cat course at Orange County National, where the PGA Tour used to stage Q-school.

## Player load management may impact NBA scoring race

Associated Press

The most famous scoring race in NBA history was probably the 1978 edition, when George Gervin edged out David Thompson by seven hundredths of a point.

Thompson scored 73 points in his team's final game of the regular season, only for Gervin to answer with 63 later that day. It was an example of how two talented players — with a tight margin separating them — can push each other to some impressive heights.

Will we see anything similar this coming week from Joel Embiid and Luka Dončić?

Embiid is the leader at 32.97

points per game. Dončić is at 32.75. The regular season ends April 9 — 45 years to the day after Thompson and Gervin produced their fantastic finish to the 1977-78 season. Embiid and the 76ers are scheduled to play at Brooklyn at 1 p.m. That game should end around the time Dončić and the Mavericks tip off against San Antonio.

So it's easy to imagine Embiid putting up a huge number and leaving Dončić to try to answer with his own scoring binge. And that would be fitting, given that this season has already had two 71-point games from Donovan Mitchell and Damian Lillard.

Dončić scored 60 points in a

Dec. 27 game against the New York Knicks, and Embiid had 59 on Nov. 13 against Utah. There's no telling how high they might go if there's enough motivation to chase the scoring championship.

Of course, that's the big question: How big a priority is it? Especially for Embiid, who won last year.

The 76ers have four games remaining. They're currently third in the Eastern Conference, three games behind Boston and 2½ ahead of Cleveland. If Philadelphia's postseason seeding becomes certain, would Embiid — who is also an MVP candidate — sit out to rest up for the

playoffs?

Dončić may not have that choice. The Mavericks are a game out of the last play-in spot in the West, and they need him in the lineup as they try to salvage their rapidly deteriorating season. Of course, that means winning games is the priority, so Dallas may not be in a position to feed Dončić the ball in an effort to get him the scoring crown.

Gervin finished the 1977-78 season at 27.22 ppg, with Thompson at 27.15. That is, according to Sportradar, the closest race since 1969-70, when the NBA started using points per game to determine the scoring champion instead of total points.