

## Troops suffered TBI after Iraq drone strike

By J.P. LAWRENCE  
*Stars and Stripes*

U.S. troops have traumatic brain injuries resulting from a drone attack in Iraq last week that struck a convoy carrying them and the Syrian Kurdish commander of anti-Islamic State forces, U.S. Central Command has said.

The U.S. military said last week that the attack led to no casualties. Continued medical screening identified cases of TBI characterized as mild by CENTCOM on Wednesday.

“Our neurological team is closely monitoring these service members as they can continue to feel the effects of the attacks,” CENTCOM said in an emailed response to questions from Stars and Stripes.

A CENTCOM spokesman on Thursday did not say how many service members were hurt in the attack.

Last Friday’s drone strike in northern Iraq targeted Gen. Mazloun Abdi, leader of the Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-led group that the U.S. has allied with in the fight against ISIS.

Responsibility for the strike has been widely attributed to Turkey, although Ankara has denied these claims.

The attack and its aftermath highlight the complicated nature of American relations in the Middle East, where troops tasked with containing ISIS are partnering with Kurdish units seen as threats by NATO ally Turkey, while also defending against attacks from Iran and its proxy militias.

Ankara believes that the U.S.-backed SDF is a terrorist group affiliated with Kurds waging an insurgency in Turkey that has left 40,000 dead, a January report by the Council on Foreign Relations said.

But the U.S. views the SDF as separate from Kurdish groups that have been blacklisted internationally for terrorism. Washington has worked with the SDF since 2014 to defeat ISIS.

Three U.S. military personnel were in the convoy with Abdi at the time of the attack, with one service member riding in the same vehicle as the general, The Wall Street Journal reported last Friday.

Capt. Abigail Hammock, a CENTCOM

spokeswoman, confirmed that the convoy had “included U.S. military personnel participating in routine operations with our partner forces in Iraq and Syria.”

Abdi said he was in Iraq with U.S. troops to talk with Kurdish anti-terrorism forces about fighting ISIS, Al Jazeera reported Sunday. The general called the attack a “clear message from the Turks,” the report said.

Unidentified Western officials also blamed Turkey for the attack in reports by The Wall Street Journal and the Al-Monitor news site. Iraq’s government held Turkey responsible and demanded an official apology Sunday.

Turkey said their military didn’t undertake any operations in the area that day, Reuters reported Sunday. The Turkish directorate for communications did not respond to questions sent by Stars and Stripes on Thursday.

CENTCOM didn’t mention Turkey or Abdi in its statements about the attack, saying only that it strongly opposes any action that threatens the safety and security of U.S. personnel.

## Ukraine stands firm on reclaiming annexed areas

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine’s foreign minister said Thursday his country won’t budge from its demand that Russia withdraw its forces from Crimea, as well as from other parts of Ukraine that Moscow illegally annexed more recently, for the war to end.

Calling the conflict in Ukraine “a bleeding wound in the middle of Europe,” Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said all his country’s territory must be treated equally in dealing with the Kremlin after its full-scale invasion more than 13 months ago.

“We are united by U.N. charter principles and the shared

conviction that Crimea is Ukraine and it will return under Ukraine’s control,” Kuleba said, speaking by video link to a gathering in the Romanian capital, Bucharest.

“Every time you hear anyone from any corner of the world saying that Crimea is somehow special and should not be returned to Ukraine, as any other part of our territory, you have to know one thing: Ukraine categorically disagrees with these statements,” he said at the Black Sea Security Conference.

Russia took over Crimea in 2014, and during the current war has expanded its presence there. Occasional acts of sabo-

tage and other attacks against Russian military and other facilities on the peninsula have occurred since, with the Kremlin blaming Ukraine. The Kyiv government hasn’t claimed responsibility for the attacks but welcomes efforts to repel the Russian presence there.

The Kremlin wants Kyiv to acknowledge Russia’s sovereignty over Crimea and also recognize September’s annexation of the Ukrainian provinces of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia.

Ukraine has rejected those demands and won’t hold talks with Russia until Moscow’s troops pull back from all occu-

pied territories.

Though there is no sign of possible peace negotiations, the two countries have sporadically exchanged prisoners of war and have engaged in a wartime deal for the export of Ukrainian grain and Russian grain and fertilizers. The grain deal has helped ease concerns about the global food supply, especially to countries in Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia where many are already struggling with hunger.

The agreement, which was brokered by the U.N. and Turkey last July, is delicate, however, and has been the subject of repeated threats by Moscow to end it.

# Guardisman target of leak investigation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The FBI wants to question a member of the Massachusetts Air National Guard in connection with the disclosure of highly classified military documents on the Ukraine war, two people familiar with the investigation said Thursday.

Investigators believe the guardsman, who specializes in intelligence, led the chat group where the documents were posted, according to the two people, who were not authorized to discuss an investigation publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

They identified the guardsman as 21-year-old Jack Teixeira, of Swansea, Mass.

The Biden administration has scrambled for days to contain the fallout from the leaked information, which has publicized potential vulnerabilities in Ukraine's

air defense capabilities and exposed private assessments by allies on an array of intelligence matters.

The National Guard did not confirm his identity but said in a statement that, "We are aware of the investigation into the alleged role a Massachusetts Air National Guardsman may have played in the recent leak of highly-classified documents."

The Biden administration has been working to assess the diplomatic and national security consequences of the leaked documents since they were first reported last week.

A top Pentagon spokesman told reporters earlier this week that the disclosures present a "very serious risk to national security," and the Justice Department opened an investigation to identify the person responsible.

"We're getting close," Presi-

dent Joe Biden told reporters in Ireland on Thursday.

He said that though he was concerned that sensitive government documents had been disclosed, "there's nothing contemporaneous that I'm aware of that is of great consequence."

It's possible the leak may have started on a site called Discord, a social media platform popular with people playing online games. The Discord site hosts real-time voice, video and text chats for groups and describes itself as a place "where you can belong to a school club, a gaming group, or a worldwide art community."

In one of those forums, created to talk about a range of topics, members would debate the war in Ukraine. According to one member of the chat, an unidentified poster shared documents the poster claimed were classified, first typing them out with the

poster's thoughts, then, as of a few months ago, uploading images of folded papers.

Discord has said it was cooperating with law enforcement.

There are only a few ways the classified information that was leaked could have been accessed, which may provide critical clues as to who is responsible. Typically in classified briefings, as with the slides that were placed on Discord, the information is shared electronically. That is done either through secure computer terminals where users gain access based on their credentials or through tablets that are distributed for briefings and collected afterward. If the slides need to be printed out instead, they can only be sent to secured printers that are able to handle classified documents — and that keep a digital record of everyone who has requested a printout.

## US, Ukraine say many war secrets safe despite leak

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ukraine's leaders said they don't see a major U.S. intelligence leak as gravely damaging future offensives. A key reason: They have long held back on sharing their most sensitive operational information, doubting Washington's ability to keep their secrets safe.

Ukrainian and U.S. officials said this week that only Ukrainians know some battle plans and other operational information, not the Americans, their most important ally. That means the leak of secret military documents, including some assessing Ukraine's battlefield strengths and weaknesses against Russia, may not have been enough — so far — to change the course of the war.

"If military operations are planned, then only a very narrow circle of people know about the

planning of the special operation," Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar said Wednesday on Ukrainian television. "The risk of leaks is very minimal" for the most important war matters.

Still, the United States sees the leaks as grave. The documents include previously unreported sensitive disclosures about Ukraine, South Korea, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and others. Senior Biden administration officials are working to stop the flow of classified information onto social media and websites, and head off any lasting damage to relationships with allies and strategic partners.

More damaging material could still surface, as leaked documents are continuing to appear online.

Ukrainian officials have made clear they could afford no open split over the leaks with the U.S.,

which has given Ukraine more than \$100 billion in military and civilian support.

Secrecy in one vital area, Ukraine's plans for any upcoming offensives to repel Russian forces, remains unbreached, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told reporters in Washington on Tuesday after speaking with his Ukrainian counterpart.

"They have a great plan ... but only President [Volodymyr] Zelenskyy and his leadership really know the full details of that plan," Austin said.

Ukrainian civilian and military chiefs — speaking in European and North American capitals on their continual tours to round up the Western arms and cash to keep Ukraine's fight going — responded to questions about whether the leaks would harm relations with the U.S. by saying that unity among allies

was one of Ukraine's most vital war needs.

The details disclosed "are not pleasant to hear," Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov told reporters in Madrid on Wednesday.

"There is a lot of information that is not true," Reznikov added, without elaborating. "And the true information has already lost its relevance."

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak described the leaks regarding the war assessments as free of actual operational information, and partly fake. Ukraine's strategy and tactics are developed by the military command and that work was not directly damaged, he told The Associated Press.

"Operations scenarios are still in development because the front line is flexible and changes are made every day," he said.

# Court preserves access to abortion pill, tightens rules

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — A federal appeals court preserved access to the abortion pill mifepristone for now but reduced the period of pregnancy when the drug can be used and said it could not be dispensed by mail.

The ruling late Wednesday temporarily narrowed a decision by a lower court judge in Texas that had completely blocked the Food and Drug Administration's approval of the nation's most commonly used method of abortion. Still, preventing the pill from being sent by mail amounts to another major curtailing of abortion access, less than a year after the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* resulted in more than a dozen states effectively banning abortion outright.

The case is likely to go to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"We are going to continue to fight in the courts, we believe the law is on our side, and we will prevail," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Thursday, speaking to reporters from Dublin during a visit by President Joe Biden.

Mifepristone was approved for use by the FDA more than two decades ago and is used in combination with a second drug, misoprostol.

In a far-reaching ruling last week, a federal judge blocked the FDA's approval of the pill following a lawsuit by the drug's opponents. There is virtually no precedent for a lone judge overturning the regulator's medical decisions. The ruling was put on pause to

allow an appeal.

Just before midnight Wednesday, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans ruled that the FDA's initial approval of mifepristone in 2000 could remain in effect.

But in the 2-1 vote, the panel of judges put on hold changes made by the regulator since 2016 that relaxed the rules for prescribing and dispensing mifepristone. Those included extending the period of pregnancy when the drug can be used from seven weeks to 10, and also allowing it to be dispensed by mail, without any need to visit a doctor's office.

The two judges who voted to tighten restrictions, Kurt Engelhardt and Andrew Oldham, are both appointees of former President Donald Trump. The third judge, Catharina Haynes, is an appointee of former President George W. Bush. She said she would have put the lower court ruling on hold entirely for now to allow oral arguments in the case.

Either side, or both, could take the case to the Supreme Court. Opponents of the drug could seek to keep the full lower court ruling in effect. The Biden administration, meanwhile, could ask the high court to allow all the FDA changes to remain in place while the case continues to play out.

Adding to the uncertainty, a separate federal judge in Washington state last week ordered the FDA not to do anything that might block mifepristone's availability in 17 Democrat-led states suing to keep it on the market.

# Second expelled Tenn. lawmaker returns to House

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The second of two Black Democrats who were kicked out of the Republican-led Tennessee House followed his colleague back to work at the Capitol on Thursday, a week after their expulsion for participating in a gun control protest propelled them into the national spotlight.

State Rep. Justin Pearson, of Memphis, was sworn in Thursday outside the Statehouse. The day before, Shelby County commissioners unanimously voted to reinstate him.

"There will be a new building of this building, with a foundation built on love," Pearson said during a fiery speech outside the Capitol after being sworn in. "With pillars of justice rising up. With rafters of courage covering us. With doors that are open to everybody in the state of Tennessee. Not just rich somebodies, but everybody. Not just straight somebodies, but everybody. Not just Republican somebodies, but everybody."

After delivering his speech outside the Capitol, Pearson walked into the House chamber as debate on bills was underway. He pumped his fists and silently mouthed, "This is our House." Those in the gallery pumped their fists back and mouthed "Our House" as Pearson circled around the floor.

Before Pearson returned to the chamber, lawmakers cheered and applauded as the police officers who responded to the deadly March 27 mass shooting at a Nashville elementary school shooting — the event that prompted the gun control protest — were honored in the chamber.

# Feinstein seeks replacement on Judiciary Committee

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Recuperating U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, of California, asked Wednesday to be temporarily replaced on the Judiciary Committee, shortly after two House Democrats called on her to resign after her extended absence from Washington.

In a statement, the long-serving Democratic senator said her recovery from a case of shingles she disclosed in early March had been delayed because of complications. She provided no date for her return to the Senate and said she had asked Majority Leader Chuck Schumer to ask the Senate to allow another Democratic senator to serve in her committee seat until she was able to return.

"I intend to return as soon as possible once my medical team advises that it's safe for me to travel," Feinstein said. "In the meantime, I remain committed to the job and will continue to work from home in San Francisco."

Feinstein's decision to seek a committee stand-in during her recovery comes amid increasing anxiety within her party that her lengthy absence has damaged Democratic efforts to confirm President Joe Biden's nominees for federal courts in a narrowly divided chamber.

She is the oldest member of Congress, at 89.

California Rep. Ro Khanna, one of two Democratic House members who called Wednesday for Feinstein to resign, said in a

statement Wednesday: "This is a moment of crisis for women's rights and voting rights. It's unacceptable to have Sen. Feinstein miss vote after vote to confirm judges who will uphold reproductive rights."

Khanna, a California progressive, wrote on Twitter that Feinstein should step aside. She announced in February that she would not seek reelection in 2024, opening up her seat for the first time in over 30 years. Not long afterward, Democratic Rep. Dean Phillips, of Minnesota, tweeted that he agreed with Khanna.

The senator has faced questions about her cognitive health and memory, though she has defended her effectiveness representing a state that is home to nearly 40 million people.



# Heavy flooding wreaks havoc in Florida

*Associated Press*

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — South Florida kept a wary eye on a forecast that called for rain Thursday, a day after nearly a foot fell in a matter of hours, causing widespread flooding, closing the Fort Lauderdale airport, and turning thoroughfares into rivers.

Fort Lauderdale issued a state of emergency as flooding persisted in parts of the city. Emergency crews had worked through the night to attend rescue calls, but there were no immediate reports of injuries or deaths.

Stranded cars littered streets around eastern Broward County, where rains started Monday, with the heaviest downpours coming Wednesday afternoon and evening. Crews worked to clear drains and fire up pumps to clear standing water. People were told to stay off roads until it drained.

The Red Cross arrived at 5 a.m. Thursday and set up a staging area to help residents whose homes were flooded, providing them with blankets and coffee, officials said. The staging area also acted as a reuni-

fication point for families.

Fort Lauderdale City Hall remained closed Thursday with ground-floor flooding and no power.

More showers, thunderstorms and local flooding were in the forecast from the National Weather Service on Thursday morning. An additional 2 to 4 inches of rain was possible on top of the 14 inches that fell in recent days.

Fort Lauderdale Hollywood International Airport remained closed through at least noon Thursday, with many flights canceled and some passengers stranded. Roads around the airport flooded and became congested with stalled traffic.

By early Thursday, enough water had drained to allow people to drive on the upper level — or departures — road to pick up waiting passengers. But the entrance to the lower-level, or arrivals, road remained closed, officials tweeted.

Video taken by witnesses showed water coming in the door at an airport terminal and a river rushing down the tarmac between planes.

In downtown Fort Lauderdale, video showed a man swimming to the curb along Broward Boulevard on Wednesday afternoon as cars rolled by. Drivers also recorded themselves rolling through streets where brown, swirling water rose nearly to car hoods.

Hollywood Mayor Josh Levy told CNN it was the worst flooding he'd experienced.

"The ground was already saturated so there is extensive flooding all over our city and throughout South Florida. Many roadways are impassable. Lots of vehicles got stuck and left abandoned in the middle of our roadways," Levy said. "I've lived here my whole life. This is the most severe flooding that I've ever seen."

Broward County schools canceled classes Thursday, including after-school and extracurricular activities.

The heavy rains also shut down South Florida's high-speed commuter rail service, called Brightline. It tweeted Wednesday evening that train service between Miami and Fort Lauderdale was suspended.

## Envoy: Allies seek US aid to fend off cyberattacks

*CQ-Roll Call*

WASHINGTON — U.S. allies and partners are increasingly seeking Washington's help in defending their own computer networks from foreign cyberattacks, Nathaniel Fick, the top U.S. diplomat on cyber and digital policy, said Wednesday.

"I'm not sure I have been any place in the world where there wasn't demand for hunt-forward presence," Fick, the ambassador-at-large heading the State Department's

Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy, said at an event hosted by the Project for Media and National Security. "There's more demand for the capability globally than we can right now meet."

Hunt-forward presence refers to teams of cybersecurity experts from the Pentagon's Cyber Command deployed outside the U.S.

"Fundamentally, it's cyber defense ... it's securing allied and partner networks," said Fick, a former Marine Corps officer and

tech entrepreneur who is the first person to lead the State Department's bureau on cyber policy. The U.S. also offers financial assistance to small, allied countries to cope with cyber threats, he said.

Between 2018 and 2022, Pentagon cyber experts conducted more than two dozen hunt-forward operations, according to Cyber Command, deploying to sixteen different nations including Ukraine, Estonia and Lithuania.

## US jobless claims rise, remain at historically low level

*Associated Press*

U.S. applications for jobless benefits rose to their highest level in more than a year, but remain at relatively low levels despite efforts by the Federal Reserve to cool the economy and job market in its battle against inflation.

Jobless claims for the week ending April 8 rose by 11,000 to 239,000 from the previous week, the Labor Department said Thursday. That's the most since January 2022, when 251,000 people filed for unemployment. The four-week moving average of

claims, which evens out some of the week-to-week fluctuations, rose by 2,250 to 240,000. That's the most since November 2021.

Last week, the Labor Department unveiled revised estimates of the number of weekly applications for jobless benefits under a new formula it is using to reflect seasonal adjustments. The job market seems to be showing signs of softening, more than a year after the Federal Reserve began an aggressive campaign to cool inflation by raising its benchmark borrowing rate nine

times in about a year.

America's employers added a solid 236,000 jobs in March, suggesting that the economy remains on solid footing despite the nine interest rate hikes the Federal Reserve has imposed over the past year in its drive to tame inflation. The unemployment rate fell to 3.5%, just above the 53-year low of 3.4% set in January.

In its latest quarterly projections, the Fed predicts that the unemployment rate will rise to 4.5% by year's end, a sizable increase historically associated with recessions.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**3 hurt in floor collapse at 124-year-old courthouse**

**GA** SAVANNAH — Three construction workers were injured Tuesday when part of an upper floor collapsed inside Savannah's 124-year-old federal courthouse, which has been undergoing extensive renovations for more than a year.

All three workers were taken to a hospital, none of them with life-threatening injuries, after part of the courthouse's third floor gave way and the workers tumbled down to the floor below, said Savannah Fire Battalion Chief Wayne Ifill.

The Tomochichi Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse opened in 1899. It was named more than a century later for the chief of the Yamacraw people, a small band of Native Americans who befriended the colonial English settlers that founded Georgia in 1773.

The building is in the middle of a \$75 million renovation scheduled for completion next year and has been essentially gutted on the inside, Ifill said. It remains unclear why roughly 30 square feet of the floor collapsed.

**City will settle bikini barista dress code suit**

**WA** EVERETT — A legal battle over a dress code for bikini baristas at coffee stands is ending after a city north of Seattle agreed to pay \$500,000 to the owner and employees who sued over it six years ago.

The Everett City Council voted unanimously this week to authorize Mayor Cassie Franklin to sign the settlement agreement

with Jovanna Edge and employees, The Daily Herald reported.

Under the agreement, the city will keep most of its rules for probationary licensing of coffee stands and other quick-service business but will no longer dictate that baristas wear at least tank tops and shorts.

Instead, the city will align dress code rules with an existing lewd conduct standard that makes it a crime to publicly expose too much of one's private parts.

**Student charged after cache found in dorm**

**MN** NORTHFIELD — A student at a private southeastern Minnesota college faces multiple counts after authorities found several items in his dorm room that school officials believed posed a threat — including knives, a tactical vest and empty ammunition and magazine boxes — according to charges filed Monday.

St. Olaf College student Waylon Kurts, 20, was charged with conspiracy to commit second-degree assault and conspiracy to commit threats of violence, among other counts.

According to the charges, the items found in Kurts' dorm room included a tactical vest, empty boxes for ammunition and magazines, a tactical knife, a folding knife, firearm earmuffs, six propane canisters, fireworks, lighter fluid, a battery with wires and a lock pick set.

Police also confiscated notebooks with writings that included a plot to steal ammunition from a retailer, police radio frequencies and a hand-drawn map of the recreational facility on

campus, the Star Tribune reported.

Kurts' attorney, Paul Rogosheske, said that his client is a hunter, and noted there were no guns or ammunition taken from Kurts' room or vehicle. He said Kurts drew the map for someone else.

**Woman charged as pilot forced to divert flight**

**MO** KANSAS CITY — A woman has been charged in federal court after prosecutors said she caused a disturbance that forced a flight to be diverted to Kansas City International Airport.

Chloe DaSilva, 32, whose hometown was not available, was charged with one count of interfering with a flight attendant, federal prosecutors announced Monday.

DaSilva was on board an Alaska Airlines Flight that took off from San Francisco International Airport early Friday bound for Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. According to court documents, several passengers said DaSilva became abusive toward a flight attendant, including threatening to kill him. She eventually was restrained with zip ties.

The pilot told investigators he decided to divert the flight to Kansas City out of concern for the safety of the passengers.

**Tribes want protection for Grand Canyon areas**

**AZ** PHOENIX — Tribal leaders in Arizona said Tuesday that they hope to build on the momentum of President Joe Biden's recent designation of a national monument in

neighboring Nevada to persuade the administration to create similar protections for areas adjacent to the Grand Canyon, which they consider sacred.

"This designation is of the highest priority to the Hopi people," said Timothy Nuvangyama, chairman of the tribe in northern Arizona. "We have to protect the beauty and grandeur of this place many tribes call home."

Tribes in Arizona are looking to persuade Biden to use his authority under the Antiquities Act of 1906 to make the designation for a little more than 1 million acres.

Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva, a ranking member of the House Natural Resources Committee and a Democrat representing southern Arizona, said the effort to have lands adjacent to the Grand Canyon named a national monument called Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni is part of a sustained effort to protect Indigenous sacred and cultural sites.

**State to raise age to buy tobacco to 21 on July 1**

**KS** TOPEKA — Gov. Laura Kelly signed a bill Tuesday that will require Kansans to be 21 or older to legally buy tobacco products, starting July 1.

The current age to buy cigarettes, electronic cigarettes and tobacco products is 18.

The federal government raised its age to buy tobacco products to 21 in 2019 and Kansas could have lost federal funds for substance abuse programs if it did not pass the bill. Kansas joins 41 other states that have increased the age to 21.

— From wire reports

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# LaVine scores 39, Bulls beat Raptors in play-in

Associated Press

TORONTO — Zach LaVine scored 39 points, DeMar DeRozan had 23 against his former team and the Chicago Bulls overcame a 19-point deficit to beat the Toronto Raptors 109-105 in a play-in tournament game Wednesday night.

Nikola Vucevic had 14 points and 13 rebounds for the Bulls, who trailed 66-47 in the third quarter before LaVine carried them back. He scored 17 points in the third as Chicago cut the gap to nine, then added 13 more in the fourth to help the Bulls advance.

Bulls coach Billy Donovan said LaVine was “phenomenal” against the Raptors.

“His performance was extraordinary,” Donovan said. “It gave us life and it gave us hope.”

The Bulls will visit the Miami Heat on Friday night for the chance to earn the eighth seed in the Eastern Conference

playoff bracket, and a first-round playoff matchup with Giannis Antetokounmpo and the Milwaukee Bucks.

Chicago went 3-0 against the Heat this season. The Bulls won in Miami twice, including on opening night.

“They’re going to make adjustments. We are, too,” LaVine said. “It’s going to be whoever wants it more. I think it comes down to that.”

The Bulls shot 3-for-19 from three-point range through the first three quarters, but LaVine connected twice as Chicago made four of seven from distance in the fourth.

Fred VanVleet had 26 points and 12 rebounds and Pascal Siakam scored 32 points, but Toronto’s season ended in disappointment as the Raptors — with DeRozan’s nine-year-old daughter, Diar, screaming when they shot — went a dismal 18-for-36 at the free-throw line.

Toronto missed six attempts from the line in the fourth quarter.

“I thought we played well enough to win tonight, but it just didn’t go our way,” Raptors coach Nick Nurse said.

Scottie Barnes had 19 points and 10 rebounds for the Raptors, and O.G. Anunoby scored 13 points. Toronto didn’t win three straight until January and never won more than four in a row in a season that struggled to generate any momentum.

Chicago’s Alex Caruso connected from the corner to tie the score at 91-all with 7:08 left in the fourth quarter, and Patrick Beverley’s three with 5:07 remaining gave the Bulls a 96-93 lead. It was Beverley’s first basket of the game.

VanVleet’s three with 3:11 to go knotted it again at 100-all, but LaVine and DeRozan replied with baskets for the Bulls.

Barnes and Siakam each

made one of two at the line inside the final two minutes, and VanVleet missed a three that would have tied the game.

Siakam’s driving dunk with 19 seconds left cut it to 105-104. After a timeout, LaVine pushed the lead to three with a pair of free throws. Caruso fouled Siakam on a three but the Raptors star missed his second and third attempts.

## Doing it for dad

After talking her dad into skipping a day of school to attend the game, DeRozan’s daughter sat in a courtside seat adjacent to the Chicago bench.

“I just saw it,” DeRozan said of Diar’s screams. “She went viral.”

Toronto was 8-for-14 at the line in the opening half.

DeRozan said he’s sending Diar back to school, meaning she won’t be at Friday’s game against the Heat.

# Gilgeous-Alexander leads Thunder past Pelicans

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander exercised patience during his lowest-scoring first half all season, routinely deferring to teammates such as Lu Dort and Josh Giddey in an effort to keep New Orleans defenders off balance in a winner-take-all postseason game.

“To start the game, I wasn’t expecting a huge outburst offensively,” Gilgeous-Alexander said. “I wanted to kind of set the table to make sure my teammates were ready to go, confident and attacking. And I knew once I did that, the defense would have to worry about them as well and my offensive game would open up.”

And how.

Gilgeous-Alexander scored 25 of his 32 points after halftime, including a go-ahead baseline jumper and four clutch free throws in the final 29 seconds, and Oklahoma City beat the Pelicans 123-118 on Wednesday night to remain alive in the Western Conference play-in tournament.

The Thunder All-Star’s repertoire included spinning dribble drives, varying mid-range jumpers and a three-pointer as he again shot 50% (11-for-22) to match his season average.

Giddey had 31 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds for Oklahoma City (41-42), the only Western Conference team still playing with a losing record.

“We did a great job of not getting rattled” after Brandon Ingram’s putback dunk gave the Pelicans a 110-108 lead, Giddey said. “Nothing ever phased us. It’s such a young group, but it’s such a composed team and that’s how you have to be down the stretch of tight games like that.”

The loss eliminated the ninth-seeded Pelicans, while 10th seed Oklahoma City advanced to play at Minnesota on Friday night for the right to enter the NBA playoffs as an eighth seed and meet No. 1 Denver.

Ingram scored 20 of his 30 points in the second half, including a three-pointer with 4.3 seconds left to give the Pelicans a slim chance to come back.

But after Gilgeous-Alexander hit two free throws to put the Thunder up by three, Herbert Jones threw away an inbound pass, sealing New Orleans’ fate.

Dort scored 27, hitting four threes and finishing with two free throws in the final seconds.

Jonas Valanciunas had 16 points and 18 rebounds for New Orleans, but checked out with 4:26 left after apparently hurting his right foot. He returned only briefly in the final minute.

Trey Murphy III scored 21 points, Jones had 20 and CJ McCollum had 14 for the Pelicans, who went 2-0 in play-in games as a ninth seed to advance to the first round of the playoffs a season ago.

This time, New Orleans, which was at the top of the Western Conference standings in December, was left to wonder what might have been had All-Star forward Zion Williamson not strained his hamstring on Jan. 2 — an injury that wound up sidelining him the rest of the season.

“It’s important to have your guys on the floor,” coach Willie Green said. “It helps your team reach its potential. We didn’t do that this season.”

Gilgeous-Alexander scored 17 in the third quarter and Giddey added 12, including his third three of the game to give Oklahoma City a 95-85 lead.

“The third quarter, I thought we got a bit casual in our approach,” Green said. “They just made more plays than us.”



# Confident Rays not surprised by historic start

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The streaking Tampa Bay Rays are running out of superlatives to describe baseball's best start in more than three decades.

Remarkable, incredible, unbelievable — even crazy — are words players have used to describe the dominant, all-around team effort that has carried them to a 12-0 record that's the toast of the big leagues two weeks into the season.

The Rays, who have made the playoffs each of the past four years, expected to be good.

But no one could have envisioned them joining the 1987 Milwaukee Brewers, 1982 Atlanta Braves, 1981 Oakland Athletics, 1966 Cleveland Indians, 1962 Pittsburgh Pirates and 1955 Brooklyn Dodgers as the only clubs to begin seasons with dou-

ble-digit winning streaks. Of those teams, only the Dodgers won the World Series.

"Pretty exciting. Doing it the way we have, every facet of our game is really performing, producing and contributing," manager Kevin Cash said. "Normally it doesn't work out that way."

Through Wednesday night's 9-7 victory against the Boston Red Sox, the Rays have swatted a majors-leading 30 homers and outscored opponents 92-27 for baseball's fastest getaway since the '87 Brewers won 13 in a row to tie the '82 Braves for the longest winning streak to start a season.

Tampa Bay won its first nine games by four runs or more, the longest such streak at any point in a season since the New York Yankees rattled off 10 in a row in 1939.

"Truthfully, I don't think we've talked about it. We're just here to play our brand of baseball. ... We just have fun with each other, and go out there and have a blast," ace Shane Bieber said.

"It's fun to be in this clubhouse regardless of the streak, to be honest with you," McClanahan added. "I'll tell you the truth, that's the last thing we're concerned about. ... Part of what we do is no matter what, we have the same mentality out there."

In addition to swinging torrid bats, the pitching and defense have been superb, too, with No. 3 and No. 4 starters Jeffrey Springs and Drew Rasmussen each winning twice and posting 13 scoreless innings over their first two outings.

McClanahan, a first-time All-Star a year ago, is 3-0 with a 1.59

ERA through three starts, while offseason acquisition Zach Eflin (2-0, 3.27) has been impressive after signing a \$40 million, three-year contract — the largest the budget-minded Rays have ever awarded in free agency. Eflin was placed on the injured list Tuesday with back tightness.

That group has thrived even without star right-hander Tyler Glasnow, who has been sidelined by a left oblique strain since spring training.

Eflin and rookie reliever Kevin Kelly were the only new faces on the opening-day roster, so it's not surprising that pieces have come together quickly.

"This is incredible baseball that we're playing," said second baseman Brandon Lowe, whose eighth-inning homer beat Boston 1-0 on Monday night. "We gotta keep it up."

# Panthers pick Stroud first overall in mock NFL draft

Associated Press

The Carolina Panthers have been on the clock since making a blockbuster trade last month to acquire the No. 1 overall pick in the NFL Draft and get their choice of potential franchise quarterbacks.

There's still no general consensus on which QB will go first.

Bryce Young or C.J. Stroud? The Panthers themselves are still trying to decide, and they're doing their due diligence on Anthony Richardson and Will Levis in the process.

The Panthers traded four picks, including No. 9 overall and a first-rounder next year, along with wide receiver DJ Moore to give new coach Frank Reich a quarterback to build around.

The first edition of the AP's 2023 mock draft says it'll be Stroud. The top 10 picks from that draft are as follows:

**1. Carolina Panthers (from Chicago): C.J. Stroud, QB, Ohio State**

Stroud's size — 6-foot-3, 214 pounds — gives him an edge over Young — 5-foot-10, 204. Stroud has a strong, accurate arm and possesses the leadership ability and other intangibles that Reich values.

**2. Houston Texans: Bryce Young, QB, Alabama**

Young, the 2021 Heisman Trophy winner,

becomes the face of the Texans and allows Houston to move past Deshaun Watson. His size is below standard, but it was never an issue when Young played at a high level at Alabama. He can make every throw, has strong pocket presence and is a dynamic playmaker.

**3. Arizona Cardinals: Will Anderson, Edge, Alabama**

New coach Jonathan Gannon benefited from having a dominant defensive line last season as a defensive coordinator for the NFC champion Philadelphia Eagles. Anderson is the best pass rusher in the draft and Arizona has to replace T.J. Watt and Zach Allen.

**4. Indianapolis Colts: Anthony Richardson, QB, Florida**

Another pick inspired by the Eagles. New coach Stane Steichen, the former offensive coordinator in Philadelphia, had tremendous success with quarterback Jalen Hurts. Colts owner Jim Irsay is a big fan of Hurts' style. Richardson has incredible athleticism, a strong arm and elite talent. He needs time to work on accuracy and mechanics.

**5. Seattle Seahawks (from Denver): Jalen Carter, Defensive Tackle, Georgia**

Before his off-field issues, Carter was a potential No. 1 overall pick if Chicago didn't trade down. He's simply too talented to slip down any further. Carter is the right fit for

Seattle and coach Pete Carroll.

**6. Detroit Lions (from Los Angeles Rams): Devon Witherspoon, Cornerback, Illinois**

Witherspoon has slid on some drafts probably because a hamstring injury limited his workouts. He was impressive at Illinois' pro day and is widely considered the top cover cornerback. The Lions had the NFL's second-worst pass defense in 2022.

**7. Las Vegas Raiders: Tyree Wilson, Edge, Texas Tech**

Size, build, speed, Wilson has it all for an edge rusher. The Raiders can team Wilson up with Maxx Crosby to get after the elite QBs in the AFC West.

**8. Atlanta Falcons: Myles Murphy, Edge, Clemson**

Murphy instantly upgrades a pass rush on a defense that had the second-fewest sacks in 2022.

**9. Chicago Bears (from Carolina): Peter Skoronski, Offensive Tackle, Northwestern**

The Bears need to protect Justin Fields, so it starts with Skoronski covering his blindside.

**10. Houston Texans (mock trade from Philadelphia via New Orleans): Lukas Van Ness, Edge, Iowa**

After taking Young at No. 2, the Texans swing a deal in our first mock trade and move up to grab an elite edge rusher in Van Ness.

# Assessing where NHL awards will go

Associated Press

Connor McDavid has put together the first 150-point season in the NHL since the mid-1990s, Erik Karlsson is the first defenseman to hit 100 points in more than 30 years and the Boston Bruins made history by setting the single-season wins record.

Put all that together, and who will win the league's major awards this year seems pretty obvious.

McDavid could again be the unanimous choice for the Hart Trophy as league MVP, Karlsson is a favorite to win the Norris Trophy for a third time and the Bruins could sweep for top goaltender, defensive forward and coach honors.

## Hart

**Who will win:** Connor McDavid, Edmonton.

**Other contenders:** Mikko Rantanen (Colorado), David Pastrnak (Boston), Jack Hughes (New Jersey).

McDavid won it unanimously in 2021, and the Oilers captain has only strengthened his position as the best hockey player in the world by surpassing 60 goals. The last player to record 150 points in a season was Mario Lemieux and, before that, Wayne Gretzky.

The defending Stanley Cup champion Avalanche have been ravaged by injuries and Rantanen is their most consistent star not to miss time. Pastrnak, like McDavid, reached the 60-goal plateau, and Hughes has the Devils back in the playoffs for the first time since 2018.

## Norris

**Who will win:** Erik Karlsson, San Jose.

**Other contenders:** Adam Fox (N.Y. Rangers), Josh Morrissey (Winnipeg), Rasmus Dahlin (Buffalo), Miro Heiskanen (Dallas).

No defenseman until Karlsson had reached 100 points since Brian Leetch in 1991-92. Doing it at

the age of 32 makes Karlsson the most likely choice, even though the Sharks have been out of contention most of the season.

Fox won the Norris in 2021 and has since added penalty-killing responsibilities as the Rangers prep for the playoffs. Morrissey has nearly doubled his career high in points, Dahlin has put in a strong year at age 22 and Heiskanen has added more offensive production to his all-around game.

## Vezina

**Who will win:** Linus Ullmark, Boston.

**Other contenders:** Juuse Saros (Nashville), Ilya Sorokin (N.Y. Islanders), Jake Oettinger (Dallas), Connor Hellebuyck (Winnipeg).

The only knock against Ullmark: He has started only 47 games in a tandem with Jeremy Swayman that will get Boston the William Jennings Trophy for fewest goals allowed. But Ullmark's .938 save percentage is the highest by any goalie with 40-plus appearances in a season since the Bruins' Tim Thomas in 2010-11, and his 1.89 goals-against average is the best since Dwayne Roloson in 2003-04.

Sorokin and good friend Igor Shesterkin of the Rangers, the reigning Vezina winner, have pushed into the conversation with Tampa Bay's Andrei Vasilevskiy for the best at the position in the NHL. Saros, Oettinger and Hellebuyck all had great years, but Ullmark had the best of his career for the NHL's top team.

## Selke

**Who will win:** Patrice Bergeron, Boston.

**Other contenders:** Mitch Marner (Toronto), Jordan Staal (Carolina).

Bergeron has already won the Selke five times and been a finalist each of the past 11 seasons, and at age 37 he still sets the standard for being an elite all-around forward. The Bruins captain has won 60.6% of faceoffs (third in the league), plays almost two minutes a game on the penalty kill and

consistently draws the toughest matchups — winning them a vast majority of the time.

When Bergeron retires, there will be stiff competition as to who's the best defensive forward in the league. Until then, there's no debate.

## Calder

**Who will win:** Matty Beniers, Seattle.

**Other contenders:** Stuart Skinner (Edmonton), Mason McTavish (Anaheim), Owen Power (Buffalo), Matias Maccelli (Arizona), Wyatt Johnston (Dallas).

Beniers looks like the runaway leader as the top scorer in his class and after helping the Kraken make the playoffs in their second season.

Skinner emerged as the Oilers' starting goaltender and helped them overcome defensive deficiencies. Maccelli has made a late push to be second among rookie scorers, but the Coyotes have not been anywhere near the playoff race, unlike the Kraken or Johnston and the Stars.

## Jack Adams

**Who will win:** Jim Montgomery, Boston.

**Other contenders:** Todd McLellan (Los Angeles), Dave Hakstol (Seattle), Rod Brind'Amour (Carolina).

Montgomery has coached the Bruins to the most wins in a season in NHL history, a triumphant return after being dismissed by the Stars in 2019. Nine-time Stanley Cup-winning Hall of Fame coach Scotty Bowman praised others but said on performance alone the award should go to Montgomery.

"He's positive, he's got a lot of confidence," Bowman said. "He seems to have kept the confidence up with the team."

McLellan leading the Kings back to the playoffs speaks for itself. Hakstol has turned the Kraken around quickly, and Brind'Amour is always in the conversation because of the Hurricanes' consistency.

# Blackhawks say they won't re-sign Toews next season

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Chicago Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews will not return to the team next year, ending a wildly successful run that included three Stanley Cup championships in 15 seasons.

General manager Kyle Davidson said Thursday the team will not re-sign its longtime center, who turns 35 on April 29.

"I think words fail to adequately summarize everything that Jonathan's done for the organization, the amazing memories that he provided," Davidson said. "He'll be a Blackhawk forever."

Chicago hosted Philadelphia in its season finale on Thursday night. Toews won his first championship when the Blackhawks beat the Flyers in the

2010 Stanley Cup Final.

Toews was selected by Chicago with the No. 3 pick in the 2006 draft, one of the first markers in the team's rise to the top of the NHL. He was just 20 years old when he became the 34th captain in team history in July 2008.

Toews helped Chicago put together the best stretch in franchise history, winning the Stan-

ley Cup in 2010, 2013 and 2015. The Blackhawks also made it to the Western Conference finals in 2014, losing to the Los Angeles Kings in an epic seven-game series.

But the franchise has fallen on hard times of late. It is among the worst teams in the NHL this year, in the mix for the No. 1 overall pick in the draft and a chance to take Connor Bedard.