

Navy crew helps find missing mariners

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

The crew of a Navy patrol aircraft flying a search-and-rescue mission found two missing mariners near the island of Saipan on Monday, according to a Navy statement.

The P-8A Poseidon patrol and reconnaissance aircraft joined the search Friday when the mariners' 21-foot fishing vessel was reported four hours late for its scheduled return, according to the statement Wednesday.

The Poseidon crew from Patrol Squadron 5 kept eyes on the mariners until a U.S. Coast Guard vessel and a merchant ship arrived to rescue them, according to the Navy.

Mission commander Lt. Cmdr. James Miller in the statement said the crew was "happy to be a part of this successful rescue effort."

"At sea, we're all on the same team, and today we came together to bring two lost mariners home," he said.

The statement did not provide further information about the mariners or the vessel.

Patrol Squadron 5, the "Mad Foxes," deployed to Kadena Air Base on Okinawa from its home base in Jacksonville, Fla., according to the Navy. Okinawa is about 1,400 miles southeast of Saipan.

The squadron is "conducting maritime patrol and reconnaissance as well as theater outreach operations" during its deployment to the 7th Fleet, according to the statement.

US Army bans all indoor dining near Tokyo

BY JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Japan's capital city experienced another surge in coronavirus cases Wednesday, while the U.S. military by 6 p.m. had reported only two new infections.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government reported 500 new cases, according to public broadcaster NHK. That's down from the record 570 new patients announced Nov. 27.

The daily count fell in the interim to 372 on Tuesday. More than 440 people are becoming infected in the city every day, according to the seven-day moving average.

U.S. Army Japan has banned indoor dining at off-post eateries in the Tokyo metro area up to 93 miles from Army headquarters at Camp Zama, according to a post on its Facebook page Wednesday.

The order from Maj. Gen. Viet Luong, commander of U.S. Army Japan, takes effect Thursday. Civilians, including Defense Department employees, "are strongly encouraged to comply with this directive," the order states.

Service members who violate the order are subject to punitive action under the Uniform Code of Military Justice; civilians may be subject to administrative actions, including the denial of base access, loss of command sponsorship or an early return of dependents, according to the post.

The order did not explain the timing of Luong's order, except to say it aims to preserve the health and safety of the Army community.

U.S. Army Japan on Wednesday reported one new coronavirus case, an individual assigned to Okinawa who tested positive after becoming ill Saturday, according to a news release. That person went into self-isolation immediately, was tested Monday and learned the results the next day.

Okinawa prefecture received a report from Naval Hospital Okinawa of one case at Torii Station, the Army post there, a prefectural health official told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday.

Army contact tracers found and quarantined an unspecified number of other individuals, according to the release.

The prefecture also received reports of two new cases at the Marine Corps' Camp Foster, the health official said. The Marines stopped publicly reporting their new cases on Okinawa in early November, except for a cluster of 72 infections among new arrivals announced Monday.

The prefecture reported 47 new cases Wednesday, according to the public health official. Government spokespeople in Japan typically speak on the condition of anonymity as a condition of their employment.

Tuesday evening, Misawa Air Base, 400 miles north of Tokyo, reported one new case, a person who arrived on temporary

duty via the Patriot Express, a government-chartered passenger service.

The individual was positive on a rapid test for COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus, and quarantined along with an unspecified number of contacts, according to a base Facebook post.

Meanwhile, The Associated Press reported that Japan's parliament has approved legislation to aid the distribution and administration of coronavirus vaccines to all citizens. The government aims to secure enough vaccines for all 126 million Japanese by the first half of next year, before the Tokyo Olympics, which have been postponed until July due to the pandemic.

Under the law passed Wednesday, free vaccinations will be available to all residents and the government will cover the costs of treatment and compensation for damages in case of any side effects. Priority for vaccinations will be given to the elderly and those with underlying health problems.

Japan is struggling with a resurgence of the virus, with a rapid increase in serious cases burdening medical systems. Tokyo, Osaka and several other cities with rapid spikes in cases have asked places serving alcohol to close early in exchange for compensation. Nationwide, Japan had 150,386 cases, including 2,172 deaths, as of Wednesday morning.

Soldier honored for risking his life in rescue

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

A soldier who pulled a driver from a burning vehicle and used his T-shirt to put out the flames on the injured man has earned the Army's highest award for bravery outside combat.

Sgt. Alexander Jabin, a satellite operator/maintainer with 4th Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., was presented the Soldier's Medal for "exceptional heroism" Tuesday for his lifesaving actions one night in March last year.

It was about 2:30 a.m. when Jabin heard a "bang" and looked outside his barracks on the base near Tacoma to see figures running around flames, he said in an Army video released Tuesday. As he ran out of the building to the scene, he yelled for someone to call the fire department.

"Jabin dove quickly under the fence (surrounding the Special Forces compound) and ran to the car, which was on fire," Sgt.

Komi Amenyo, who was the duty noncommissioned officer that night, an Army statement said.

He could hear screaming and, as he got closer to the burning vehicle, heard someone saying "Help me! Help me!," Jabin said in the Army video.

Josiah Caro-Yost and Aaron Cavazos, who were specialists assigned to the 1st SFG at the time, were already on the scene, but the driver was stuck and the flames were growing hotter.

"The fire had gotten pretty intense, so we backed away," Cavazos said.

But Jabin rushed in and tried to get the driver out.

"I tried to rip the door open but I was only able to rip off some of the car parts," Jabin said in the statement. "It was a cold night, but the fire from the collision grew more and more intense, like a big bonfire."

He reached in and tried to unbuckle the seatbelt, but that failed, so he turned and called for a knife to cut the straps. Amenyo

tossed him a knife, but by then the flames had completely engulfed the car and the driver was on fire, Jabin said.

The driver was able to move and had pulled his upper body out of the driver's side window, but appeared to be trapped and contorted, and continued to scream for help. So Jabin rushed back over to pull him out, calling for Cavazos and Caro-Yost to assist him.

After pulling the driver to safety, Jabin used his sweat-soaked T-shirt to smother the flames on the man's body, he said. "He was on fire, from the waist down," he said in the video.

When that shirt caught fire, Caro-Yost took off his jacket and used it to help snuff out the flames, and Jabin "proceeded to use the knife to cut the belt and burning clothes off the victim's body," Caro-Yost said.

Jabin, who received second-degree burns to his face, arms and hands during the rescue, provided first aid and comforted the driver until paramedics arrived.

US rewards program targets North Korea and China

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration on Tuesday announced a \$5 million reward for tips on sanctions-busting activities that allow North Korea to continue developing nuclear weapons and accused China of facilitating the illicit trade.

The leads are being solicited through a new State Department website, dprrewards.com. The targeted activities it lists include money laundering, the export of luxury goods to North Korea, cyberoperations and other actions that support the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

"I assure you, many of the tips we receive through this program will directly implicate that trade," Alex Wong, the State Department's deputy envoy for North Korea, said in a virtual speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Wong warned that the United States will impose more sanctions related to North Korea in the two months remaining before the Trump administration ends, including penalties on people and entities in China that facilitate illicit trade.

"We've imposed numerous such sanctions designations in the past," Wong said.

"And more are forthcoming."

Wong accused China of a "flagrant violation" of its obligation to enforce international sanctions on North Korea.

The rewards program underscores how even in its waning days, the Trump administration is doubling down on its relentless "maximum pressure" campaigns against countries it considers its chief nemeses.

Although the sanctions campaigns have hampered the economies of the targeted countries, none has succeeded in dislodging the regimes or making them change their authoritarian behavior, the stated aim.

Trump threatens defense bill veto over internet protections

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is threatening to veto a defense policy bill unless it ends protections for internet companies that shield them from being held liable for material posted by their users.

On Twitter on Tuesday night, Trump took aim at Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act, which protects companies that can host trillions of messages from being sued into oblivion by anyone who feels wronged by something some-

one else has posted — whether their complaint is legitimate or not.

Trump called Section 230 "a serious threat to our National Security & Election Integrity," adding, "Therefore, if the very dangerous & unfair Section 230 is not completely terminated as part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), I will be forced to unequivocally VETO the Bill."

Trump has been waging war against social media companies for months, claiming they are biased against conservative voices.

In October, he signed an executive order directing executive branch agencies to ask independent rule-making agencies, including the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission, to study whether they can place new regulations on the companies.

Since losing the presidential election, Trump has flooded social media with unsubstantiated claims of widespread voter fraud. Twitter has tagged many such Trump tweets with the advisory, "This claim about election fraud is disputed."

US morgues, hospitals overflow amid surge

Associated Press

Nearly 37,000 Americans died of COVID-19 in November, the most in any month since the dark early days of the pandemic, engulfing families in grief, filling newspaper obituary pages and testing the capacity of morgues, funeral homes and hospitals.

Amid the resurgence, states have begun reopening field hospitals to handle an influx of patients that is pushing health care systems — and their workers — to the breaking point. Hospitals are bringing in mobile morgues. And funerals are being livestreamed or performed as drive-by affairs.

Health officials fear the crisis will be even worse in coming weeks, after many Americans ignored pleas to stay home over Thanksgiving and avoid people who don't live with them.

November's toll was far lower than the 60,699 recorded in April but perilously close to the next-highest total of almost 42,000 in May, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. Deaths had dropped to just over 20,000 in June after

states closed many businesses and ordered people to stay at home.

In Worcester, Mass., the National Guard trucked in cots, medical supplies, tables and other items needed to operate a 250-bed field hospital in the event the state's medical centers become overwhelmed.

"Hospitals all around the country are worried on a day-to-day basis about their capacity ... and we're not really even into winter season and we haven't seen the impact of Thanksgiving travel and Thanksgiving gatherings," said Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

The number of hospital beds is just one concern. Many hospitals are scrambling to find enough staff to care for patients as the virus surges almost everywhere at once, Adalja said.

"You can't just say we'll have doctors and nurses from other states come because those other states are also dealing with COVID patients," he said.

US probing possible bribery, lobbying scheme for pardons

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department is investigating whether there was a secret scheme to lobby White House officials for a pardon as well as a related plot to offer a hefty political contribution in exchange for clemency, according to a court document unsealed Tuesday.

Most of the information in the 18-page court order is redacted, including the identity of the people whom prosecutors are investigating and whom the proposed pardon might be intended for.

But the document from August does reveal that certain individuals are suspected of having acted to secretly lobby White House officials to secure a pardon or sentence commutation and that, in a related scheme, a substantial political contribution was floated in exchange for a pardon or "repeal of sentence."

A Justice Department official said Tuesday night that no government official was or is a subject or target of the investigation. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation.

President Donald Trump tweeted Tuesday night: "Pardon investigation is Fake News!"

The existence of the investigation, first reported by CNN, was revealed in a court order from U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell, the chief judge of Washington's federal court.

In it, she granted investigators access to certain email communications connected to the alleged schemes that she said was not protected by attorney-client privilege. The investigative team will be able to use that material to confront any subject or target of the investigation, the judge wrote.

The order was dated Aug. 28, and prosecutors had sought to keep it private because they said it identifies people not charged by a grand jury.

But on Tuesday, Howell unsealed select portions of that document while redacting from view any personally identifiable information.

Pardons are common at the end of a president's tenure and are occasionally politically fraught affairs as some convicted felons look to leverage connections inside the White House to secure clemency.

Barr: No evidence of voter fraud

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Disputing President Donald Trump's persistent, baseless claims, Attorney General William Barr declared the U.S. Justice Department has uncovered no evidence of widespread voter fraud that could change the outcome of the 2020 election.

Barr's comments, in an interview Tuesday with The Associated Press, contradict the concerted effort by Trump, his boss, to subvert the results of last month's voting and block President-elect Joe Biden from taking his place in the White House.

Barr told the AP that U.S. attorneys and FBI agents have been working to follow up specific complaints and information they've received, but "to date, we have not seen fraud on a scale that could have effected a different outcome in the election."

The comments, which drew immediate criticism from Trump attorneys, were especially notable coming from Barr, who has been one of the president's most ardent al-

lies. Before the election, he had repeatedly raised the notion that mail-in voting could be especially vulnerable to fraud during the coronavirus pandemic as Americans feared going to polls and chose to vote by mail.

Trump didn't directly comment on the attorney general's remarks on the election. But his personal attorney Rudy Giuliani and his political campaign issued a scathing statement claiming that, "with all due respect to the Attorney General, there hasn't been any semblance" of an investigation into the president's complaints.

The Trump campaign team led by Giuliani has been alleging a widespread conspiracy by Democrats to dump millions of illegal votes into the system with no evidence. They have filed multiple lawsuits alleging that partisan poll watchers didn't have a clear enough view in some locations and therefore something illegal must have happened. The claims have been repeatedly dismissed including by Republican judges who have ruled the suits lacked evidence.

White House plans many holiday parties

From wire reports

WASHINGTON — The White House is forging ahead with plans for more than a dozen indoor holiday parties this month despite the ongoing surge in coronavirus cases, ignoring warnings from the Trump administration's own public health professionals to limit travel and avoid congregating in large group settings.

The president and the first lady are determined to have a final holiday season in the White House, officials said, despite a pandemic that has killed more than 266,000 Americans and infected 13 million across the country. Many of the administration's supporters have taken a skeptical view of the restrictions aimed at combating the virus and are choosing to attend, officials said.

The events, including the Congressional Ball on Dec. 10, will each include more than 50 guests and could risk the health of White House staffers and others who work at the parties. Most guests will not be tested in advance, one official said.

Health experts expressed dismay at the plans, noting that cases are not only increasing across the country but in the Washington area specifically. They also said travel by many guests outside the District of Columbia would likely violate myriad state and city restrictions.

California

As the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors debated last week whether to ban outdoor dining, Democrat Sheila Kuehl was quick to speak up in favor of restrictions.

Hours later, according to KTTV, she was spotted dining outside at an Italian restaurant in Santa Monica, Calif.

Kuehl is now one of at least four high-profile California Democrats who have landed in hot water in recent days for failing to abide by their own public health recommendations.

Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom and San Francisco Democratic Mayor London Breed both traveled to Napa Valley for birthday dinners last month, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

In San Jose, Democratic Mayor Sam Liccardo has drawn similar scrutiny for traveling to his parents' home for an outdoor Thanksgiving dinner, despite urging others not to do the same.

Colorado

DENVER — The ACLU of Colorado and a county sheriff's office reached an agreement Tuesday to implement measures at the

county's jail to better protect inmates from the coronavirus pandemic.

Weld County Sheriff Steve Reams and the ACLU asked a federal judge to enter a consent decree between the two sides to officially implement the changes and provide federal oversight.

The ACLU filed a lawsuit in April alleging that the sheriff's office failed to meet public health orders related to the pandemic and did not sufficiently protect inmates, jail staff and the public.

As part of the agreement, the jail is required to promote social distancing, require and distribute masks to all people in the jail, conduct coronavirus testing pursuant to U.S. Centers for Disease Control guidelines and isolate medically vulnerable inmates while monitoring them regularly.

Hawaii

HONOLULU — Honolulu Police Chief Susan Ballard said her department takes responsibility for the actions of officers on its now-suspended coronavirus enforcement units who are accused of abusing the department's overtime policy.

Ballard confirmed Monday in a statement on social media that multiple investigations are being conducted about the officers accused of submitting as many as 300 overtime hours in one week.

Law enforcement officials suspended the coronavirus enforcement units on Nov. 20 after the officials were told in an internal memo that 59 officers on the task force had been flagged in an audit for overtime violations.

At least 10 officers logged 200 or more hours of overtime during a five-week period. Records show that two officers recorded more than 300 hours of overtime from Sept. 27 to Oct. 31, or about 60 hours of overtime each week.

Louisiana

With no dance floor and strict, new coronavirus guidelines, attendees at the 2020 Naughty N'awlins swingers convention swayed in place at their tables and flirted behind face masks from a distance.

After being tested for the coronavirus and agreeing to wear masks, about 250 people checked into a New Orleans hotel for the swingers convention Nov. 14.

A little more than two weeks later, 41 attendees have tested positive for the virus, according to the event's organizer, in an outbreak that led local officials to call the convention a "superspreader event."

Once a hot spot, Orleans Parish has reported more than 16,000 virus cases and 648 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Michigan

LANSING — Michigan's chief medical executive, Joneigh Khaldun, said Tuesday that she was cautiously optimistic more residents took steps to help combat the surging coronavirus last month, citing declining case rates, but warned that the spread remains significant and the effect of Thanksgiving will not be known for two to three weeks.

Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said it was too early to say if her administration will extend a three-week order that prevents high schools from offering in-person instruction, prohibits dine-in service at restaurants and closes various entertainment businesses. The restrictions are due to end Dec. 8.

Michigan's seven-day case average of 6,815 is down from 7,370 two weeks ago, according to the COVID Tracking Project.

Nevada

A photo of a hospital's alternative care site in Reno is being misrepresented on social media to fuel the false narrative that the coronavirus pandemic is a hoax, even as cases surge in the state.

Renown Regional Medical Center has been the target of renewed conspiracy theories online suggesting that hospitals are empty and the virus is not as dangerous as top medical officials say it is. The hospital opened an alternative care site with two floors of supplemental hospital beds inside a parking structure on Nov. 12 to accommodate an overflow in COVID-19 cases if needed.

In recent weeks, social media posts have shared a variety of falsehoods about the hospital's parking garage site, with some posts saying that visitors went there and found no patients, which they then cited as evidence that the virus is a hoax.

According to Renown hospital officials, the alternate care site in the parking structure currently has 42 patients and has served 198 patients since opening day in November.

Dr. Jacob Keeperman, medical director for Renown's Transfer and Operations Center, shared the photo of himself inside the parking garage facility on Twitter with the hope of relaying the gravity of the situation at the hospital. But his tweet was quickly picked up and misrepresented online.

Suspect snatches \$24K from casino after distracting worker

PA CHESTER — A man who asked to use a phone made off with approximately \$24,000 from a Pennsylvania casino, police said.

The heist unfolded in the area where customers bet on horse races at Harrah's Casino in Chester.

According to police, the suspect asked an employee who was counting cash from a money drawer if he could use the phone.

The employee turned away for a moment and the suspect grabbed the cash and took off, police said.

The investigation was ongoing.

Police shoot man who stole skip loader owned by city

CA BAKERSFIELD — Police shot and wounded a man who stole a city-owned heavy equipment machine in Southern California, authorities said.

Officers responded following reports that someone had taken a skip loader near downtown Bakersfield, said police Sgt. Robert Pair.

The man then fled from the loader to an older red Nissan pickup and that's when two officers opened fire, Pair said.

The suspect, who was not identified, was struck once and hospitalized in critical but stable condition, according to Bakersfield Now.

Police didn't immediately say what prompted the shooting or whether the suspect was armed. The incident is under investigation.

A skip loader is used in construction to move heavy materials like rocks or debris.

Deputies: Woman shot man, robbed store

NC GREENSBORO — A woman accused of stealing a car and a gun from a home as she was fleeing from deputies was arrested after she robbed a convenience store and shot a homeowner in North Carolina who was chasing her away from his residence, authorities said.

The woman, who authorities have not identified, entered the first home while fleeing on foot from deputies responding to a report of a suspicious female at a gas station in Greensboro, the Guilford County Sheriff's Office said in a news release.

Authorities said she then drove to another gas station in Greensboro with the car she stole from that home, and committed armed

robbery for cigarettes.

After that, the woman entered the second home, which was across the street from the gas station, and stole another set of car keys, the release said. That's when the homeowner started to chase her away from his house and she shot him in the abdomen, according to deputies. His injuries were non-life-threatening.

Boater found clinging to capsized vessel

FL CAPE CANAVERAL — A 62-year-old boater who had been missing since Friday was found Sunday clinging to his capsized vessel off of Florida's Atlantic coastline, the U.S. Coast Guard said,

The agency had been searching for signs of Stuart Bee and his 32-foot boat since he was reported missing.

A crew onboard the container ship Angeles spotted Bee some 86 miles off of Cape Canaveral, the Coast Guard said in a Twitter post.

Dog gone for 11 months is home

IL CHICAGO — A dog that darted out of an open door nearly a year ago and has been living on the streets ever since is finally back home in Chicago.

Gracie, a 6-year-old pit bull, was reunited over the weekend with her owner, Kelly Shade, thanks to a couple of people who took time to gain the dog's trust, capture it and return it home.

"She got close and that tail started wagging, and she just lost it and I lost it," Shade told

Over the summer, people in the Jackson Park Highlands neighborhood where Shade lives noticed a skittish black dog with white feet roaming around. One of them was Polly Ellison, a fellow pet owner.

"She was in obvious fear of potential harm (and) I just couldn't turn my back on her," Ellison said, explaining why she started feeding Gracie and kept feeding the dog for months to gain the dog's trust.

Ellison and Katie Campbell, who has rescued dogs before, kept up the routine long enough to capture Gracie. Then, after detecting a microchip under Gracie's skin, she was able to track down Shade.

Pictographs vandalized

OR BEND — Pictographs west of Bend were recently vandalized and Forest Service officials are seeking help from the public as authorities investigate.

Deschutes National Forest spokeswoman Jean Nelson-Dean said that the vandalism to the rock art was recently discovered and appears to have happened within the last month. No further information about the vandalism was released.

Law enforcement is asking the public for any information or tips that could help them identify potential suspects.

Mom: Son wrongly attacked by police dog while sleeping

IA CEDAR RAPIDS — A Cedar Rapids woman filed an open records lawsuit against the city's police department after her 13-year-old Black son was attacked by a police dog and arrested before being released without charges.

TonyaMarie Adams' son went to a friend's house two nights after a derecho devastated Cedar Rapids in August. Because of a mix up in communication, the teen fell asleep in the friend's backyard, The Cedar Rapids Gazette reported.

At the time, police were pursuing four young Black suspects in a stolen vehicle investigation, who were believed to be on foot in the same neighborhood, said Adams' attorney, Brad Kasper.

Kasper said the teen awoke to a police dog attacking him and officers threatening him with car theft and firearms charges.

His mother is seeking all audio and video police records arising from the interaction with her son before determining whether to pursue further legal action.

Zoo reports 2 birds stolen

CA FRESNO — Two birds were stolen from a zoo in Fresno over the weekend, officials said.

A lesser sulphur-crested cockatoo and a Nicobar pigeon were taken from Chaffee Zoo's Australian Asian Aviary, The Fresno Bee reported.

"Our bird zookeepers and entire team are deeply concerned for the safety of both of these animals," general zoo curator Lyn Meyers said. "We do not know the condition of either bird and we hope to get them back quickly so that our veterinary team can examine them and continue the care they require."

Security footage shows someone cutting the lock from the aviary doors, capturing the birds and putting them into a duffel bag before leaving, authorities said. The motive for the theft is unknown.

— From The Associated Press

Bubble mentally taxing on college players

Associated Press

UNCASVILLE, Conn. — Villanova stayed in Connecticut's "Bubbleville" at the Mohegan Sun resort casino for a full week, playing four games, including two that were not on the schedule when the Wildcats arrived.

Coach Jay Wright says he's not worried about the physical toll that took on his 12th-ranked team. His players, he said, were in good shape after Tuesday's 87-53 rout of Hartford left them at 3-1.

But the mental struggles, he said, were real.

The coaches and players were basically locked in their hotel rooms for seven days, coming out only to eat, play basketball, get tested for the coronavirus and go for one or two walks outside as a group.

"Everything was perfect here," Wright said. "The rooms, the security, the food was great. It was run extremely professional. But you're inside from

Monday (Nov. 23) to Tuesday (Dec. 1). I just really learned the mental impact that has on young guys, especially when they thought they were going to leave twice."

Junior Brandon Slater was asked what kind of fun the players had in their free time, understanding they were not allowed in the public areas of the resort. He made it clear that this was basically a weeklong business trip.

"Really, we've been focused on watching film and spending time with our teammates and coaches and building a bond so that when we're not playing that we understand that we're still a group, we're still together and we're trying to become a better team," he said.

Nobody, Wright said, was allowed to leave their rooms for any reason without a security escort. They used "back-of-the-house" passageways and the guard would stop one team if

there was a chance of crossing paths with another team on the way somewhere, ensuring that there was no mingling.

"If I'm on the elevator by myself with our security guard and the elevator opens and another security person or another team member, opponent is out there waiting, they don't let anybody in the elevator," he said "They make sure you don't go outside. They have security with you all the time."

Wright said it gave him a new appreciation for what NBA players went through for several months.

But, it also gave him a sense of security. He said he was confident that because teams were tested when they arrived and tested every day and isolated on their hotel tower floor, that nobody on their team or the opposing team was going to get COVID-19.

That's why he jumped at the opportunity to play fellow "Bub-

bleville" residents Virginia Tech and later Hartford, when he found out that games in Philadelphia with Saint Joseph's and Temple were being canceled because of positive coronavirus tests on those teams.

In fact, he was working on having the Saint Joseph's game moved from Philadelphia to the Mohegan Sun when it was canceled.

"Philly's hot, they're getting infected there," he said. "This is really safe, and it's really been convenient."

Wright also sees another benefit. He expects the NCAA Tournament will be held in a similar bubble. His team, he said, will know what to expect.

But that doesn't mean he or his players want to make a habit of it.

"I would not push them another game," Wright said. "If we got offered another game, I wouldn't go. They've handled everything great."

Michigan State upends Duke in empty Cameron

Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — Rocket Watts scored 20 points and Julius Marble had a career-high 12 to help No. 8 Michigan State beat No. 6 Duke 75-69 on Tuesday night in the Champions Classic.

The Spartans (3-0) trailed by 10 early in the game but closed the first half with a 13-4 surge to take a 37-33 lead at halftime. Michigan State maintained control in the second half, leading by as many as 16.

The Blue Devils (1-1) rallied late and pulled within five in the final minute. Duke shot just 32% from the field and allowed five Spartans to score in double figures.

Joey Hauser had 11 points and 10 rebounds for Michigan State.

Matthew Hurt had 21 points and 13 rebounds for Duke.

Freshman Jalen Johnson was limited to 11.

No. 4 Wisconsin 82, Green Bay 42: Micah Potter scored 14 points, Tyler Wahl had 11 points and 15 rebounds, and the host Badgers breezed past the Phoenix in coach Will Ryan's return to Madison.

Ryan is the son of former Wisconsin head coach Bo Ryan. Will Ryan and current Badgers coach Greg Gard worked together on Bo Ryan's Wisconsin staff from 2002-07.

No. 7 Kansas 65, No. 20 Kentucky 62: At Indianapolis, Jalen Wilson scored 21 of his career-high 23 points in the second half and posted his first double-double to help the Jayhawks get past the Wildcats in the Champions Classic.

Wilson grabbed 10 rebounds as Kansas (2-1) won its second straight.

No. 9 Creighton 94, Omaha 67: Christian Bishop scored 18 points to lead the host Bluejays in the rout of the Mavericks.

Creighton (2-0) shot 61% while bolting to a 50-26 half-time lead.

No. 12 Villanova 87, Hartford 53: At Uncasville, Conn., Justin Moore led a balanced scoring attack with 15 points and the Wildcats bounced back from their first loss of the season to rout the Hawks.

Eric Dixon had 14 points and 10 rebounds for Villanova (3-1), which had six players score in double figures.

No. 14 North Carolina 67, Stanford 63: At Asheville, N.C., Leaky Black had a big driving basket at the 1:02 mark followed by a clinching free throw with 5.5 seconds left to help the Tar Heels hold off the Cardinal in the semifinals of the

relocated Maui Invitational.

Freshman Caleb Love scored 16 points to lead North Carolina (3-0).

No. 15 Virginia 76, St. Francis (Pa.) 51: Jay Huff scored 13 points and the host Cavaliers rebounded from a stunning loss to San Francisco with a win over the Red Flash.

Kadin Shedrick had 12 points and eight rebounds for Virginia (2-1).

No. 17 Texas 66, Indiana 44: At Asheville, N.C., Matt Coleman III scored 16 points and the Longhorns beat the Hoosiers in the semifinals of the relocated Maui Invitational, reaching the tournament's championship game for the first time.

Courtney Ramey added 13 points for Texas (3-0).

Trayce Jackson-Davis scored 17 points to lead Indiana (2-1).

NBA begins cautious start to season

Associated Press

The first day of NBA training camp is supposed to be accompanied by brimming optimism, a time for players and coaches all taking those first steps toward what they hope is a championship.

It was tempered this year.

The first preseason camps of the coronavirus era opened Tuesday, with teams limited for the first few days to individual sessions with one coach and one player at one basket, all of this starting to happen as the pandemic continues raging and more and more Americans are testing positive — including at least three NBA players in recent days.

“I’m very concerned if we can pull this off,” Philadelphia coach Doc Rivers said.

He probably isn’t alone.

Golden State general manager Bob Myers said two Warriors have tested positive, meaning that club won’t start individual workouts until Wednesday and won’t have a full-scale practice until Monday. Washington coach Scott Brooks said the Wizards have one player who tested positive. And Orlando coach Steve Clifford said Magic center Mo Bamba — who tested positive several months ago — is still “a ways away” from being ready to play again.

“I don’t think this is unexpected,” Myers said. “Kind of proves that the protocols and testing are working. ... That’s all per NBA protocols, which I’m learning a lot about.”

Rivers, noting how the virus is becoming a major issue for college football and the NFL in terms of getting games played, said the effect on an NBA team losing a key player or two for even a short period could essentially wreck a season.

“In football they play once a week and they have 1,000 players, so when you miss three or four players, you can still get away with it,” Rivers said. “If we miss three or four players, we’re in trouble, especially with the amount of games. We’re playing three and four games a week. So, if one of our guys or two of our key guys get the virus and they miss 10 days, 14 days, that can be eight games in a 72-game season. That can knock you out in the playoffs.”

The Wizards didn’t say what player tested positive, though Brooks said the player has yet to be around the team in Washington and that “everybody else is ready to go.” The Warriors also didn’t reveal who had positive tests, citing league rules and privacy policies. Bamba was diagnosed with COVID-19 on June 11, played sparingly in Orlando’s first two games during the NBA’s restart there this

summer, then required additional testing.

“Right now, we’re hoping that he can get healthy enough to get back on the floor,” Clifford said. “He’s going to be able to do some of the things early in camp, but he’s going to be limited. He’s had kind of a tough stretch here in terms of how much he’s been able to do. We have to be prudent and make sure we’re moving along with him in an intelligent manner.”

Players and coaches are being tested daily and that is likely to be the plan for throughout the season. Protocols that the league sent to teams late last week suggested that, in many cases, it would take at least 12 days for a player to be able to return to play after testing positive for the coronavirus.

The league had no positive tests once players entered the restart bubble over the summer. But now back in the real world, with travel and hotels and airplanes back in the mix, San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich said the challenge will fall on individuals to do the right things.

“Here, people are coming in and out, it’ll be much more difficult and the discipline will have to be even greater,” Popovich said. “But I think the understanding is, to make it work, we have an even greater responsibility than we had in Orlando. The league made it easy for us in Orlando, in my opinion, and as we all know did a great job. But here, a lot more of the onus is on individuals and teams.”

The NBA is working with Bio-Reference — a company that also handled testing in the bubble, at the league’s expense of about \$140 per test — for standardized league-wide testing, and that company will likely have personnel traveling with teams this season to handle testing on the road.

“I’m pretty comfortable with it,” Boston coach Brad Stevens said. “As we saw with the bubble, the NBA crosses every ‘t’ and dots every ‘i.’ They have been great communicating with all of us ... and I’m looking forward to hopefully getting together and starting practice soon as a group.”

Some teams will be able to start those group practices — and 5-on-5 sessions — Friday. Most other NBA clubs will be able to start Sunday. Injuries will be a worry, as will conditioning, but the daily testing numbers seem like they’ll overshadow everything.

“As a coach, you want to go in with your team concerns being more basketball,” Rivers said. “And I think every coaches’ concerns right now are probably non-basketball.”

“I definitely used to have crazy anxiety wondering how I was going to play the next day or the next series and it used to drive me crazy,” Durant said.

He got over that by relying on his work ethic and he believes that will help him overcome the uncertainty he faces now.

Durant unsure what to expect as return draws near

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Kevin Durant used to worry about how he would play.

There hasn’t been reason for concern for years. He became an NBA MVP and a two-time champion, an explosive scorer who could get 25 points on a bad night and 45 on a good one.

But that was before having one of the most serious injuries a basketball player could face.

Now, 18 months after rupturing his Achilles tendon and finally set to play for the Brooklyn Nets, Durant once again has reason to wonder if he will be one of the league’s greatest players.

“Who knows?” he said Tuesday. “I’ve just got to see how I feel in a real NBA game again.”

He hasn’t played in one since Game 5 of the 2019 NBA Finals, when he went down early in the second quarter of his last ap-

pearance for Golden State. Surgery followed and then shortly after he decided to join the Nets along with friend and fellow superstar Kyrie Irving.

With that duo plus a deep and talented roster, the Nets have a chance to be one of the NBA’s top teams. But that may depend on how quickly — or if — Durant regains his form.

Few players have bettered it. The 6-foot-10 forward is a four-

time scoring champion who has averaged 27 points, easing whatever fears he had earlier in his career.

“I definitely used to have crazy anxiety wondering how I was going to play the next day or the next series and it used to drive me crazy,” Durant said.

He got over that by relying on his work ethic and he believes that will help him overcome the uncertainty he faces now.

Two women's teams opt to play it safe

Associated Press

It is not unusual to see players and coaches wearing masks on the sideline as the college basketball season gets going.

The DePaul and Creighton women's teams have taken it a step further: Their players are wearing masks while they are on the court competing.

"The first week I complained every day, but now it's normal as we wear them every day in practice," said Deja Church, a senior guard for DePaul. "It's kind of normal now. I don't like it, but whatever keeps us and the coaches and everyone safe is what matters most."

The NCAA does not require masks on the court, though it recommends them on the bench along with social distancing guidance for its member schools and other steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19. But masks are still very uncommon in organized basketball and that is unlikely to change.

DePaul coach Doug Bruno

said he took the advice of the school's medical staff. His 20th-ranked team has worn masks in every practice since Aug. 7 and played its first two games wearing them.

Creighton coach Jim Flanery said he left it up to his players to decide whether they wanted to wear masks in games. A majority of them are wearing them.

"Our contact tracer has told us it will be impactful in terms of contact tracing and determining whether we'd have to pause if someone on the other team tests positive," Flanery said. "We gave (the players) the information and let them make the decision."

Flanery said that he isn't sure how long his players will wear masks this season, but "if it gives us a greater opportunity to have everyone available or more people available if we're exposed, it's worth it."

But does it make breathing more difficult? Experts say no.

"It's doing very little, if anything, to your physiology," said

Susan Hopkins, a professor of medicine and radiology at the University of California San Diego School of Medicine.

"All of the evidence we've been able to assemble is that it's your perception of breathing that it affects. Some people may find that distressing," said Hopkins, who specializes in exercise physiology and the study of lungs under stress. "After three months practicing in it, most athletes should be used to it."

Some schools have worn masks during warmups and found them to be uncomfortable.

"When we first got here, we tried the mask thing and good lord, it felt like we were in Denver (at high altitude)," Michigan men's basketball senior forward Isaiah Livers said after scoring 22 points in an 81-71 win over Oakland on Sunday.

Flanery did point out that masks have made communication harder for players amongst themselves on the court and

with coaches.

"With the testing that we're doing here, with what we're doing at home where we get tested three times a week ... No, I'm not a big advocate of wearing a mask for the games," said Dawn Staley, coach of No. 1 South Carolina.

"We haven't talked about it (wearing a mask while playing)," Gonzaga senior Jill Townsend added. "I don't think as a team we feel the need to wear a mask out there, that we're at risk."

The Blue Demons and Bluejays are in the minority now as far as wearing masks during games, but that could change depending on the pandemic. Some schools didn't even know it was an option.

"I didn't even really know we could play with masks on," N.C. State sophomore Jakia Brown-Turner said. She said she asked an assistant coach about it.

"I think it's kind of a good idea if cases keep on rising," she said.

Top 7 stay same in College Football playoff rankings

Associated Press

Ohio State held on to the fourth spot in the College Football Playoff rankings on Tuesday night after having its previous game canceled, landing behind No. 1 Alabama, No. 2 Notre Dame and No. 3 Clemson for a second straight week.

The selection committee's top seven teams were unchanged from last week's rankings after the playoff contenders either won comfortably or didn't play because of COVID-19 issues.

Texas A&M (6-1) was in fifth and Florida (7-1) sixth.

Ohio State (4-0) had to cancel its game at Illinois last week because of a spike in COVID-19 cases in the program. It was the second game of the season the Buckeyes have missed out on. One more cancellation would leave them ineligible for the Big Ten championship game and unable to play more than six regular-season games.

No. 7 Cincinnati (8-0) also had its last game canceled. The Bearcats are next scheduled to

play Dec. 12 at Tulsa.

The College Football Playoff has set no minimum number of games played to be eligible for the playoff. It's just going to be up to the selection committee to figure out how many is too few.

"There is a discrepancy sometimes between a team that plays eight or nine games and a team that's played three or four games and frankly that's a problem (in ranking teams)," said selection committee chairman Gary Barta, who is Iowa's athletic director.

Barta said the committee discussed ranking Texas A&M ahead of Ohio State, but for now the Buckeyes and their potent offense led by quarterback Justin Fields are holding down the final playoff spot.

"When those two teams were put side-by-side this morning and last night, there just wasn't enough there to put Texas A&M ahead of Ohio State," Barta said.

Texas A&M is coming off a 20-7 victory against LSU that was played in rainy and windy conditions.

Georgia was eighth and Iowa State and Miami rounded out the top 10. Oklahoma was 11th, followed by Indiana and BYU.

The Cougars, who are hoping for a New Year's Six bowl, edged up one spot.

Herbstreit apology

ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit caused a commotion with some of his analysis regarding Ohio State, Michigan and teams using COVID-19 as an excuse to not play.

Michigan did not hold in-person team activities Monday and Tuesday after returning at least one positive test in the program. The Wolverines (2-4) are scheduled to host Maryland this week and play at Ohio State on Dec. 12.

"I still think Michigan waves the white flag, potentially avoids playing Ohio State next week," Herbstreit said.

"Is that fair?" the former Ohio State quarterback said. "Michigan could opt out basically of that game and could keep Ohio State out of six games to qualify for the Big Ten championship. That doesn't make sense to me."