

## US panel endorses use of Pfizer vaccine

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — A U.S. government advisory panel endorsed widespread use of Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine Thursday, putting the country just one step away from launching an epic vaccination campaign against the outbreak that has killed close to 300,000 Americans.

On Friday the head of the FDA said his agency had told Pfizer it "will rapidly work" to grant emergency use of the vaccine following the positive recommendation. Many FDA observers predicted action by Saturday ahead of a Sunday meeting by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Shots could begin within days, depending on how quickly the Food and Drug Administration signs off, as expected, on the expert committee's recommendation.

"This is a light at the end of the long

tunnel of this pandemic," declared Dr. Sally Goza, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

In a 17-4 vote with one abstention, the government advisers concluded that the vaccine from Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech appears safe and effective for emergency use in adults and teenagers 16 and over.

That endorsement came despite questions about allergic reactions in two people who received the vaccine earlier this week when Britain became the first country to begin dispensing the Pfizer-BioNTech shot.

While there are a number of remaining unknowns about the vaccine, in an emergency, "the question is whether you know enough" to press ahead, said panel member Dr. Paul Offit of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. He concluded that the potential benefits outweigh the risks.

The decision came as COVID-19 cases surge to ever-higher levels across the U.S.

Pfizer has said it will have about 25 million doses of the two-shot vaccine for the U.S. by the end of December. But the initial supplies will be reserved primarily for health care workers and nursing home residents, with other vulnerable groups next in line until ramped-up production enables shots to become widely available on demand — something that will probably not happen until the spring.

Next week, the FDA will review a second vaccine, from Moderna and the National Institutes of Health, that appears about as protective as Pfizer-BioNTech's shot. A third candidate, from Johnson & Johnson, which would require just one dose, is working its way through the pipeline. Behind that is a candidate from AstraZeneca and Oxford University.

## US sees over 3,000 one-day death toll from virus

*Associated Press*

MISSION, Kan. — Just when the U.S. appears on the verge of rolling out a COVID-19 vaccine, the numbers have become gloomier than ever: Over 3,000 American deaths in a single day. One million new cases in the span of five days. More than 106,000 people in the hospital.

The crisis across the country is pushing medical centers to the breaking point and leaving staff members and public health officials burned out and plagued by tears and nightmares.

All told, the crisis has left more than 290,000 people dead nationwide, with more than 15.5 million confirmed infections.

The U.S. recorded 3,124 deaths Wednesday, the highest one-day total yet, according to Johns Hopkins University. Up until last week, the peak was 2,603 deaths on April 15, when New York City was the epicenter of the nation's outbreak. The latest number is subject to revision up or down.

New cases per day are running at all-time highs of over 209,000 on average. And the number of people in the hospital with CO-

VID-19 is setting records nearly every day.

A U.S. government advisory panel on Thursday endorsed widespread use of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine to help conquer the outbreak. Depending on how fast the FDA signs off on the panel's recommendation, shots could begin within days, inaugurating the biggest vaccination campaign in U.S. history.

In St. Louis, respiratory therapist Joe Kowalczyk said he has seen entire floors of his hospital fill up with COVID-19 patients, some of them two to a room. He said the supply of ventilators is dwindling, and the inventory is so thin that colleagues on one shift had to ventilate one patient by using a BiPAP machine, similar to the devices used to treat sleep apnea.

When he goes home to sleep during the day at the end of his grueling overnight shifts, he sometimes has nightmares.

"I would be sleeping and I would be working in a unit and things would go completely wrong and I would shock myself awake. They would be very visceral and very vivid," he said. "It would just really spook me."

In South Dakota, Dr. Clay Smith has treated hundreds of COVID-19 patients while working at Monument Health Spearfish Hospital and at Sheridan Memorial Hospital in neighboring Wyoming.

He said patients are becoming stranded in the emergency room for hours while they await beds on the main floor or transfers to larger hospitals. And those transfers are becoming more challenging, with some patients sent as far away as Denver, 400 miles from the two hospitals.

"That is a huge burden for families and EMS systems as well when you take an ambulance and send it 400 miles one way, that ambulance is out of the community for essentially a whole day," he said.

Smith added that some patients have gone from thinking "I thought this was a hoax" to "Wow, this is real and I feel terrible." But he also has seen people with COVID-19 who "continue to be disbelievers. It is hard to see that."

"At the end of the day the virus doesn't care whether you believe in it or not," he said.

# McKenzie: Drawdowns limit operations

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The troop drawdowns in Afghanistan and Iraq planned to be completed by mid-January will restrict the remaining forces in both countries and limit how the United States assists with future operations there, the top general for U.S. Central Command said Thursday.

“We’re just going to have to be very careful and focused when we do it,” Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie said during a virtual event with DefenseOne, a news organization.

On Nov. 17, acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller announced President Donald Trump had decided to reduce the

U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan by Jan. 15, just five days before President-elect Joe Biden is sworn into office.

The force reduction will leave roughly 2,500 troops in Afghanistan and 2,500 in Iraq as both countries continue to see violence against government forces and civilians by terrorist groups such as the Islamic State and the Taliban.

With less troops, the work of advising and assisting Afghan forces with counterterrorism operations will be done “at a higher level,” McKenzie said.

“We will have to be very careful and very smart how we pick and choose where we go and where we don’t go. And the margins will be less, but we believe it still will en-

able us to carry out our core objective” of preventing ISIS and al-Qaida from attacking the U.S. or other partner countries from Afghanistan, the general said.

The United States will not have trouble getting down to less than 3,000 in Afghanistan by January, including the removal of excess equipment, McKenzie said. Even with the drawdown, they will still work with allies and partners to carry out their mission in Afghanistan and Iraq.

“One point I want to make is our NATO and coalition partners are going to be with us, even as we go down. In fact, there will be more coalition and NATO forces in Afghanistan than U.S. forces when we arrive at this number,” he said.

## Rand Paul objection delays Senate vote on defense bill

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — A Senate vote on a wide-ranging defense policy bill was delayed after Kentucky Republican Rand Paul objected to the measure, casting the next steps in doubt and raising the slim prospect of a government shutdown if a short-term spending bill caught up in the dispute is not approved by Friday.

Paul said on the Senate floor that he opposes provisions in the defense bill that would limit President Donald Trump’s ability to draw down U.S. troops from Afghanistan and Germany. His objections on Thursday threatened another must-pass bill, a one-week spending measure that would keep the government open through Dec. 18. The House has passed the stopgap measure, but a government shutdown would occur if the Senate does not act on it by midnight Friday.

Paul said he would drop his objection if GOP leaders allowed a final vote on the National Defense Authorization Act on Monday. Senators from both parties were eager to finish work on the bill this week.

South Dakota Sen. John Thune, the No. 2 Senate Republican, said he thought Paul — who has provoked government shutdowns before — was using the time-crunch for maximum leverage to remove the provision on troop withdrawals.

“I think he’s just trying to figure out ways to derail the bill. And ... when

you’re in the U.S. Senate that’s your prerogative. But most of our people would like to get it done” this week, Thune said.

“His thing is just to delay this and use all the time so it pushes the vote on (the defense bill) into next week, which pushes the override vote” on a possible Trump veto into the following week, Thune said of his fellow Republican, Paul.

A procedural vote on the defense bill was expected Friday, setting the stage for final votes on the defense bill and the stopgap spending measure later in the day.

Paul said he is concerned that the measure on troop deployment “creates 535 commanders-in-chief in Congress” and hampers the president’s ability to deploy troops as he sees fit. Democrats support the measure because they oppose Trump, Paul said, but the amendment would also apply to future presidents, including President-elect Joe Biden.

One amendment, co-sponsored by Reps. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., and Jason Crow, D-Colo., would block troop withdrawals in Afghanistan unless the Pentagon submits inter-agency reports certifying that the drawdowns would not jeopardize national security. A separate provision pushed by Utah Republican Sen. Mitt Romney and other lawmakers would limit planned troop withdrawals in Germany.

## Report: Afghans losing hope for peace process amid violence

*Associated Press*

KABUL, Afghanistan — Optimism among Afghans regarding the country’s peace process has decreased significantly in the past few months amid a spike in violence, according to a survey released Friday.

The Institute of War and Peace Studies found optimism had dropped to 57% when the survey was conducted from Sept. 29 to Oct. 18. That’s down from 86% of those surveyed according to the previous assessment conducted over the summer and released in August.

Ongoing peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban in Qatar had been at an impasse until last week, when in a breakthrough, the two sides agreed on rules and procedures for the negotiations.

However, since the Afghan-Taliban talks started in September, violence has spiked significantly. The Taliban have staged deadly attacks on Afghan forces while keeping their promise not to attack U.S. and NATO troops. The attacks have drawn a mighty retaliation by the Afghan air force, backed by U.S. warplanes. International rights groups have warned both sides to avoid inflicting civilian casualties.

# Biden filling Cabinet with an Obama feel

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President-elect Joe Biden is getting the old gang back together.

Increasingly deep into the process of selecting Cabinet members and other senior staff, the incoming Biden administration has a distinctly Obama feel.

There's Denis McDonough, former President Barack Obama's chief of staff who Biden announced on Thursday would be nominated as the secretary of veterans affairs. Susan Rice, Obama's former national security adviser, was named the director of Biden's White House Domestic Policy Council.

That's on top of Biden already tapping Obama's agriculture secretary, Tom Vilsack, to head the department once again, former Secretary of State John Kerry to serve as special envoy on climate and Kerry's Obama-era deputy Antony Blinken to lead the State Department. Jeff Zients, who did stints as acting Office of Management and Budget director and a top economic adviser in the Obama White House, will return as Biden's coronavirus response coordinator.

With the exception of President Donald Trump, a political outsider when he was elected in 2016, recent new presidents have relied heavily on pools of talent that had cut their teeth in their parties' previous administrations to fill out their own government.

But Biden, who is assuming the presidency in the midst of the worst public health crisis in a century and a flagging economy, is putting a greater premium on past experience and, as a result, has gone frequently back to the Obama well as he fills out his government.

"Many of the folks who are returning are returning because they believe in public service and know that after four turbulent and destructive years and a brutal pandemic, this is a particularly important time to serve," said David Axelrod, who served as a senior adviser to Obama. "Their experience is valuable. Their values and outlooks are consonant with (Biden's). The challenge is to look forward and not back and innovate beyond what's simply been broken."

The swelling ranks of Obama officials in Biden's orbit seem to have some limits.

Former Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, a three-term former congressman who served as Obama's first White House chief of staff, seems increasingly unlikely to win a Cabinet post. He had lobbied for the yet-to-be-filled transportation secretary slot but has faced criticism for his handling as mayor of the 2014 deadly police shooting of Laquan McDonald, a Black teen shot 16 times by a white officer.

Still, the reliance on Obama veterans carries risks. For one, some of the nominees

represent the Washington establishment that Trump dubbed the "swamp" during his 2016 campaign and are still distrusted by some Republicans.

Progressive Democrats, meanwhile, view the Obama era with frustration, believing that those in power acted too cautiously at a time that called for bold change. They're pressing Biden to focus in particular on the diversity of his Cabinet after several early picks were white men.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a New York Democrat, questioned earlier this week "the overall message" that Biden is aiming to send with his Cabinet picks. And the left-leaning climate group Sunrise Movement on Thursday called the pick of Vilsack for agriculture secretary over Rep. Marcia Fudge, an Ohio Democrat who was looking to become the agency's first Black secretary, as a "slap in the face to Black Americans."

Biden did nominate Fudge to serve as housing and urban development secretary and retired four-star Army general Lloyd Austin to serve as defense secretary. If confirmed, he would be the first Black Pentagon chief.

The president-elect's allies say he's making good on his pledge to fill out a Cabinet that reflects the diversity of the nation, while putting a premium on the ability of his picks to hit the ground running.

## Congress snagged on state aid in coronavirus deal

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — An emerging \$900 billion COVID-19 aid package from a bipartisan group of lawmakers has all but collapsed after Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Republican senators won't support \$160 billion in state and local funds as part of a potential trade-off in the deal.

McConnell's staff conveyed to top negotiators Thursday that the GOP leader sees no path to an agreement on a key aspect of the lawmakers' existing proposal — a slimmed-down version of the liability shield he is seeking for companies and organizations facing potential COVID-19 lawsuits — in exchange for the state and local funds that Democrats want.

The GOP leader criticized "controversial state bailouts" during a speech in the Senate, as he insists on a more targeted aid package.

The hardened stance from McConnell, who does not appear to have enough votes from his Republican majority for a far-reaching compromise, creates a new stalemate over the \$900-billion-plus package, despite days of toiling by a bipartisan group of lawmakers to strike compromise.

Other legislative pile-ups threatened Friday's related business — a must-pass government funding bill. If it didn't clear Congress, that would trigger a federal government shutdown on Saturday.

McConnell's staff conveyed to other negotiators it's "unlikely" the trade-off proposed by the bipartisan group would be acceptable, as COVID aid talks continue, according to a person granted anonymity to discuss the talks. A senior Democrat first shared the Republican leader's views after being granted anonymity to discuss the private conversations, which were first reported by Politico.

Deadlines, real and perceived, haven't been sufficient to drive Washington's factions to an agreement, despite the U.S. breaking a record-high 3,000 daily COVID fatalities, and hospitals straining at capacity from soaring caseloads nationwide.

The House recessed for a few days, with leaders warning members to be prepared to return to Washington to vote on the year-end deals, while the Senate was planning a rare Friday session.

The breakdown over the COVID aid package, after days of behind-the-scenes talks by a group of lawmakers fed up with inaction, comes as President Donald Trump has taken the talks in another direction — insisting on a fresh round of \$600 stimulus checks for Americans.

Sending direct cash payments to households was not included in the bipartisan proposal.



# Washington State reduces its death toll

*Associated Press*

SEATTLE — The state Department of Health has reported 2,550 new cases and reduced the number of COVID-19 deaths by 166.

The state removes deaths from the statewide total when the primary cause of death is determined not to have been COVID-19.

The Seattle Times reports the update brings the state's totals to 192,413 cases and 2,850 deaths, meaning that 1.5% of people diagnosed in Washington have died, according to the state. The data is as of 11:59 p.m. Wednesday.

In Washington's most populous King County, 755 new cases were reported, and the number of deaths was reduced by 50, to 894.

The DOH also reported 88 new hospitalizations as of Wednesday because of the virus and said 12,084 people have been hospitalized in the state since the pandemic began.

In Moses Lake, contact tracing has connected additional COVID-19 cases and possible deaths to a 300-person wedding near the Adams County-Grant County line in November, KXLY-TV reported.

The Grant County Health District said Thursday evening it has linked 47 cases in its county to wedding attendees.

## Kentucky

LOUISVILLE — Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear announced Thursday that the state's restaurants, bars, gyms and other businesses will be able to return to their previous capacity limits starting Monday, Dec. 14.

"When we talk about COVID being a fast moving train, it doesn't just immediately turn; you have to slow it down, stop it and turn it around. We still believe that's what we're seeing," Beshear said.

The Democratic governor pointed toward the state's test

positivity rate as a "leading not a lagging" indicator that community spread is slowing, and urged businesses to reopen with a commitment to enforcing social distancing guidelines.

Bars and restaurants will be able to open indoor dining at 50% capacity, and continue curbside pickup, delivery, and outdoor dining. They must stop serving food at 11 p.m. and close by midnight. Gyms, fitness centers, pools and other indoor recreation facilities will also be able to resume operations at 50% capacity.

## Maryland

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan on Thursday announced a series of measures that he hopes will spur job creation and help businesses that have struggled financially as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

The new efforts include the forgiveness of \$75 million in emergency loans provided to businesses early in the pandemic and an executive order to prevent small businesses from seeing their unemployment taxes skyrocket. In addition, the state will spend \$37 million for the construction of affordable housing.

"While we continue to wait for Congress to finally get its act together, today, we are taking a series of additional state actions to help businesses struggling to hang on to avoid the prospect of more layoffs and to try to keep some businesses from going out of business," Hogan said during a news conference. "During this crisis, our small businesses have had to make very difficult decisions to move ahead with layoffs and furloughs despite their best efforts."

## Ohio

COLUMBUS — Ohio's overnight curfew will be extended into the new year, Gov. Mike DeWine announced Thursday as he urged residents to do ev-

erything possible to protect themselves and others from the coronavirus during the Christmas season.

The curfew first enacted last month will continue to run from 10 p.m. until 5 a.m. until Jan. 2, the governor said. The curfew restricts movement outside homes but allows multiple exceptions for work, grocery shopping, medical emergencies and other trips. Some epidemiologists have questioned its effectiveness.

"We simply cannot afford — on the very eve of a safe and effective vaccination — to further overwhelm our hospitals and healthcare providers with a holiday tsunami," DeWine said, calling these next few weeks "an inherently dangerous time."

Ohio is set to receive its first supplies of vaccination on Tuesday.

## Oregon

REDMOND — Some Central Oregon schools that were offering in-person instruction this week canceled those plans for the rest of the year, as more staffers and students quarantined because of exposure to the coronavirus.

Redmond school officials in Deschutes County halted classroom learning after 91 students and staffers were told to isolate, The Bulletin reported. In neighboring Crook County, School Superintendent Sara Johnson sent a letter Monday, telling parents the rural district of about 3,000 students would resume comprehensive distance learning next week through at least Jan. 4.

"The impact of quarantines due to potential exposures has severely impacted our staffing levels," the letter reads.

Some 22 Crook County staff and 12 students have been told to quarantine, with at least three staffers testing positive so far for the virus, district spokes-

man Jason Carr told Oregon Public Broadcasting.

## Texas

FORT WORTH — A North Texas medical examiner's office has brought in two refrigerated trucks to store dead bodies in response to low capacity amid a surge in coronavirus cases.

Many of the hospitals and larger funeral homes in the Fort Worth area have reached their storage capacity or will soon, said Nizam Peerwani, Tarrant County's chief medical examiner.

The Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office, which has a capacity normally of 100 bodies, said each truck can store 50 bodies.

Officials expect to start using the trucks in the next few days.

## Virginia

RICHMOND — Gov. Ralph Northam announced new measures to combat the coronavirus Thursday that include a stricter mask mandate and a curfew that will require most Virginians to stay at home between midnight and 5 a.m.

The executive order is set to take effect on Monday and will also reduce the state's cap on public gatherings from 25 people to 10. Northam is expanding the state's longstanding mask requirements to include outdoor areas where social distancing isn't possible and all indoor areas shared with others, except for households. The current mask mandate requires only that masks be worn in indoor public settings.

The modified stay-at-home order will have some exceptions, including for Virginians traveling to work and seeking medical attention. The mask mandate does not apply to children under five. The executive order will be in place through the end of January.

## Ex-teacher sentenced for kicking kindergartener in school library

**KS** BELLE PLAINE — A former Kansas teacher who was caught on security camera kicking a kindergarten student in the school library has been sentenced to 30 days in jail and a year of probation.

Crystal Smith, 55, was also ordered to attend anger management classes after pleading guilty in Johnson County District Court, online court records show.

A security camera at the Bluejacket-Flint Elementary School in Shawnee, Kan., captured footage of the incident. The girl had crawled into a bookshelf opening. Smith yanked her out, then kicked the girl as she lay huddled.

When the mother confronted the teacher, Smith denied harming the girl and told her the girl was not being truthful. The mother demanded school officials to investigate.

## Flower Show to be held outdoors for first time in 200-year history

**PA** PHILADELPHIA — The Philadelphia Flower Show, which bills itself as “the nation’s largest and longest-running horticultural event,” will move outside next year for the first time in its nearly 200-year history because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The 2021 event will take place in FDR Park in south Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society announced.

“We are working closely with our colleagues at Philadelphia Parks and Recreation and a host of planning experts including the Department of Public Health in Philadelphia to develop the Flower Show into a safe, beautiful, and extraordinary outdoor experience for everyone,” the society said.

## Holiday messages being sent to long-term care facilities

**KY** FRANKFORT — Employees of the Legislative Research Commission have launched a campaign to send handwritten holiday cards to every long-term care facility around the state.

The goal was to send at least one card to each facility, but some have asked for cards for each resident. There are around 250 facilities in the state.

“If your family is anything like mine, curtailing holiday traditions because of social distancing has been hard on the soul,” Commission Director Jay Hartz said. “My hope is this card-writing initiative fosters some of that human connection lost with the restrictions.”

## The Census

**22** The number of black bears killed on the first day of New Jersey’s annual black bear hunt. The second segment of the hunt resumed with hunters in parts of eight counties using firearms. Hunters used archery to bag 62 bruins on the first day of the hunt’s first segment in October. They killed 336 bears with archery and muzzleloaders during the first segment between Oct. 12 and Oct. 17.

## Police find cocaine stash in trailer hauling garlic

**IN** VALPARAISO — A stash of cocaine worth up to \$2 million was discovered inside a trailer hauling garlic from California after staff at a northwest Indiana highway weigh station grew suspicious, police said.

State troopers were called to the weigh station along Interstate 94 in Porter County by staff who had been inspecting a commercial truck’s trailer loaded with 18,000 pounds of minced garlic.

State Police Sgt. Glen Fifield said a staff member became suspicious after spotting a black case in the trailer that seemed inconsistent with the rest of its load, The (Northwest Indiana) Times reported.

Fifield said that case contained packages of a white substance, which later tested positive as cocaine.

## 2 kids jump from 3rd floor to escape Christmas tree fire

**WA** SPOKANE — Two children had to jump from a third-floor window of a Spokane apartment building to escape a fire that was caused after the family’s Christmas tree burst into flames.

A boy, 9, who jumped as people gathered below had to be taken to the hospital to be checked out but fire officials said his injuries were not life threatening.

The boy’s sister, 5, who also jumped, was not injured.

The third-story window was about 25 feet above the ground, said Julie O’Berg of the Spokane Fire Department.

The father, Kevin Hulme, was not in the apartment when the tree caught fire.

His wife ran to get help but could not re-enter the apartment because of smoke.

## Deputies confront, arrest man pointing AK-47 at them

**NC** EDEN — A North Carolina man dressed in body armor pointed

an assault rifle at deputies after they went to a home to serve him with a warrant, a sheriff’s office said.

The Rockingham County Sheriff’s Office said in a news release that deputies went to a home in Pelham to arrest Patrick James Donovan, 46, on a misdemeanor simple assault charge stemming from an incident earlier in the day in Caswell County.

Deputies said Donovan emerged from a carport carrying an AK-47 rifle, wearing body armor and demanding that the deputies leave the property. The deputies then took cover behind their patrol cars and told Donovan they had a warrant for his arrest, authorities said.

According to the news release, Donovan fled into nearby woods before he negotiated with deputies and surrendered.

## Man pleads guilty to wire fraud, identity theft at ABC stores

**VA** NEWPORT NEWS — A Virginia man has pleaded guilty to participating in a scheme to buy alcohol for resale from state-run liquor stores by using stolen debit and credit card numbers, according to the U.S. Attorney’s Office.

Tyrell Jackson, 44, of Norfolk pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft, a news release from Virginia U.S. Attorney G. Zachary Terwilliger said.

Prosecutors said Jackson and three other men defrauded Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control stores by using debit and credit cards re-encoded with the stolen information. The news release said investigators identified 20 direct victims of identity theft from Jackson’s role in the conspiracy, and at least 82 victims of the bigger conspiracy.

## Woman arrested at airport with knife hidden in bra

**AZ** PHOENIX — A woman was arrested at Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport after allegedly trying to pass through security and board a flight to San Francisco recently with a folding knife concealed in her bra, authorities said.

FBI officials in Phoenix said Erine Aisha Robertson, 36, was charged with the federal crime of attempting to carry a weapon on an aircraft. Court documents show an alarm went off as Robertson passed through the sensor at the Transportation Security Administration checkpoint. Authorities said Robertson was taken to a private screening room where she reached into her bra and pulled out a small knife.

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

# Army, Navy set to face off at West Point

Associated Press

Navy coach Ken Niumatalolo never tires of the feeling that permeates the locker room in the moments before the opening kickoff of the annual matchup against Army.

"There's a chill that goes through you unlike any other game," Niumatalolo said. "It's the craziest thing because you're in the locker room and it's quiet, a little bit serene, and then you step outside and there's this rush and you know it's different."

The 121st meeting between the service academy rivals is Saturday, and this one will be very different. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, for the first time in 77 years the game will be played at West Point's venerable Michie Stadium. Both schools agreed to move it from its customary site in Philadelphia after attendance limits were placed on outdoor events

in Pennsylvania because of concerns over the new coronavirus and it was Army's turn to be the home team.

This show must go on just as it did for two years during World War II at the urging of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, with games played at both academies.

"We are excited we are able to play this game here for only the fourth time in history," Army coach Jeff Monken said. "The state of our world right now has forced the game away from Philadelphia. It will be special to play it here. It will be very nostalgic and really a great piece in the history of this rivalry."

No fans will be allowed at Michie Stadium — capacity 38,000 instead of nearly 70,000 at Lincoln Financial Field. But at least the entire Brigade of Midshipmen and Corps of Cadets (about 9,000 total) will be there,

and President Trump is scheduled to fly in.

Navy (3-6) leads Army (7-2) 61-52-7 in the series, which started in 1890 when West Point cadet Dennis Michie accepted a challenge from Navy to play a football game. The Midshipmen arrived at West Point by ferry, and with one year of football experience to none for Army they easily prevailed 24-0 on The Plain before about 2,000 spectators.

The Black Knights returned the favor the next year at Annapolis, winning 32-16 and a football rivalry like no other was beginning to blossom.

According to Gene Schorr's, "The Army-Navy Game," players on both teams personally congratulated one another during an evening celebration in the Navy boathouse after that initial Army victory and cadet Michie and Navy quarterback Worth Bagley, the stars of those

teams, shook hands, looking forward to the next meeting. Seven years later both men were killed in the Spanish-American War.

"There's so much history in both of these schools, so we're playing for so much more than just football," Army senior offensive lineman J.B. Hunter said. "We're stoked for this opportunity. For us, it's very important. We don't want anyone coming in our back yard (and winning). We're just going to hope that what we do is going to work."

Navy is unbeaten in three games at West Point and won the previous encounter 13-0 in 1943, when the great Glenn Davis was a plebe at West Point. The Midshipmen won last year's game 31-7 behind the stellar play of senior quarterback Malcolm Perry, who rushed for 304 yards and two touchdowns.

## Bufs need win, USC loss to reach Pac-12 title game

Associated Press

A weekend devoid of drama appears to be setting up in college football unless you're Colorado.

Southern California (4-0, 4-0) can lock up a spot in the Pac-12 championship game if it beats crosstown rival UCLA on Saturday even if Colorado beats Utah to remain undefeated in the Pac-12 South.

Colorado (4-0, 3-0) has had two games canceled by COVID-19; the Trojans lost one game to the virus, the one against the Buffaloes.

If CU and USC win this weekend, the Trojans would go to the title game based on the tiebreaker that gives the nod to the team with the higher College Football Playoff ranking. The Trojans are No. 15 and the Buffs are No. 21.

So if you're a Colorado fan, you're cheering hard for the

Bufs in the morning and, if they win, for the Bruins at night.

Top-ranked Alabama is the only team among the top four in the CFP rankings playing this week, and the Crimson Tide are 31-point favorites at Arkansas.

Notre Dame and Clemson are idle until they meet next Saturday in the Atlantic Coast Championship game.

Ohio State had its game against Michigan canceled because of COVID-19 issues in the Wolverines program. The No. 5 team in the CFP rankings, Texas A&M, also will be off after having its game against Mississippi called off.

### Best game

**No. 25 Wisconsin at No. 19 Iowa:** The Hawkeyes (5-2, 5-2 Big Ten) are averaging better than 37 points during their five-game winning streak, their longest since the magical 2015

season that saw them go 12-0 in the regular season.

Wisconsin (2-2, 2-2) has had a bumpy ride. Graham Mertz had one of the best starting debuts in FBS history against Illinois but hasn't come close to duplicating that 20-for-21 performance.

The Badgers, ranked as high as No. 9 before having three games in five weeks canceled due to COVID-19, have scored a combined 13 points in losing their last two.

### Heisman watch

Alabama's Mac Jones overtook Florida's Kyle Trask as the favorite with a stellar performance against LSU. That's according to oddsmakers.

Jones closes the regular season at Arkansas after throwing for 385 yards and four touchdowns in the Crimson Tide's 55-17 win.

Trask gets his turn against

LSU on Saturday. Don't discount the possibility Trask totals over 400 yards passing for the fourth time this season against defensive coordinator Bo Pelini's unit.

Two other Heisman contenders, Clemson's Trevor Lawrence and Notre Dame's Ian Book, are idle until they square off in the ACC championship game next week.

### Numbers to know

**0** — Second-half points allowed by Colorado in back-to-back games against San Diego State and Arizona, the first time in 18 years the Buffaloes have blanked opponents after the half in consecutive games.

**7** — Consecutive weeks Indiana has been ranked in the Top 25, matching the school regular-season record set by the 1945 team.



# RB Akers, Rams run over Patriots

Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — With rookie Cam Akers running wild for the Rams and his defensive teammates thoroughly stifling the Patriots, Los Angeles got a tiny measure of payback for its Super Bowl embarrassment two years ago.

These Rams even looked good enough to contend for a chance at some actual Super Bowl redemption later this season.

Akers rushed for 171 yards in a breakout performance, Kenny Young returned an interception 79 yards for a touchdown and the Rams clinched their fourth straight winning season with a 24-3 victory over the New England Patriots on Thursday.

Jared Goff rushed for a touchdown and threw a TD pass to Cooper Kupp as the NFC West-

leading Rams (9-4) rolled to a one-sided victory in a rematch of their 13-3 Super Bowl loss in February 2019.

"We've got a lot of respect for them, but it's a totally different year," Rams coach Sean McVay said. "It doesn't have anything to do with what occurred a couple of years ago."

While the Rams' offense looked sharp, their defense pushed the Patriots (6-7) perilously close to disarray. New England managed only 220 total yards — just 62 in the second half with a series of misbegotten drives.

Cam Newton went 9-for-16 for 119 yards and got sacked four times before the 2015 NFL MVP was replaced by Jarrett Stidham for the final three series in the fourth quarter.

"We knew exactly what they were going to do," Newton said.

"We have to be better, and it starts with me personally. I have to make more plays."

Five days after the Patriots scored 45 points at SoFi Stadium against the Chargers, New England endangered its push for a 12th straight playoff berth with only its second loss in six games.

When asked if he expected to start next week, Newton replied: "That's not my call."

Bill Belichick doused the speculation moments later: "Cam is our quarterback."

The Rams got a superb game from Akers, the second-round draft pick out of Florida State who has seized a major role in their offense over the last three weeks.

Akers' yards mostly came in big chunks during the biggest rushing game by an NFL rookie this season and just the ninth

150-yard game against a Belichick-coached defense since 2000.

"It's just (great) watching that guy really assert himself as a big-time player for us," McVay said. "You can just see this guy is going to be a really special player for us, and this was a great night for him."

Aaron Donald had 1½ sacks to move into the overall NFL lead with 12½ this season while leading another strong game from Los Angeles' elite defense, which recorded six sacks and also scored a touchdown in its third consecutive game.

"We knew they had a great running game, that they out-physical-ed people, and we took that personally," said Rams defensive tackle Michael Brockers, who had two sacks. "If they were going to come in here and run the ball, we were going to stop them."

# No. 24 Aztecs use size to upend No. 23 Devils

Associated Press

TEMPE, Ariz. — San Diego State was so worried about Arizona State's fast break, it sent three players back on defense after every miss, leaving its two big men to work the offensive glass.

Two against five turned out to be pretty good odds for the hard-working Aztecs.

Jordan Schakel scored 25 points, Nathan Mensah had 17 points and 15 rebounds, and No. 24 San Diego State dominated inside to beat No. 23 Arizona State 80-68 Thursday night.

"We sent the center and the power forward to the offensive glass and those guys did a great job on their own," Aztecs coach Brian Dutcher said. "It was a real key to the game."

The Sun Devils (3-2) got volume-scoring guard Alonzo Verge Jr. back after he missed two games due to COVID-19 contact tracing but were without forward Marcus Bagley due to a lower left leg injury suffered Saturday against Cal.

San Diego State (5-0) already had a size advantage inside, and Bagley's absence turned it into an even bigger strength.

The Aztecs outscored Arizona State 36-9

in the paint and had 17 second-chance points on 11 offensive rebounds against the smaller Sun Devils. San Diego State pulled away with an 18-2 run in the second half to stretch the nation's longest road winning streak to 13 straight games.

"It was probably our closest to a complete game," said Schakel, who shot 5-for-9 from three-point range. "We still have a long way to go, but it was nice to put that kind of game together this early in the season."

The Sun Devils were pushed to the perimeter most of the night by the bigger Aztecs and, despite a couple of nice runs, didn't make enough outside shots. Arizona State shot 34% and missed 11 straight shots during a key stretch in the second half.

Verge led the Sun Devils with 25 points.

"Do we really care about how hard we've got to play? Do we know how hard we've got to play to beat a team like that?" Arizona State coach Bobby Hurley said. "There were a lot of examples of that tonight."

The Aztecs were without three players due to contact tracing, though only Keshad Johnson was expected to be part of the rotation.

Bagley's loss was a bigger one for the Sun Devils, leaving them without their top re-

bounder.

San Diego State took advantage, scoring 12 points off six offensive rebounds midway through the first half. The 6-10 Mensah had his way inside with 10 points and 10 rebounds in the first half to give the Aztecs a 35-33 lead.

Arizona State missed 11 of its first 15 shots before finding a better offensive rhythm and cleaned up the defensive glass better to rally from an early 12-point deficit.

The Sun Devils struggled against San Diego State's defensive pressure early in the second half and began turning the ball over, leading to a series of transition baskets during a 13-0 Aztecs run.

Arizona State had a stretch of eight minutes without a field goal as San Diego State extended the lead to 59-45.

## Poll implications

San Diego State entered the AP Top 25 for the first time this season and could climb considerably with a win over BYU this weekend. Even with a win over Grand Canyon on Sunday, Arizona State could end up dropping out of the poll after being manhandled by the Aztecs inside.

# USOPC won't punish athletes for protests

Associated Press

For generations, the IOC knew exactly where to look for key support of its ban against protests at the Olympics.

In 1968, it was the U.S. Olympic Committee that sent home its own athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, when they raised their fists while on the medals stand at the Mexico City Games.

In 2019, it was the same organization that placed its own athlete, Gwen Berry, on probation for doing the same after her win at the Pan-Am Games.

This week, the American federation put the IOC on notice: It is no longer the IOC's partner when it comes to enforcing the contentious Rule 50. The USOPC is now heeding the calls from many of its own athletes and will no longer punish them for kneeling or raising fists or any other kind of acceptable demonstration at the Olympics.

"When you sit in my seat, you have to make decisions that you think are on the right side of history," said CEO Sarah Hirschland. "And I believe we're on the right side of history."

But there are details to iron out, and they strike to the heart of how much change is truly possible between now and next July, when the Tokyo Olympics are scheduled to take place.

High on the list: What can athletes demonstrate about, and what will an acceptable demonstration look like?

## Phillies hire Dombrowski

PHILADELPHIA — Whether rebuilding or reloading, small market or large, Dave Dombrowski has been a big success at every major league stop.

His next challenging project: a Philadel-

phia Phillies team that's gone nine years without a winning record.

Dombrowski joined the Phillies as president of baseball operations on Friday.

Andy MacPhail is the Phillies' current president and has planned to retire after the 2021 season. He said in October he would be willing to step aside sooner to make way for a new baseball operations boss.

The 64-year-old Dombrowski has led baseball operations for four teams over more than three decades in the majors, taking a trio of franchises to the World Series. His clubs have won four pennants and two Series titles.

## Clippers' George signs extension

LOS ANGELES — Paul George wants to retire with the Los Angeles Clippers, and he took a step in that direction by signing a multiyear contract extension Thursday.

The six-time All-Star could have become a free agent after the upcoming season. Instead, the team locked down his services, ensuring George will remain not far from where he grew up in Palmdale.

Terms of the deal were not disclosed, but ESPN reported George's contract was extended for an additional four years at \$190 million, in addition to the \$35.4 million guaranteed him for the 2020-21 season.

## Garrett wins Payton Award

One regrettable, violent moment nearly changed everything for Myles Garrett.

He wouldn't let it.

Suspended, disgraced and branded a villain for his helmet-swinging attack on Steelers quarterback Mason Rudolph in the closing seconds of a nationally televised

game last year, Garrett found his playing career at a crossroads. He considered quitting.

However, he pushed on and persevered. Garrett turned his story around.

The Browns' star defensive end on Thursday was named the team's Walter Payton Man of the Year, which annually recognizes the NFL's best players for their excellence on the field and dedication to community service.

In addition to being one of the game's best defenders, Garrett is also a high-profile ambassador for several charitable causes, serving as the active player captain for Waterboys, an organization focused on bringing clean water to communities in East Africa.

## BC opts out of bowl game

BOSTON — Boston College, which managed to escape the worst of the coronavirus outbreak and the schedule and roster shuffling that has affected so many other college football teams, is passing on the opportunity to play in a bowl so players can spend Christmas with their families.

BC is the first school to forego the post-season because of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, four more major college football games scheduled for Saturday — including two with ranked Big 12 teams — were canceled, bringing the total to 10 for this week. No. 13 Oklahoma will not play at West Virginia because of COVID-19 issues with the Mountaineers. No. 23 Texas paused its football activities, calling off the season finale at Kansas.

And the 10th-ranked Duke men's basketball team said it will not play any more non-conference games this season.

# MLS: 20% of players tested positive during season

Associated Press

The Major League Soccer Players' Association says nearly 20% of the league's players tested positive for the coronavirus over the course of the season.

Bob Foose, executive director of the union, revealed the results in a conference call with reporters Thursday.

"During a time when most professionals were working at home, our players were going to work every day, really just about every

single day. Almost 20% of the players in the league at one point or another were infected with the virus, which meant that those who became infected and those who didn't become infected became dangers and dangerous to their partners, their family and their friends just by virtue of doing their jobs," Foose said.

MLS did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the figure, which would mean about 150 players tested positive.

The league's protocols called for several tests to confirm cases. Some of the league's players also tested positive only after international duty.

MLS teams had played just two games before the season was suspended in March. The league regrouped to hold the MLS is Back tournament in a bubble in Florida this summer.

Teams then returned to local markets to complete an abbreviated season. The MLS Cup

championship game between the Seattle Sounders and the Columbus Crew is set for Saturday.

The league and the union reached a new five-year collective bargaining agreement in early February, but it had not been ratified when the season was put on hold.

The two sides renegotiated the deal in June ahead of the tournament, agreeing to a new one that included across-the-board pay cuts and reduced bonuses.