

US approves emergency virus vaccine

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. gave the final go-ahead Friday to the nation's first COVID-19 vaccine, marking what could be the beginning of the end of an outbreak that has killed nearly 300,000 Americans.

Shots for health workers and nursing home residents are expected to begin in the coming days after the Food and Drug Administration authorized an emergency rollout of what promises to be a strongly protective vaccine from Pfizer Inc. and its German partner BioNTech.

Initial doses are scarce and rationed as the U.S. joins Britain and several other countries in scrambling to vaccinate as many people as possible ahead of a long, grim winter. It will take months of work to tamp down the coronavirus that has surged to catastrophic levels in recent weeks and already claimed 1.5 million lives globally.

While the FDA decision came only after public review of data from a huge ongoing study, it has also been dogged by intense po-

litical pressure from the Trump administration, which has accused the agency of being too slow and even threatened to remove FDA chief Stephen Hahn if a ruling did not come Friday.

The move sets off what will be the largest vaccination campaign in U.S. history — but it also has global ramifications because it's a role model to many other countries facing the same decision.

It offers the ability “in this situation where the pandemic is out of control, to bring hope to the people,” Dr. Ugur Sahin, CEO of BioNTech, told The Associated Press.

The world desperately needs multiple vaccines for enough to go around, and the Pfizer-BioNTech shot is the first based on rigorous scientific testing to emerge from that worldwide race — a record-setting scientific achievement that shaved years off the usual process.

“I don't think you would have found a scientist on this planet that would have predicted this 11 months ago,” said Dr. Paul Of-

fit, a vaccine expert at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia who advises the FDA.

The U.S. is considering a second vaccine, made by Moderna Inc., that could roll out in another week. In early January, Johnson & Johnson expects to learn if its vaccine is working in final testing.

Europe is set to make its own decision on the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna shots later this month, an important step as some other candidates that multiple countries were anxiously awaiting have hit roadblocks. Friday, Sanofi and GSK announced a monthslong delay after early tests showed their vaccine didn't work well enough in older adults.

And China and Russia didn't wait for final-stage tests before beginning vaccinations with some homegrown shots.

President Donald Trump said late Friday that Pfizer had “passed the gold standard of safety,” in a video statement hailing the vaccine as “one of the greatest scientific accomplishments in history.”

Senate OKs defense bill by veto-proof margin

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Senate easily passed a \$740.5 billion defense bill on Friday, just days after the House overwhelmingly approved the measure that President Donald Trump has vowed to veto.

The upper chamber voted 84-13 to approve the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, which sets annual spending and policy priorities for the Pentagon. Just as the House did in approving the measure 335-78 on Tuesday, the Senate reached the two-thirds threshold that it would need to overturn a presidential veto.

Trump has promised to sink the bill over its inclusion of a

provision that would kick-start a process to rename 10 southern Army bases honoring Confederate generals from the Civil War and its exclusion of a measure repealing federal protections for social media companies. Trump now has 10 days, excluding Sundays, to sign the bill into law or issue a veto. Congress would have to again vote on the measure to override a veto.

Among the critical measures included in the NDAA, the bill would authorize a 3% pay raise for troops, an increase of more than 5,000 military troops, and provide funding for a new initiative aimed at checking China's military power in southeast Asia.

The passage marked the 60th consecutive year that Congress approved the defense bill before the end of the calendar year. Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the NDAA is among the few examples of bipartisanship in an increasingly divided Congress and signaled he expected a Trump veto to be overruled.

“It's the most important bill we'll do all year,” Inhofe said in a statement. “It's what the Constitution tells us we have to do. We must protect freedom, democracy and peace, and support our troops. This is the heart of the National Defense Authorization Act and I look forward to it becoming law before the

end of the year.”

Inhofe has been a Trump ally, but he has drawn the president's ire in recent days over his refusal to include in the NDAA the repeal of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which protects social media giants against liability for postings by their users. Inhofe has said he supports repealing Section 230 but balked at Trump's 11th-hour insistence that it be tacked onto the unrelated defense bill.

Trump has not issued a veto threat over the NDAA since the House passed the law on Tuesday. The White House did not immediately return a request for comment Friday afternoon about his plans.

Navy base in Japan reports 19 cases

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — The home of the 7th Fleet in Japan reported 19 new cases of the coronavirus Friday, as Japan's capital city logged another 500 new infections.

The U.S. military in Japan, as a whole, announced 33 new cases as of 6 p.m. Friday. Yokosuka Naval Base, 35 miles south of central Tokyo, said 17 of the 19 people found to be infected there since Tuesday were discovered during contact tracing.

"Most of the locally transmitted [coronavirus] cases can be traced to a single

dinner party at an on-base residence," a base Facebook post Friday states. "Community members are reminded to keep events like these small (10 or less), maintain social distancing, and wear face masks, especially indoors."

One of the new Yokosuka patients tested positive after falling ill with symptoms of COVID-19, the coronavirus respiratory disease, according to the base. Another, a base employee, also became ill and tested positive at a Japanese medical facility.

Thirty-four coronavirus patients are under observation at Yokosuka. The base has

reported 41 new cases so far in December, its second highest month after 69 in August. At least 186 people have tested positive there since March.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government reported 595 newly infected patients Friday, the second highest daily total so far, according to public broadcaster NHK. The city reported its highest total, 602, on Thursday.

All or parts of the Tokyo metro area are off-limits to most U.S. personnel.

Three other U.S. bases in Japan reported a combined 14 new patients Friday.

Biden also promises to end 'forever wars'

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump took office after repeatedly promising to "beat the hell" out of the Islamic State and end the United States' "endless wars." But reality proved more complicated.

Although his administration oversaw the destruction of ISIS' caliphate in Syria and a Special Operations raid that killed its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, remnants of the group remain active in several countries.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military is still involved in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Yemen and other terrorism hot spots after four years of Trump vowing to bring troops home.

President-elect Joe Biden is expected to face a similar landscape — and political pres-

sure — as he takes over the White House.

In similar fashion to Trump, Biden has said it is time to "end the forever wars," a catchall for 19 years of military operations launched in response to the September 2001 terrorist attacks. Thousands of U.S. troops — and many more civilians — have been killed since then, and trillions of dollars have been spent.

But Biden has indicated that ending the wars does not mean shutting down all counterterrorism operations abroad.

Although the "vast majority" of U.S. troops should come home, the United States must "narrowly define" and continue counterterrorism operations targeting al-Qaida and ISIS, Biden wrote in *Foreign Affairs* magazine in the spring.

"We must maintain our focus on counter-

terrorism, around the world and at home, but staying entrenched in unwinnable conflicts drains our capacity to lead on other issues that require our attention, and it prevents us from rebuilding the other instruments of American power," he wrote.

Biden will have to assess risks, including threats to U.S. service members, when examining the future size of any mission, and whether to continue it, said David Maxwell, a retired Special Forces colonel and senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

"We must be asking: Does this mission fit into our national security strategy?" he said. "It's a basic equation: Is the benefit [of] conducting this operation worth the cost of conducting it if it goes wrong?"

ISIS claims rocket attacks targeting Kabul's airport

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — At least one person was killed and two others injured Saturday morning when a series of rockets targeted different parts of the capital.

Three rockets landed near the city's international airport and adjacent military base — which houses U.S. and coalition troops — but injured no one, the Interior Ministry said.

Seven rockets hit northern Kabul, killing one civilian and injuring two others, ministry spokesman Tariq Arian said in a statement.

The Islamic State claimed responsibility

on its affiliated Amaq News site, saying it fired 10 Katyusha rockets toward Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport, The Associated Press reported.

A window of one of the aircraft parked at the airport was damaged by a ricocheting piece of a shell, according to an airport official who didn't want to be identified because he was not authorized to speak to the media. No one was hurt. The aircraft was empty.

The attack came three weeks after a similar attack on the city killed eight people and wounded dozens. That attack was later claimed by the local ISIS affiliate, known as Islamic State Khorasan Province.

ISIS has claimed some of the most brutal

attacks in Afghanistan in recent months, including an attack on Kabul University in November that killed 22 and wounded 40.

The Taliban have also continued attacks throughout the country despite the start of peace talks in September between the group and Afghan government officials.

All international forces could pull out of Afghanistan by May if certain conditions are met, under a U.S.-Taliban deal signed in February.

The Pentagon is on track to reduce the number of American troops in the country to 2,500 by mid-January, despite previous military assessments that called for a larger footprint due to the situation on the ground.

Supreme Court rejects election lawsuit

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court has rejected a lawsuit backed by President Donald Trump to overturn Joe Biden's election victory, ending a desperate attempt to get legal issues rejected by state and federal judges before the nation's highest court.

Trump bemoaned the decision late Friday, tweeting: "The Supreme Court really let us down. No Wisdom, No Courage!"

The high court's order earlier Friday was a stark repudiation of a legal claim that was widely regarded as dubious, yet embraced by the president, 19 Republican state attorneys general and 126 House Republicans.

Trump had insisted the court would find the "wisdom" and "courage" to adopt his baseless position that the election was the

product of widespread fraud and should be overturned. But the nation's highest court emphatically disagreed.

Friday's order marked the second time this week that the court had rebuffed Republican requests that it get involved in the 2020 election outcome and reject the voters' choice, as expressed in an election regarded by both Republican and Democratic officials as free and fair. The justices turned away an appeal from Pennsylvania Republicans on Tuesday.

On Monday, the Electoral College meets to formally elect Biden as the next president.

Trump had called the lawsuit filed by Texas against Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin "the big one" that

would end with the Supreme Court undoing Biden's substantial Electoral College majority and allowing Trump to serve another four years in the White House.

In a brief order, the court said Texas does not have the legal right to sue those states because it "has not demonstrated a judicially cognizable interest in the manner in which another State conducts its elections."

Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas, who have said previously the court does not have the authority to turn away lawsuits between states, said they would have heard Texas' complaint. But they would not have done as Texas wanted — setting aside those four states' 62 electoral votes for Biden — pending resolution of the lawsuit.

Administration's string of federal executions continues

Associated Press

TERRE HAUTE, Ind. — The Trump administration continued its unprecedented series of post-election federal executions Friday by putting to death a Louisiana truck driver who severely abused his 2-year-old daughter for weeks in 2002, then killed her by slamming her head repeatedly against a truck's windows and dashboard.

Alfred Bourgeois, 56, was pronounced dead at 8:21 p.m. Eastern time at a federal prison in Terre Haute, Ind.. His lawyers had argued he had an IQ that put him in the intellectually disabled category, saying that should have made him ineligible for the death penalty.

In his last words, Bourgeois, strapped to a gurney, offered no apology and instead struck a deeply defiant tone, insisting that he neither killed nor sexually abused his baby girl.

"I ask God to forgive all those who plotted and schemed against me, and planted false evidence," he said. He added: "I did not commit this crime."

Later, the girl's relatives released a joint statement calling Bourgeois "a monster."

"None of us thought she would return from (visiting Bourgeois) in a casket," it said. "It should not have taken 18 years to receive justice for our angel."

Bourgeois was the 10th federal death-row inmate put to death since federal exe-

cutions resumed under President Donald Trump in July after a 17-year hiatus. He was the second federal prisoner executed this week, with three more executions planned in January.

The last time the number of civilians executed federally was in the double digits in a year was under President Grover Cleveland, with 14 in 1896.

As a lethal injection of pentobarbital began flowing through IVs into both of his arms, Bourgeois tilted his head to look at his spiritual adviser in a corner of the death chamber clutching a Bible.

Bourgeois gave him a thumbs-up sign, and his spiritual adviser raised his thumb in reply.

Zodiac Killer's '340 cipher' is cracked after 51 years

New York Daily News

A coded message sent by the Zodiac Killer to The San Francisco Chronicle in 1969 has finally been cracked, the newspaper reported Friday.

A team of code breakers solved the vexing cryptogram after 51 years, opening a window into the mind of the still unidentified serial killer thought to have murdered at least five people in the Bay Area from December 1968 to October 1969.

The puzzle, known as the 340 Cipher, was solved by a sleuthing team with members in the U.S., Australia and Belgium, The Chronicle reported.

"I hope you are having lots of fun in trying to catch me," the chilling message says.

"I am not afraid of the gas chamber because it will send me to paradise all the sooner because I now have enough slaves to work for me," it states.

Many hoped the long-standing stumper would reveal the killer's name, but it does not.

"Last weekend, a team I'm on solved the 340 and submitted it to the FBI," code-breaking expert David Oranchak said in an email to The Chronicle on Friday. "They have confirmed the solution. No joke! This is the real deal."

A spokeswoman for the FBI's San Francisco office said Oranchak's claim was accurate.

"The FBI is aware that a cipher attributed to the Zodiac Killer was recently solved by private citizens. The Zodiac Killer case remains an ongoing investigation for the FBI San Francisco division and our local law enforcement partners," the spokeswoman, Cameron Polan, said. "The Zodiac Killer terrorized multiple communities across Northern California and even though decades have gone by, we continue to seek justice for the victims of these brutal crimes," she said.

Ban on NYC indoor dining reinstated

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Indoor dining at New York City restaurants will be banned again in an effort to halt the coronavirus resurgence, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Friday in an announcement that could foretell a grim winter for one of the city's most important industries.

As of Monday, only takeout orders and outdoor dining will be allowed in the city, one of the world's great cuisine capitals, the governor said at a news conference in Albany.

The Democrat had been hinting at a clampdown on indoor dining for a week, saying he was waiting to see if hospitalization rates stabilized. They have not. Nearly 1,700 patients are now hospitalized in the city with COVID-19 infections, triple the number a month ago.

Cuomo said that despite the economic pain to the city's roughly 24,000 restaurants and their legions of workers, he needed to act.

"In New York City, you put the CDC caution on indoor dining together with the rate of transmission and the density and the crowding, that is a bad situation," he said, adding that the shutdown will be evaluated again after two weeks.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said he supported Cuomo's decision.

"This is painful. So many restaurants are struggling. But we can't allow this virus to reassert itself in our city," the Democratic mayor said on Twitter.

California

SAN JOSE — An outbreak of 77 coronavirus cases in Santa Clara County has been traced to an illegal youth basketball tournament held last month in Placer County, public health officials said Friday.

Those who tested positive attended the event Nov. 7 and 8 at Courtside Basketball Center in Rocklin, Santa Clara Public

Health announced. They included 39 middle- and high school players, three coaches and 35 "additional contacts," officials said in a news release.

An additional 17 cases outside Santa Clara County also have been traced to the tournament, the release said.

The event violated local and state orders for youth sports during the pandemic, officials said.

"Public Health orders, directives, and guidance around contact sports and sporting events are in place for a reason. The risk of transmission in these settings can easily result in community spread that threatens the most vulnerable among us," said Dr. Monika Roy, Santa Clara County's assistant public health officer.

Arizona

WINDOW ROCK — Navajo Nation health officials on Friday reported 231 new COVID-19 cases and 12 more deaths as they prepared to implement a weekend-long lockdown for reservation residents.

In all, the tribe has now reported 19,199 cases and 711 known deaths since the pandemic began.

Navajo Department of Health officials said more than 180,000 people on the vast reservation that includes parts of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah have been tested for COVID-19 and more than 10,000 have recovered.

The lockdown that begins at 8 p.m. Friday will require everyone on the reservation except essential workers to stay at home. All businesses are required to remain closed until the lockdown ends at 5:30 a.m. Monday.

Michigan

KALAMAZOO — The U.S. Justice Department said Friday it's on the side of Michigan faith-based schools that are challeng-

ing Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's ban on in-person classes in high schools.

The department's Civil Rights Division filed an argument in favor of three Catholic high schools and the Michigan Association of Non-Public Schools. A federal judge in Kalamazoo will hear arguments Monday.

Schools and families have a constitutional right to practice their religion through in-person instruction, the government said, citing a recent U.S. Supreme Court order that barred New York from enforcing certain restrictions on religious services in areas hit hard by the coronavirus.

"The state has failed to make any provision for consideration of the religious need of plaintiffs for in-person religious education which they sincerely believe cannot be done remotely," the Justice Department said.

Nevada

CARSON CITY — Amid a monthslong coronavirus surge, Nevada has surpassed South Dakota and now has more COVID-19 patients hospitalized per million residents than any other state in the U.S., according to data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

As of Wednesday, 588 out of every 1 million state residents was hospitalized for COVID-19, more than the rate of 566 per million reported in South Dakota, where Gov. Kristi Noem has for months opposed mask mandates and other measures to contain the virus.

Nevada officials logged 2,783 new coronavirus cases and 45 deaths Friday, bringing the statewide total to 181,310 confirmed cases and 2,479 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Mississippi

JACKSON — As Mississippi's coronavirus hospitalizations

continue to surpass records, the state's top health official said Friday that hospitals full with COVID-19 patients can no longer handle elective surgeries, and he's ordering the facilities to start postponing many of the procedures next week.

Dr. Thomas Dobbs, Mississippi's state health officer, announced the decision on Twitter, saying the state's intensive care unit beds are full and he expects more hospitalizations of coronavirus patients.

"Beginning next Tuesday elective surgeries that require hospitalization must be delayed — statewide," Dobbs said in his tweet.

An order issued by Dobbs later Friday confirmed the move and spelled out the details: A specific list of elective surgery types that require overnight hospitalization must be delayed starting Tuesday, at least until Dec. 23. The list of procedures include colonoscopies, knee replacements and certain cancer surgeries.

Wyoming

GILLETTE — Two county sheriff's offices in Wyoming have said they will not enforce a statewide mask mandate aimed at preventing transmission of the coronavirus.

The Fremont County sheriff joined the Sweetwater County sheriff on Thursday in declaring that enforcement of the new measure is up to individuals and not law enforcement.

That same day, about 40 unmasked protesters gathered at the Campbell County Courthouse in the northeastern part of the state to demonstrate against the mask mandate.

"Our Governor is sending a strong message about the current state of affairs in Wyoming," Fremont County Sheriff Ryan Lee said. "I understand his directive, however my office will not be issuing criminal citations."

Anne Frank Memorial defaced with swastika stickers

ID BOISE — Boise police are investigating after the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial was defaced by swastika stickers.

The stickers, which included the words, “we are everywhere” as well as the Nazi insignia, were discovered by a visitor to the memorial in downtown Boise.

The Wassmuth Center for Human Rights maintains the memorial, which includes a life-sized bronze statue of Anne Frank.

One of the nine stickers was stuck to the diary, said Dan Prinzing, the executive director of the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights.

Another was pasted to a statue representing the “spiral of injustice,” intended to show how hateful language can lead to discrimination, violence and attempts to eliminate disadvantaged groups.

Caregiver couple allegedly defraud elderly victim

AZ TUCSON — A federal grand jury in Tucson has indicted a married couple who as caregivers allegedly defrauded an elderly victim.

Prosecutors said Michael Tagle Santos, 33, and his wife, Cherry Mae Santos 28, are accused of wire fraud and conspiracy to commit wire fraud.

They are charged with fraudulently transferring funds from the victim’s account to their own accounts as salary “advances.”

The Santoses also are accused of fraudulently transferring additional funds for personal use, while simultaneously paying themselves a salary out of the victim’s account.

Auto parts warehouse engulfed in flames

IL CHICAGO — Firefighters were battling a fire on the city’s West Side that had completely engulfed an auto parts warehouse.

The fire that sent billows of black smoke that could be seen for miles was reported. Within a half hour from the time the person inside the building reported the fire was on the roof, the blaze spread and the fire was upgraded, prompting the fire department to send hundreds of firefighters to the scene.

By mid-morning the roof of the building in the city’s Lawndale neighborhood had collapsed and Fire Department spokesman Larry Merritt said it was likely that the building would ultimately be demolished.

Man gets probation after bus attack on ex-Marine

NV LAS VEGAS — A Las Vegas man was sentenced to up to five years of probation after the man punched a military veteran on a public bus last year, causing him to lose his right eye, a judge said.

District Judge Kathleen Delaney sentenced Nathaniel Graves Jr. for the attack on Roger Conant, 64, a former U.S. Marine. Graves, who spent 240 days in jail before posting bond in August, pleaded guilty in July to battery resulting in substantial bodily harm on a victim 60 years or older.

Conant boarded the bus and told police he asked Graves, who was then 26, to move his legs, which were propped on a seat against the aisle, so he could sit down, police said. Police then reported Graves initially complied before propping his feet up on Conant’s lap and punching Conant after he pushed his feet off.

Student arrested after taking professor hostage in home

CA FRESNO — A central California college student is in custody after taking his former instructor hostage at her home, Fresno police said.

The rescue of the unidentified instructor unfolded, The Fresno Bee reported, with a retired Tulare County Sheriff’s deputy who lived nearby interceding with his firearm before police could arrive.

Fresno Police Capt. Tom Rowe said the suspect, whose name was not released, is estimated to be in his 40s or 50s and had been reported previously by the instructor to a Fresno City College dean for some type of “inappropriate behavior.”

The suspect arrived at her home with a handgun and was holding her in the backyard. Police were able to convince him to surrender, Rowe said.

Pagans Motorcycle Club face drug charges

PA PITTSBURGH — Thirty western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio residents face charges stemming from an ongoing investigation of Pagans Motorcycle Club members and associates, federal prosecutors said.

According to three indictments announced, the defendants violated federal drug and firearms laws.

Authorities said the defendants trafficked firearms and distributed “significant quantities of methamphetamine, cocaine and heroin.”

According to prosecutors, club members

“routinely hold ‘church,’ a term used to describe their weekly meetings.” There also appeared to be large gatherings or parties with nonmembers at the club’s McKees Rocks Clubhouse.

Surfer injured in shark encounter off island

HI HONOLULU — A 56-year-old surfer was injured after encountering a shark off the Hawaii island of Maui, officials said.

The man was admitted to a hospital for surgery, the state Department of Land and Natural Resources said in a statement. The man was from Lahaina, a town on Maui.

Organizers of the Women’s Surfing League’s Maui Pro contest voluntarily suspended their competition.

In line with standard practice, shark warning signs will remain in place on either side of Honolua Bay.

Police investigate theft of catalytic converters

NH MANCHESTER — Police in Manchester are investigating the theft of more than 20 catalytic converters since October.

Police said the catalytic converters have been taken from vehicles in various business parking lots, as well as at the JFK Memorial Coliseum and West Side Ice Arena, where cars were parked during a snow emergency.

Police said a camera captured two people on bicycles taking a catalytic converter from a vehicle.

They are looking to identify the two people, and asked for the public’s help to identify them or providing any information about the thefts.

Babies of endangered rare right whale species born

GA CUMBERLAND ISLAND — The first baby whales of the season that belong to a critically endangered species have been born off Georgia and Florida.

The rare North Atlantic right whales were spotted, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said. The whales number only 366 and their population has declined in recent years.

The whale calves were spotted swimming with their mothers off Cumberland Island, Ga., and Vilano Beach, Fla., NOAA said.

The whales move north to New England and Canada to feed in the spring.

From The Associated Press

Pats seek answers as hopes fade

By KYLE HIGHTOWER
Associated Press

For the first time in more than a decade, the New England Patriots will head into their final three games of the season with an unsettled playoff fate.

The Patriots entered the week in 10th place in the AFC and trudging through one of their worst years of Bill Belichick's tenure. Now 6-7 following a 24-3 loss to the Los Angeles Rams on Thursday night, New England's long-shot hopes of extending an NFL-record run of 11 consecutive playoff appearances have faded even more.

And the questions about New England's future at quarterback that surrounded the team this offseason following Tom Brady's departure have returned, with perhaps even greater urgency.

The Patriots' loss to the Rams was marked by the same problems that have plagued New England for most of 2020.

Cam Newton's struggles in the passing game reemerged, leaving the offense one-dimensional and predictable opposite a dogged Los Angeles defense that disrupted the Patriots' running game and plowed through an offensive line that surrendered a season-high six sacks.

It led to Newton being benched in the fourth quarter in favor of backup Jarrett Stidham, raising the question of whether a more permanent change could be on the ho-

rizon. But when asked postgame whether he plans to continue with Newton as the starter, Belichick was unequivocal.

"Cam's our quarterback," he said.

Belichick was queried again on Friday and again dismissed the idea of starting Stidham.

"I've answered that question for the last time," Belichick said.

As for where the Patriots go from here, safety and team captain Devin McCourty said their approach will remain unchanged until they're eliminated from playoff contention.

"Just keep playing. It is what it is right now. We'll keep fighting. We'll see how it works out," he said. "But there's no easy answer other than we have three games left. The goal is still the same. Try to win the remaining three games."

It was a sentiment that was repeated by his teammates.

"We ain't a bunch of quitters," defensive tackle Lawrence Guy said. "It doesn't matter what the record is. It doesn't matter what the outcome is. ... We're going to go out there and play some football."

What's working

Special teams play continues to be one of the few bright spots for the Patriots. Gunner Olszewski, who entered the game leading the NFL with a 26.9-yard punt return aver-

age, returned a punt 21 yards in the fourth quarter. Nick Folk also extended his made field goals streak to 21.

What needs help

When New England did move the ball on offense, it couldn't finish drives, which has been a familiar refrain. The Patriots were 0-for-4 in the red zone Thursday and failed to reach the end zone for the second time this season. Through 13 games, they are ranked 27th in the NFL in the red zone, scoring a touchdown on 52.3% of their opportunities.

Stock up

Cornerback Myles Bryant continues to impress. The undrafted rookie notched his first career interception in the first quarter, wrestling the ball away from Robert Woods for the pick. Bryant rolled to his feet and returned the ball 32 yards for an apparent touchdown, but he was ruled down by contact after a review, negating the score.

Next steps

At a minimum, New England will be two games out of the AFC's final wild-card spot following this weekend's games. The Patriots finish the season against the Dolphins (8-4), the AFC East-leading Bills (9-3) and the winless Jets (0-12).

Jeudy's struggles are par for this pandemic season

Associated Press

The Denver Broncos see an upside to rookie receiver Jerry Jeudy's frustrations that have seeped into snarky comments on social media.

"I'm glad he's a little frustrated that he's not getting more production. We want our guys to feel that way," coach Vic Fangio said. "I don't know what he said or didn't say on Twitter, but I'm OK with Jerry. Jerry's in a good spot."

Jeudy's frustration peaked last week after he caught just one pass — a 5-yarder in the final minute — of Denver's 22-16 loss at Kansas City.

Afterward, Jeudy tweeted, "At least I got my conditioning in" with a shrugging emoji and "it all makes sense now lol," in response to a recent Odell Beckham Jr. quote criticizing Pat Shurmur, his ex-head coach in New York and cur-

rent Broncos offensive coordinator.

Jeudy has scrubbed both comments and he didn't speak publicly this week. But he was a big topic around Denver nonetheless.

"You want a receiver that wants the ball. You want a guy that wants it in his hand and wants to make plays," quarterback Drew Lock said. "That's what we like about Jerry."

Without injured Pro Bowl receiver Courtland Sutton around to draw away attention, Jeudy has been facing top cornerbacks and bracket coverages.

"It's about fighting through those games and getting ready to practice the next week and go into the next one thinking you're going to catch 15 that game," Lock said. "Just being ready for that opportunity for the next Sunday."

The Broncos (4-8) visit the Carolina

Panthers (4-8) on Sunday.

Highly regarded as the crispest route runner to come out of college in at least a decade, Jeudy has endured a maddening rookie season after being selected 15th overall in the NFL Draft.

After starring for an Alabama team that went 38-4 during his three seasons in Tuscaloosa, Jeudy hasn't stood out much on a Broncos team that's already lost twice as many games this year as Jeudy did in his entire college career.

Jeudy has caught 38 of 82 passes thrown his way for 594 yards and two touchdowns, including one against Atlanta on Nov. 8 when he caught seven passes for 125 yards in his breakout game.

In the four games since then, however, Jeudy has just eight total receptions for 110 yards and no touchdowns.

Sun Devils put historic beating on rival

Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. — Arizona State scored on the opening kickoff and had a 14-point lead in the opening minute. Turnovers came by the bunches and so did the touchdowns.

By the time they were done, the Sun Devils had scored the most points in Territorial Cup history and possibly cost their biggest rival's coach his job.

D.J. Taylor returned the opening kickoff 100 yards for a touchdown and Arizona State scored twice in the opening 56 seconds to rout rival Arizona 70-7 Friday night.

"I've never been part of a game like that in my life," Arizona State co-defensive coordinator Marvin Lewis said.

Arizona State (1-2) made a mockery of the annual Territorial Cup game from the opening kick return, capitalizing on a string of Arizona turnovers to build a 35-0 lead by early in the second quarter.

Freshman DeaMonte Traynum converted an Arizona fumble on its first drive into a 4-yard TD run 43 seconds after Taylor's TD return and the Sun Devils piled on one score after another.

Rachad White ran for 133 yards and three touchdowns, Jayden Daniels accounted for three scores and Arizona State won its fourth straight in the series for the first time since 1975-78. It was also the Sun Devils' first win since the 2019 Sun Bowl.

"There is no playbook for it," Arizona State coach Herm Edwards said. "I was just happy to see these guys win a football game."

The Wildcats (0-5) may have been thankful there were no fans in the stands after a lackluster performance that may put coach Kevin Sumlin's job in jeopardy.

Arizona was on its heels after Taylor's opening kick re-

turn and had three fumbles, an interception and twice turned it over on downs in its first six drives. The Wildcats had seven turnovers overall and gave up 70 points for the first time since 1949 to lose their record 12th straight game spanning two seasons.

"Everybody's frustrated, disappointed, everybody's not happy right now," Sumlin said.

Arizona State lost the previous two games it played on last-minute TDs and three more to COVID-19 issues.

Arizona had its opener canceled due to the coronavirus and lost its first four games, most recently 24-13 to Colorado last weekend.

The odd, twisting season came to a conclusion in the desert with the most unique game in the history of a series that dates to 1899.

The Sun Devils quickly turned it into a laugher.

Taylor was about 6 yards

deep when he returned the opening kickoff for a touchdown — Lewis said "What is he doing" in the headset — and Arizona State got the ball back at Arizona's 4-yard line after Gary Brightwell lost the first of his three fumbles. Traynum scored on the next play to put the Sun Devils up 14-0 in less than a minute.

They kept going.

Daniels pinballed off defenders for a 20-yard TD run and hit a wide-open Ricky Pearsall on a 31-yard score, White broke off a 93-yard TD run and Daniyel Ngata scored on a 3-yard run.

Arizona State led 42-7 at halftime — the most first-half points in Territorial Cup history — despite being outgained 260-241 in total yards.

"We were ready to play. We were prepared," Arizona tight end Bryce Wolma said. "Not much to say. It's embarrassing."

Florida F Johnson in critical condition after collapsing

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Florida standout forward Keyontae Johnson, the Southeastern Conference's preseason player of the year, collapsed coming out of a timeout against rival Florida State and needed emergency medical attention. Johnson was taken off the floor on a stretcher and rushed to Tallahassee Memorial for evaluation.

The Gators said he was in critical but stable condition at the hospital.

Johnson, a 6-foot-5 junior from Norfolk, Va., averaged a team-high 14 points last season to go along with 7.1 rebounds. He also led the Gators with 38 steals.

Like most of his teammates, Johnson tested positive for COVID-19 during the summer. Although the cause of Johnson's ailment was not immediately

known, the coronavirus can lead to myocarditis, a viral infection of the heart muscle. At its most severe, myocarditis can lead to sudden cardiac arrest and has been a documented cause of death for young, otherwise healthy athletes.

Wall, NBA return as preseason begins

John Wall was back on the floor for the first time in nearly two years. DeMarcus Cousins played for the first time since the 2019 NBA Finals.

And the NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers were home, with nobody there to watch.

The NBA preseason — a truncated 49-game, nine-day sprint — opened Friday with a five-game slate, action returning to NBA arenas for the first time in exactly nine months.

Wall's first basket since De-

cember 2018 came on the first possession of Houston's preseason, when he got to the rim for an easy score in his Rockets debut, one that came after his recovery from heel and Achilles injuries.

The Rockets' next basket? Wall set up Cousins for a three-pointer, the center's first basket since Game 6 of the 2019 finals with the Warriors, two months before he tore his ACL and missed last season.

Mets nearing 4-year deal with McCann

NEW YORK — Free agent catcher James McCann and the New York Mets were close to completing a \$40 million, four-year contract Saturday as the team continues to upgrade its roster under new owner Steve Cohen.

McCann was an All-Star with the White Sox in 2019 when he

hit .273 with 18 home runs and 60 RBIs. He batted .289 with seven homers and 15 RBIs for Chicago this year in 31 games while splitting time with Yasmani Grandal during the pandemic-shortened season.

Utah State players sit after alleged comments

LOGAN, Utah — Utah State has canceled its football game against Colorado State amid concerns voiced about religious discrimination during the search for a new football coach.

Aggies players issued a statement to Stadium on Friday, saying they were opting out of Saturday's game because of alleged comments made by University President Noelle Cockett about the religious and cultural background of interim coach Frank Maile.

Garza leads No. 3 Iowa over Iowa State

Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Luka Garza was angry as he sat, and it showed in the second half.

Garza surged after halftime and finished the game with 34 points in just 17 minutes, lifting No. 3 Iowa over Iowa State 105-77 on Friday night.

Garza missed nearly 11 minutes in the first half after picking up his second foul, but he responded with 25 points in the second half. He was 13-for-14 from the field — including 10-for-10 after halftime — and knocked down four straight three-pointers.

“I definitely was a little bit frustrated,” Garza said. “Getting ticky-tack fouls is unlike me. And it was just upsetting. I wanted to get out there and just kind of let loose.”

The 6-foot-11 senior scored the most points by a Division I player who played less than 20 minutes in a game over the past 25 seasons.

“We were looking forward once he got going,” Iowa coach Fran McCaffery said. “He can score inside. He can score outside. He scores wherever you put him.”

“That stretch in the second half, Garza was really good,” Iowa State coach Steve Prohm said. “He was good around the basket, but was terrific from three.”

Jack Nunge had 17 points and 10 rebounds and Joe Wieskamp had 16 points for the Hawkeyes (5-0). Nunge, like Garza a 6-foot-11 center, had 15 points and eight rebounds in the first half with Garza on the bench.

“(Nunge) was awesome,” McCaffery said. “That’s what he does. He’s just a terrific player, and we needed him. Luka’s in foul trouble, and somebody’s got to step up. And he sure did.”

Garza came into the game ranked second in the nation in scoring at 29.5 points per game.

He picked up his second foul with 10:48 left and didn’t play the rest of the half. Iowa State had a 15-2 run to take a 32-29 lead after Garza went out, but Iowa outscored the Cyclones 23-9 going into the break.

“I’m proud of the rest of our guys for taking care of business when I was out of the game,” Garza said. “It gives me confidence that, when I make a mistake like that, we’re not doomed.”

McCaffery said he thought about putting Garza back in late in the first half.

“I always want my guys to be able to play without being tentative,” McCaffery said. “As long as we were doing OK, I was going to leave him out a little longer. Put him back in if we had to. But I thought we were OK.”

Javan Johnson led Iowa State (1-2) with 20 points. Rasir Bolton had 18 points, and Jalen Coleman-Lands had 17.

Familiar face

Coleman-Lands has played against Iowa six times for three different teams — Illinois, DePaul and Iowa State — averaging 14.3 points.

Rivalry streak

Iowa has won three consecutive games in the in-state rivalry series, the Hawkeyes’ longest streak since 1988-90. The Hawkeyes, who lead the overall series 47-27, have won four of the last five.

Bid picture

The Hawkeyes showed they can play for long stretches without Garza, the lone unanimous selection to The Associated Press’ preseason All-America team. Iowa State, coming off a home loss to South Dakota State, stayed with Iowa through the first half, but the Hawkeyes’ late run heading into halftime ended the Cyclones’ momentum.

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

No. 9 Villanova rallies past Georgetown in Big East opener

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Collin Gillespie and Caleb Daniels each hit five three-pointers and scored 18 points to lead Villanova to a 76-63 win over Georgetown in the Big East opener for both teams.

The Wildcats (5-1) trailed by 18 early in the first half at Georgetown’s empty on-campus gym — a surprising deficit considering Villanova was an 11 ½-point road favorite.

Gillespie shook off a slow start and keyed a 15-0 run that put the Wildcats in control of their sixth straight game on the road. Gillespie hit consecutive threes early in the second that pulled Villanova within seven and another three that tied it at 50. Daniels hit one more three to give

the Wildcats the lead.

Jamorko Pickett led the Hoyas (2-3) with 16 points.

No. 5 Kansas 95, Omaha 50: Ochai Agbaji scored 18 points and the Jayhawks beat the visiting Mavericks in their final tune-up before beginning Big 12 play.

Mitch Lightfoot had a career-best 14 points, David McCormack had 11 points and 11 rebounds, and Tyon Grant-Foster added 13 points to help Kansas (6-1) cruise to its 12th consecutive win at Allen Fieldhouse.

The Jayhawks largely cruised from the opening minute, unlike their last time out, when coach Bill Self’s crew needed Creighton’s best player to miss a free throw in the final seconds to

avoid going to overtime with the No. 8 Bluejays.

Wanjang Tut scored 14 points for Omaha (2-5).

No. 8 Creighton 98, Nebraska 74: At Omaha, Neb., Marcus Zegarowski scored 22 points, Denzel Mahoney had 20 and the Bluejays used a big run in the second half to pull away and beat the Cornhuskers.

Creighton (4-1) wasn’t sharp early but went on a powerful dunk- and three-pointer-filled 30-7 surge to bounce back from its one-point loss at No. 5 Kansas on Tuesday.

Creighton has won eight of nine against Nebraska (3-3) and leads the series 28-26. The Bluejays have won 13 straight regular-season home games

against their in-state rival since losing in Omaha in 1995.

Teddy Allen led Nebraska with 26 points. The Huskers committed 25 turnovers, and Creighton converted them into 38 points.

No. 11 West Virginia 62, North Texas 50: Sean McNeil scored 15 points and the host Mountaineers rallied in the second half to beat the Eagles.

West Virginia (5-1) trailed by eight points at halftime, then scored the first 18 points of the second half to take control. Taz Sherman added 13 points, and Derek Culver had 10 points — all in the second half — and 10 rebounds.

Javion Hamlet scored 15 points for North Texas (1-3).