

Moderna virus vaccine begins shipping

Associated Press

OLIVE BRANCH, Miss. — Initial shipments of the second COVID-19 vaccine authorized in the U.S. left a distribution center Sunday, a desperately needed boost as the nation works to bring the coronavirus pandemic under control.

The trucks left the Memphis-area factory with the vaccine developed by Moderna Inc. and the National Institutes of Health. The much-needed shots are expected to be given starting Monday, just three days after the Food and Drug Administration authorized their emergency rollout.

Also on Sunday, an expert committee began considering who should be next in line for early doses of the Moderna vaccine and a similar one from Pfizer Inc. and Germany's BioNTech. Pfizer's shots were first shipped out a week ago and started being used the next day, kicking off the nation's biggest vaccination drive.

Public health experts say the shots — and others in the pipeline — are the only way to stop a virus that has been spreading wildly. Nationwide, more than 219,000 people per day on average test positive for the virus, which has killed at least 314,000 in

the U.S. and upwards of 1.7 million worldwide.

The Pfizer and Moderna shots shipped so far and going out over the next few weeks are nearly all going to health care workers and residents of long-term care homes, based on the advice of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

There won't be enough shots for the general population until spring, so doses will be rationed at least for the next several months. President-elect Joe Biden pledged earlier this month to have 100 million vaccine doses distributed in his first 100 days in office, and his surgeon general nominee said Sunday that it's still a realistic goal.

But Vivek Murthy, speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press," said it's more realistic to think it may be midsummer or early fall before coronavirus vaccines are available to the general population, rather than late spring. Murthy said Biden's team is working toward having the shots available to lower-risk individuals by late spring but doing so requires "everything to go exactly on schedule."

"I think it's more realistic to assume that it may be closer to mid-summer or early

fall when this vaccine makes its way to the general population," Murthy said. "So, we want to be optimistic, but we want to be cautious as well."

Meanwhile, Trump's surgeon general, Jerome Adams, defended the administration's handling of the Pfizer vaccine Sunday, a day after the Army general charge of getting COVID-19 vaccines across the U.S. apologized Saturday for "miscommunication" with states over the number of doses to be delivered in the early stages of distribution. At least a dozen states reported they would receive a smaller second shipment of the Pfizer vaccine than they had been told previously.

Gen. Gustave Perna told reporters in a telephone briefing that he made mistakes by citing numbers of doses that he believed would be ready.

But Adams, speaking on CBS' "Face the Nation," said that "the numbers are going to go up and down."

"It absolutely was not poor planning," he said. "There's what we plan. There's what we actually allocate. There's what's delivered, and then there's what's actually put in people's arms."

Navy transits Taiwan Strait for 13th time

By **CAITLIN DOORNBOS**

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Navy on Saturday broke its record for the number of times it has sent a warship through the Taiwan Strait in a single year, according to the Yokosuka-based 7th Fleet.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Mustin steamed through the contested waterway separating Taiwan from mainland China on Saturday "in accordance with international law," 7th Fleet spokesman Lt. Joe Keiley said by email.

Navy passes through the 110-mile-wide strait typically provoke condemnation from Beijing, which sees Taiwan as a breakaway province and the waterway its territory.

The U.S. regards the strait as international waters and acknowledges China's

claim to Taiwan under its "One China" policy but views the island's status as unsettled.

"The ship's transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," Keiley said in his email. "The United States military will continue to fly, sail and operate anywhere international law allows."

The transit was the Navy's 13th this year, passing the service's previous record of 12 set in 2016. It made nine such trips last year, three in 2018 and five in 2017. Before Saturday, the Navy's most recent sail through the strait happened Nov. 22 by the guided-missile destroyer USS Barry.

The number of Navy trips through the strait has increased along with tensions between the United States and China in the South and East China seas. Strain with Chi-

na over Taiwan has grown after the U.S. this month approved a \$280 million sale of advanced military communications equipment to Taiwan.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zheng Zeguoguang said the sale "seriously violated the basic norms of international relations, seriously interfered in China's domestic politics, seriously damaged China-U.S. relations, are arrogant, unreasonable and vile," according to a Dec. 8 report by The Associated Press.

The Mustin's sail came a day after Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin, during a press conference Friday, called on the U.S. to "focus on cooperation to manage differences and bring China-U.S. relations back to the right track so as to bring more benefits to the people of both countries and the world."

Soldiers spot accident from air, land to help

By **IMMANUEL JOHNSON**
Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — Five 101st Airborne Division soldiers flying over rural Germany were in the right place at the right time to help a local man.

The four-person crew and flight surgeon were returning from a training flight to their base Wednesday when crew chief Spc. Bruce Cook spotted trouble on the ground, out of the corner of his eye.

“We were coming over a ridge line and I was looking outside, where I noticed a puff of white smoke,” he said in a phone interview Friday. “I looked further and I saw a car roll three times.”

The crash happened in Fabrikschleibach, a Bavarian town about an hour’s drive away from Illesheim, where the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade soldiers are based

during their nine-month rotation with the Atlantic Resolve mission, a U.S. effort to deter Russian aggression in Europe.

“I just called it up and the decision-making started happening from there as a crew,” Cook said.

After getting clearance from their mission commander to break away, the Chinook piloted by Chief Warrant Officers 2 David Acton and Robert Riedel circled back to help.

Cook served as a runner between the helicopter and brigade surgeon Maj. Benjamin Stork, who ran to assess the German driver.

“We landed in a muddy farm field and I ran across that, then across a ditch, then a road,” Stork said. “Saw a vehicle, one or two civilians standing around it, and then the injured German man on the ground beside the vehicle.”

Fortunately, the man spoke “pretty good

English,” Stork said, “because my German is broken.” Stork evaluated him, making sure that he could move his arms and legs, and was aware of his surroundings.

“He was in pretty good shape (considering what happened),” Stork said. “He had some bruises, scrapes, a little bit of bleeding and back pain but overall, he was doing quite well.”

Shortly after Stork stabilized the driver’s neck and back, an ambulance arrived, the Army said in a statement. He gave a report to the paramedics and helped load the man into the vehicle, it said.

“As we were getting him on the spine board, the victim got his phone and called his family,” Stork said. He was speaking German, but “he mentioned U.S. Army on the phone ... I think it was a pretty good impression we made.”

Marine credited for saving Okinawan with snakebite

By **MATTHEW M. BURKE**
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A Marine on Okinawa was credited Thursday with saving the life of a local woman after she was bitten by a venomous habu snake.

Sgt. John James, a motor vehicle operator from Combat Logistics Battalion 31, was barbecuing with friends at the Saloon bar in Kin town on Nov. 6 when they heard a scream, Marine officials said in a statement Thursday.

“We were grilling burgers and hot dogs, and suddenly we heard an elderly woman screaming in a language we didn’t understand,” James said, according to the Marine statement. “We didn’t know what was wrong until she started screaming out ‘habu, habu.’”

James, of Dubois, Neb., did not hesitate, the statement said. He found the bitemarks and quickly fastened a tourniquet two inches above the wound, using a friend’s belt.

While the bar owner called emergency services, James contacted a corpsman friend to see what else he could do, the statement said. Local authorities arrived quickly. They found the snake and administered the cor-

rect anti-venom.

First responders credited James and his quick actions with saving the woman’s life, the statement said.

James said he spoke to the woman earlier this month, according to the statement. She’s doing “really well” and went back to work a few days after the incident.

There are four types of habu snakes indigenous to Okinawa — the habu, Hime habu, Sakishima habu and Taiwan habu — according to the Okinawa prefectural government website.

Up to 50 people on Okinawa — most often farmers or farmworkers — are bitten each year. Habu venom is hemotoxic, destroying blood cells and tissues, according to the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University’s website. Snakebite anti-venom is available, but the bites can be painful and cause permanent tissue damage.

Less than 1% of those bitten by a habu die, according to a 2013 statement from the U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa. The snakes are most active September through November.

Combat Logistics Battalion 31 is a subordinate unit of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Some Japan bases offering free virus tests for US troops

By **ERICA EARL**
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Some U.S. military bases in Japan are providing coronavirus screenings for service members, their families and civilian employees heading home for the holidays, and beyond.

Medical centers at Naval Air Facility Atsugi, Sasebo Naval Base, Yokota Air Base and Kadena Air Base are offering the tests, which some U.S. states require prior to entry. While tests are free for active-duty service members, there may be fees for civilians, contractors and retirees based on each installation’s policy.

Alaska, Hawaii and Maryland require proof of a negative coronavirus test at least 72 hours before entry; Pennsylvania requires the same proof for anyone age 11 and above, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website as of Tuesday.

Yokosuka Naval Hospital is offering tests only for active-duty service members and their families, according to a spokesperson for the medical center.

NAF Atsugi, 26 miles south of Tokyo, recommends travelers contact their respective installation’s clinics at least two days before the desired testing date and provide copies of their travel itinerary and leave request forms.

Violence in Kabul continues with blast

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A large car bomb exploded in the Afghan capital Sunday, killing at least nine people and wounding 20 others, the country's Interior Minister said.

The blast adds to the near daily attacks seen in Kabul since the Taliban and government started peace talks in September, and comes as the U.S. remains on course to reduce the number of American troops in the country to the lowest level since the beginning of the war.

The Sunday morning attack occurred in a western neighborhood of the city and appeared to target parliamentarian Khan Mohammad Wardak, Interior Minister Masoud Andarabi told reporters.

Wardak was wounded, but in "good condition," Andarabi said.

Children and elderly people were among the victims, and homes near the blast site were severely damaged, the Interior Ministry said in a separate statement.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the blast, which came a day after five

rockets were fired onto Bagram Airfield, the largest U.S. base in Afghanistan. The U.S. military said no casualties or damage resulted from that attack.

The Taliban have vowed to refrain from attacking international forces and Afghan cities as part of a U.S.-Taliban deal signed in February, and the local Islamic State affiliate has claimed most large attacks in recent months.

But smaller attacks, such as Sunday's targeting high-profile Afghans, have become a frequent occurrence in Kabul and other parts of the country, and many government officials have put the blame on the Taliban.

In September, a bomb targeting Vice President Amrullah Saleh detonated in central Kabul, killing 10 civilians. The Taliban denied involvement, but explosives found at the scene were linked to the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani network, the Interior Ministry said.

In a statement condemning Sunday's bombing, President Ashraf Ghani said the Taliban should stop violence against civilians and agree to a ceasefire. But he didn't directly blame the group for the blast.

Wardak, a prominent businessman as well as a member of parliament, was the second lawmaker attacked in a week. On Dec. 13, a bomb attached to the car of parliamentarian Tofeq Wahdt killed his driver and security guard and left him wounded. No one claimed responsibility for the attack. Two days later on Dec. 15, a bomb attached to the car of Kabul's deputy provincial governor, Mahbobullah Mohibi, exploded, killing him and two others.

The perpetual violence has made Afghans more doubtful about future peace.

Optimism over the ongoing peace process dropped from 86% in the summer to 57% this fall, according to a survey by the Institute of War and Peace Studies, a Kabul-based think tank.

Despite the violence, the Trump administration announced last month that the U.S. would reduce the number of troops in Afghanistan to 2,500 by the middle of January. Under the U.S.-Taliban agreement, all remaining troops could be withdrawn by May if the Taliban is able to meet certain anti-terrorism requirements.

New strain leads EU nations to halt UK flights

Associated Press

BERLIN — One by one, several European Union nations banned flights from the U.K. on Sunday and others like Germany were considering such action, all in hopes of blocking a new strain of coronavirus sweeping across southern England from establishing a strong foothold on the Continent.

The Netherlands banned flights from the U.K. for at least the rest of the year while Belgium issued a flight ban for 24 hours starting at

midnight and also halted train links to Britain, including the Eurostar. Austria and Italy said they would halt flights from the U.K. but did not say exactly when that would take place.

Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said on Twitter that the government was preparing the ban "to protect Italians" from the new coronavirus variant. About two dozen flights were scheduled to arrive in Italy on Sunday, most in the northern region of Lombardy but also to Venice and Rome.

German officials, meanwhile, said they were considering "serious options" regarding incoming flights from the U.K. and the Czech Republic imposed stricter quarantine measures from people arriving from Britain. An EU official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the talks were still ongoing, said Sunday afternoon that the EU Commission was in touch with member states on the rapidly developing situation.

Just days before Christmas, high-speed train operator Euros-

tar canceled its trains between London, Brussels and Amsterdam beginning Monday, but kept trains operating on the London-to-Paris route.

The EU governments said they were taking action in response to tougher measures imposed Saturday by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on London and its surrounding areas. Johnson immediately put those regions into a new Tier 4 restriction level, upending Christmas plans for millions.

General apologizes for 'miscommunication' over vaccine

Associated Press

The Army general in charge of getting COVID-19 vaccines across the United States apologized on Saturday for "miscommunication" with states over the number of doses to be delivered in the early stages of distribution.

"I failed. I'm adjusting. I am fix-

ing and we will move forward from there," Gen. Gustave Perna told reporters in a telephone briefing.

Perna's remarks came a day after a second vaccine was added in the fight against COVID-19, which has killed more than 312,000 people in the U.S. Govern-

ment officials in more than a dozen states have said the federal government has told them that next week's shipment of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine will be less than originally projected.

The general said he made mistakes by citing numbers of doses that he believed would be ready.

There's a distinction between manufactured vaccine and doses that are ready to be released.

The finished product must undergo "rigorous quality control and sterility tests," which can take up to a month, the Department of Health and Human Services said.

Hawaiian medical workers among first to receive vaccine

By **WYATT OLSON**

Stars and Stripes

TRIPLER ARMY MEDICAL CENTER, Hawaii – Hundreds of military medical personnel on Oahu had been inoculated against the coronavirus as of Thursday morning, two days after Tripler Army Medical Center received an initial batch of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

The medical center on the outskirts of Honolulu serves all uniformed branches. It is one of 16 Defense Department sites around the world to begin a vaccination drive aiming to protect roughly 11.1 million defense personnel from COVID-19.

“We’re honored that we get to be a key player in reaching the end of COVID,” Col. Martin Doperak, Tripler’s commander, said during a news conference Thursday morning on the medical center’s sprawling grounds.

Citing operational security concerns, Doperak declined to say how many initial doses of vaccine Tripler received.

The doses on hand are being given in a “phased approach” under guidelines developed by the

Defense Department, Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, he said.

“[We] are first inoculating our intensive-care unit personnel; emergency room and urgent-care personnel; first responders; inpatient and outpatient health delivery; and support personnel,” Doperak said. “Basically, those that will come into contact with COVID patients. This first tier includes both active-duty, civilians and contractors who have volunteered to receive the vaccine.”

Defense Department policy requires all active duty and reserve personnel, as well as anyone working in the health care field, to receive flu vaccine each year. But the coronavirus vaccine is entirely voluntary at this point.

“We have well over 50% of the folks volunteering to receive the vaccine,” said Col. Ingrid Lim, deputy commander for medical services at Tripler. That amounted to “a few hundred” volunteers as of Thursday morning, she said.

Trump downplays Russia hacking connection

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Contradicting his secretary of state and other top officials, President Donald Trump suggested without evidence that China — not Russia — may be behind the cyber espionage operation against the United States and tried to minimize its impact.

In his first comments on the breach, Trump scoffed at the focus on the Kremlin and downplayed the intrusions, which the nation’s cybersecurity agency has warned posed a “grave” risk to government and private networks.

“The Cyber Hack is far greater in the Fake News Media than in actuality. I have been fully briefed and everything is well under control,” Trump tweeted Saturday. He also claimed the media are “petrified” of “discussing the possibility that it may be China (it may!).”

There is no evidence to suggest that is the case. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said late Friday that Russia was “pretty clearly” behind the operation against the United States.

“This was a very significant effort and I think it’s the case that now we can say pretty clearly that it was the Russians that engaged in this activity,” Pompeo said in the in-

terview with radio talk show host Mark Levin.

Officials at the White House had been prepared to put out a statement Friday afternoon that accused Russia of being “the main actor” in the hack, but were told at the last minute to stand down, according to one U.S. official familiar with the conversations who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private deliberations.

It is not clear whether Pompeo got that message before his interview, but officials are now scrambling to figure out how to square the disparate accounts.

Throughout his presidency, Trump has refused to blame Russia for well-documented hostilities, including its interference in the 2016 election to help him get elected. He blamed his predecessor, Barack Obama, for Russia’s annexation of Crimea, has endorsed allowing Russia to return to the G-7 group of nations and has never taken the country to task for allegedly putting bounties on U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan.

Pompeo in the interview said the government was still “unpacking” the cyberespionage operation and some of it would likely remain classified.

Senate investigators fault FAA over Boeing jet, safety

Associated Press

Boeing improperly influenced a test designed to see how quickly pilots could respond to malfunctions on the Boeing 737 Max, and Federal Aviation Administration officials may have obstructed a review of two deadly crashes involving the plane, Senate investigators say.

In a report released Friday, the Senate Commerce Committee also said the FAA continues to retaliate against whistleblowers. The FAA’s parent agency, the Transportation Department, has also hindered investigators by failing to turn over documents, it said.

The report follows a similarly scathing re-

view of the FAA by a House panel earlier this year. Both grew out of concern about the agency’s approval of the Boeing Max.

In a statement, the FAA said the report “contains a number of unsubstantiated allegations” and defended its review of the Max, calling it thorough and deliberate.

“We are confident that the safety issues that played a role in the tragic accidents involving Lion Air Flight 610 and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 have been addressed through the design changes required and independently approved by the FAA and its partners,” the agency said.

“We take seriously the Committee’s findings and will continue to review the report in full,” the Chicago-based company said.

All Max planes were grounded worldwide after crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia killed 346 people. Following a lengthy review of Boeing changes, the FAA last month approved the plane to fly again if airlines update a key flight-control system and make other changes.

The Senate report, however, criticized a key part of the FAA review. It said that Boeing “inappropriately influenced” FAA testing of pilot-reaction time to a nose-down pitch of the plane.

Police: Man falsely said infant was in stolen car

OH CINCINNATI — A man falsely reported a 10-month-old was in his car when it was stolen from a gas station to get a faster response, police said.

The man called police to say the car was snatched with the baby inside, police said.

But about 45 minutes into the search, police said that the man changed his story and said that the child was not in the vehicle.

While police tried to verify that the child was safe, a tip came in and police located the car. Officers apprehended one suspect.

Police verified the child was safe with a grandmother.

The man who reported the car was stolen will be charged with inducing panic and making false alarms.

Cemetery makes more room for green burials

MI CHASSELL TOWNSHIP — A cemetery in Michigan's Upper Peninsula is making more room for so-called green burials.

The Chassell Township cemetery in Houghton County has sold out of the approximately 40 sites that were created five years ago. The cemetery has added more than two dozen plots in a wooded area, The Daily Mining Gazette reported.

Green burials refer to burials that do not use embalming fluids to preserve the body or cement vaults. The body typically is buried in a biodegradable container or a cloth shroud, according to the Keweenaw Green Burial Alliance.

Beach may decide to ban alcohol outdoors

GA TYBEE ISLAND — Georgia's largest public beach could decide in early 2021 whether to ban drinking alcohol outdoors.

The city council on Tybee Island began weighing an open container ban in October and asked a task force to study the issue. The group will make its final recommendation in January, City Manager Shawn Gillen told WTOG-TV.

Officials began looking at banning drinking on the streets after noticing an increase

in recent years of police dealing with more unruly people impaired by alcohol.

School: Undergraduates to get free text books

KY RICHMOND — Eastern Kentucky University announced an initiative that will allow undergraduate students to receive free text books during the next school year.

The ECU BookSmart program was developed by the university and is possible due to its partnership with Barnes & Noble College Booksellers, the school announced. The program will provide required textbooks and course materials for all in-person and online students. Materials can be delivered or picked up at the campus bookstore, officials said.

Barry Poynter, senior vice president for finance and administration, said national studies show that the average costs of textbooks is \$1,200 annually.

Boy in car hit by rock thrown from overpass

SC FLORENCE — A 15-year-old was knocked unconscious after a rock was thrown from an overpass and smashed through the windshield of the car he was in, authorities said.

The boy was unconscious when he was taken to a hospital, Darlington County sheriff's officials said. No other information on his condition was immediately available.

Another woman reported that her vehicle was also struck on the windshield by a rock, authorities said. Sheriff's officials say a truck driver whose rig was struck by debris reported seeing two youths throwing objects from the overpass.

Scones maker cited for overworking teens

WA TUMWATER — The maker of Fisher Scones, which has been a favorite at the Washington State Fair for years, was cited for more than 1,500 instances of overworking teenagers.

State Department of Labor and Industries investigators found Conifer Specialties was responsible for 1,560 instances of teens working more hours than state law allows.

Of the 1,560 violations, 426 involved teens working during school hours.

The report of a teenager injured while using a commercial-grade mixer prompted the investigation in 2019, state officials said.

The company, owned by John Patrick Heily, has until Wednesday to appeal the citation.

Coyote bites grocery store worker in leg

CA LAFAYETTE — A coyote bit a grocery store worker in the leg in the fourth such attack in the San Francisco Bay Area since April, a wildlife official said.

At least two of the attacks involved the same coyote. State officials are testing to see if the most recent bite was from that animal, which the California Department of Fish and Wildlife is hunting, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

The Diablo Foods employee took a break behind the grocery store in downtown Lafayette when a coyote bit him on the leg. He and a few co-workers scared it off, Foy said.

The attack is the eighth confirmed coyote bite this year in California and the fourth in the Bay Area.

Turkey that had fans and haters is killed

MA SOMERVILLE — A wild turkey that had developed an online fan following but also drew complaints about aggressive behavior was euthanized, Massachusetts wildlife officials said.

An Instagram account created for the turkey described it as "a classic wild turkey who enjoys kindness, not being honked at, and bringing joy to humans." The account attracted more than 1,700 followers since its July posting.

The bird also had a long history of aggressive behavior, said David Scarpitti, a wildlife biologist and turkey expert with the state's Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

Wildlife officials had urged local residents to stop feeding the bird, which can encourage aggressive behavior, he said.

But neighbors kept feeding the turkey and the behavior continued, leading to the decision to capture and euthanize it, Scarpitti said.

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College Football Playoff final four named

Associated Press

Notre Dame was picked Sunday over Texas A&M for the final College Football Playoff spot and will face No. 1 Alabama in the semifinals while Clemson and Ohio State were paired in the CFP for the third time.

The Fighting Irish and Crimson Tide will meet Jan. 1 at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, after a late pandemic-related relocation from the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif. The Tigers and Buckeyes are set to play the same day at the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans — if all goes according to plan.

The national champion of this college football season played through a pandemic is scheduled to be determined Jan. 11 at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Fla.

The Fighting Irish (10-1) are back in the playoff for the second time in three seasons, becoming the first team to lose a conference title game and make the selection committee's final four. The ACC is the second con-

ference to have two teams in the playoff, joining the SEC in 2017, thanks to the famously independent Fighting Irish joining the league in football for a year because of the pandemic.

After sitting second in the CFP rankings for a month, Notre Dame was blown out 34-10 by Clemson in the Atlantic Coast Conference championship game. That opened the door for Texas A&M (8-1), which had been lurking in fifth.

The Aggies (8-1) closed their regular-season Saturday by cruising to a win over Tennessee, but were unable to become the third team in the playoff's seven-year history to make the field without even winning its division.

The reward for the Fighting Irish will be a matchup with Alabama (11-0). The last time the teams played was the 2012 BCS championship game and the Tide won 42-14.

The Southeastern Conference champion Crimson Tide is back in the playoff for the

sixth time after missing out last year.

Clemson (10-1) is in for a sixth straight season, only missing out on the first playoff. Ohio State (6-0) is making its third appearance. The Tigers have won two playoff titles and the Buckeyes won the first after the 2014 season.

Clemson-Ohio State is a rematch of last season's dramatic semifinal in Glendale, Ariz., won 29-23 by the Tigers. The two teams also met at the Fiesta Bowl in the 2016 playoff and Clemson beat the Buckeyes 31-0.

One of the semifinals was scheduled to be played at the Rose Bowl but a move was announced Saturday night. The change was made after coaches and school officials from playoff contenders complained about California's COVID-19 restrictions that bans spectators from sporting events and would have made it impossible for players' families attend the game.

The Rose Bowl twice asked for a special exemption from the state and was denied

Alabama survives test from Florida in SEC final

Associated Press

ATLANTA — In a season of blowouts, Alabama finally got tested. Against a team that just wouldn't quit, the Crimson Tide required every last point.

Nick Saban needed his offensive stars to shine as bright as they have all season.

Boy, did they ever.

Najee Harris rushed for 178 yards and scored five touchdowns. Mac Jones threw for 418 yards and five TDs. DeVonta Smith hauled in 15 receptions for 184 yards and two scores.

It was just enough to send No. 1 Alabama to the College Football Playoff with a perfect record, holding off No. 11 Florida in a 52-46 shootout for the Southeastern Conference championship Saturday night.

"Those guys are pretty phenomenal. They have been all year," Saban said. "They certainly delivered tonight when we needed them to."

The Crimson Tide (11-0, No. 1

CFP) got its toughest challenge in a season of blowouts, but the result was the same. Another win. Now, with one of his best teams yet, the 69-year-old coach heads to the playoff in search of his seventh national title.

After trailing 35-17 at halftime, Florida (8-3, No. 7 CFP) made a game of it with a pair of third-quarter scores. And the Gators fought to the bitter end, adding two more TDs in the fourth period before the clock hit zero.

"We were rolling pretty good," said quarterback Kyle Trask, who threw for 408 yards and three TDs. "We just ran out of time."

Harris, the game's MVP, essentially established residency in the Mercedes-Benz Stadium end zones.

The senior running back had 31 bruising carries, scoring on plays of 8 and 1 yards and leaping like a hurdler over a defender who tried to go low on a 19-yard run.

QB Lawrence, Clemson dominate Notre Dame

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — After a heartbreaking 47-40 double-overtime loss to Notre Dame last month, Clemson coach Dabo Swinney assured his players in the locker room that there would be no trophy handed out that night.

There would, however, be one up for grabs when they got to Charlotte for the Atlantic Coast Conference championship game.

The Tigers haven't blinked since, staying focused on their goal. On Saturday they collected the hardware — again.

Trevor Lawrence had 412 yards of offense and three touchdowns, Travis Etienne ran for 124 yards and a score and No. 4 Clemson dominated No. 2 Notre Dame 34-10 on Saturday to win its sixth straight ACC title.

"All we had to do was take care of business after that,"

Lawrence said about the loss in South Bend. "We remember fans running off the field and getting in our face. You remember those images and keep those things in your head."

Lawrence, who didn't play in the first meeting because the coronavirus, threw long scoring passes to Amari Rodgers and E.J. Williams in the first half to help the Tigers (10-1) lock up a spot in the College Football Playoff for the sixth straight season.

Lawrence, the game MVP and presumptive No. 1 pick in the NFL draft, overcame an early interception on a tipped ball to complete 25 of 36 passes for 322 yards. He ran 14 times for 90 yards, with a 34-yard touchdown scamper.

Clemson has won all nine games Lawrence has started by at least 18 points and their average margin of victory in those games is 33.6 points.

Army tops Air Force for 9th CIC trophy

Associated Press

WEST POINT, N.Y. — With the Commander-in-Chief's Trophy at stake, Jakobi Buchanan made sure the prized hardware returned to West Point.

Facing a fourth-and-goal from the 1, the 260-pound Army fullback followed senior captain left guard Mike Johnson through the Air Force line and into the end zone with 73 seconds left to give the Black Knights a 10-7 victory Saturday, their second emotional win in a week.

Army (9-2) was coming off a hard-fought 15-0 victory over archrival Navy a week ago in the first game between the schools at West Point in 77 years. The win gave the Black Knights their ninth CIC, emblematic of supremacy among the three academies.

"We were just determined," said Buchanan, who finished with 86 yards rushing on 21 carries. "For us, fourth down is just another down to convert. We were all on the same page. We knew it was a game-winner. We had to get it. There was no other choice for us."

The touchdown was the second fourth-

down conversion of the march. Quarterback Christian Anderson converted on fourth-and-3 six plays earlier and Arik Smith's interception on a deflected first-down pass after the ensuing kickoff sealed it for Army.

"I don't know if I've processed it yet. It's definitely tough, right?" Falcons defensive tackle George Silvanic said. "One play to win a championship and you don't get it and they do. Hats off to them. I'm very sad and distraught and I'm heartbroken for the guys, the seniors. That's kind of the feeling of the whole team right now."

Quinn Marezki kicked a 24-yard field goal early in the second quarter for the Black Knights' other points.

Air Force (3-3) beat Army 17-13 at home last year, stopping the Black Knights on fourth down at the goal line in the final seconds to escape, so this was a sweet payback, especially since it gave the senior class its 35th win, an academy record.

"The last drive, we found a way. We just weren't going to be denied." Army coach Jeff Monken said. "This season, this year has been a challenge for every human being

on the face of this planet. There's a spirit in this team and a love for each other in this brotherhood that's just uncommon. This is the best team that I've ever been a part of."

The Falcons (3-3) began the season with a dominant 40-7 win over Navy and were poised to capture their record 21st CIC after being stymied by the Black Knights' defense and failing to score in the first half. Air Force went to the air late in the third and finally broke through behind Haaziq Daniels.

He hit Kyle Patterson for 16 yards and 39 yards, and Brandon Lewis for 11 yards, to key a 10-play, 87-yard drive that he finished with a 10-yard touchdown pass over the middle to Patterson with 15 seconds left in the third.

But Army's Jabari Moore stopped the Falcons' attempt to seal it with an interception at the goal line midway through the fourth to set up the winning drive for the Black Knights, who have won 10 straight at home. Daniels completed a 22-yard pass to Ben Peterson on a third-and-18 play but got greedy and Moore made them pay with his juggling interception.

TOP 25 COLLEGE FOOTBALL ROUNDUP

Mond leads No. 5 Aggies past Volunteers

Associated Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — Kellen Mond threw for 281 yards and a touchdown and rushed for 59 yards and a score, helping No. 5 Texas A&M to a 34-13 win Saturday at Tennessee.

Isaiah Spiller ran for 89 yards and a touchdown, and Ainius Smith scored once rushing and once receiving.

Mond completed 26 of 32 passes. The Aggies (8-1, No. 5 CFP) finished their regular season.

The Volunteers (3-7) have lost seven of their last eight games, ramping up speculation about Jeremy Pruitt's future as coach.

No. 12 Oklahoma 27, No. 8 Iowa State 21: Spencer Rattler threw a 45-yard touchdown pass to Marvin Mims and ran for a score and the Sooners won their sixth consecutive Big 12 title, holding on to beat the Cyclones in the conference championship game in Arlington, Texas.

That impressive title streak wasn't

enough to get the Sooners (8-2, No. 10 CFP) into the College Football Playoff for the fourth year in a row, even when paired with their seven-game winning streak. Oklahoma lost at Iowa State on Oct. 3 and was 0-2 in Big 12 play for the first time since 1998.

Rattler was 22 of 34 for 272 yards and his 25th TD pass.

Big 12 rushing leader Breece Hall ran for two touchdowns for the Cyclones (8-3, No. 6 CFP).

No. 6 Cincinnati 27, Tulsa 24: Cole Smith made a 34-yard field goal as time expired to lift the host Bearcats in the rainy American Conference Championship game.

Alec Pierce had a career-high 146 yards receiving on five catches, Desmond Ridder passed for 269 yards and a touchdown and ran for a score, and Jerome Ford added a 42-yard scoring run for Cincinnati (9-0, No. 9 CFP).

The Golden Hurricanes (6-2, No. 23 CFP)

reached the conference championship game following three straight losing seasons. It was their first appearance in the AAC title game.

No. 25 San Jose State 34, Boise State 20: Nick Starkel completed 32 of 52 passes for 453 yards and three touchdowns to lead the Spartans to their first Mountain West Conference championship in Las Vegas.

San Jose State (7-0) had lost all 14 previous meetings with the Broncos (5-2).

Starkel broke former Fresno State star Derek Carr's title-game record of 404 yards passing set in 2013 in a victory over Utah State.

It was the fourth 400-yard passing game of Starkel's career, and second this season, his first with the Spartans. He spent the first three years of his college career at Texas A&M and Arkansas before transferring to San Jose State in January.

Tre Walker and Derrick Deese Jr. each had seven receptions.

TOP 25 BASKETBALL ROUNDUP

No. 1 Gonzaga runs past No. 3 Iowa

Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — Jalen Suggs scored 18 of his career-high 27 points in the first half and No. 1 Gonzaga held off a late rally to beat No. 3 Iowa 99-88 on Saturday.

This was the Bulldogs first game since pausing activities in early December because of the coronavirus. Gonzaga showed little rust from not playing a game since Dec. 2.

Suggs, the West Coast Conference freshman player of the week before Gonzaga's season was paused, entered the game against Iowa averaging 13.3 points per game. He blew by that midway through the first half and finished 8 for 17 from the floor and was 7 for 10 from the three-point line. His previous career high was 24 against Kansas on Nov. 26.

Drew Timme added 15 points and Joel Ayai added 11 points and grabbed a career-high 18 rebounds for Gonzaga (4-0).

Luka Garza led Iowa (6-1) with 30 points and 10 rebounds on 13-of-18 shooting.

No. 2 Baylor 100, Kansas State 69: Marcio Teague had 23 points and 10 rebounds, Davion Mitchell scored 20 points and the Bears earned a road win.

Jared Butler had 14 points and 13 assists for his first career double-double with the Bears (5-0, 1-0 Big 12), and Jonathan Tchamwa Tchatchoua scored 13 points.

Antonio Gordon led the Wildcats (3-5, 1-1) with 23 points on 9-of-9 shooting, and Selton Miguel scored 14 points.

This was the first game for Baylor in a week after the school paused team activity due to COVID-19 protocols.

No. 7 Villanova 88, Saint Joseph's 68: Jeremiah Robinson-Earl scored 25 points with a broken nose, Caleb Daniels had 19 points and the Wildcats won at home in a hastily-scheduled game.

Robinson-Earl played with a protective mask after breaking his nose in Wednesday's win against Butler. He helped Villanova (7-1) turn this one into a rout in the second half with 8-of-14 shooting overall, and he made seven of his team's 11 free throws, added seven rebounds and never seemed bothered by his injury.

No. 12 Wisconsin 85, No. 23 Louisville 48: Micah Potter scored 20 points and Aleem Ford added 12 to lead the host Badgers over the short-handed Cardinals in a rescheduled ACC/Big Ten Challenge game.

UCF 86, No. 15 Florida State 74: Brandon Mahan scored 26 of his career-high 32 points in the second half and Isaiah Adams added 22 points as the Knights ended the Seminoles' 27-game home winning streak.

Mahan shot 10-for-13 from the floor and 10-for-10 from the line as UCF (2-1) won for the first time in 12 games against the Seminoles.

No. 20 Ohio State 77, UCLA 70: Duane Washington Jr. hit two free throws in the final minute and finished with 14 points, helping the Buckeyes win at the CBS Sports Classic in Cleveland. Zed Key had 11 points and six rebounds and CJ Walker scored 10 points for Ohio State (6-1), which bounced back from a 70-67 loss at Purdue on Dec. 16. Neither team led by more than six points until the final minute.

No. 22 North Carolina 75, Kentucky 63: Armando Bacot scored 11 of his team-high 14 points in the second half, rallying the Tar Heels from a double-digit deficit to beat the Wildcats at the CBS Sports Classic in Cleveland. Kentucky (1-5) has lost five in a row for the first time since John Calipari became coach in 2009. Kerwin Walton scored 13 points.

NFL ROUNDUP

Bills clinch first AFC East title since 1995

Associated Press

DENVER — The Buffalo Bills captured their first AFC East title in a quarter-century Saturday when 24-year-old quarterback Josh Allen threw for two touchdowns and ran for two more in a 48-19 rout of the Denver Broncos.

The Bills (11-3) scored twice in a 17-second span in the third quarter to ice their fourth straight victory that officially ended the New England Patriots' 11-year reign atop the division.

The Broncos (5-9) have their fourth consecutive losing season for the first time since they had 10 straight sub-.500 campaigns from 1963-72. They also became the first team ever to go five years without making the playoffs following a Super Bowl title.

Allen threw for 359 yards, hitting Stefan

Diggs 11 times for 147 yards before a foot injury in the fourth quarter, and Cole Beasley eight times for 112 yards.

Allen also tied Jack Kemp's record of 25 career touchdown runs with his second TD scamper, a 1-yard keeper to the right that was set up by Andre Roberts' 55-yard return of Taylor Russolino's short second-half kickoff. The Broncos turned to Russolino, whose vagabond career included stops in the XFL, the Canadian Football League and even the Chinese arena league after Brandon McManus went on the COVID-19 reserve list. Russolino missed a 51-yard field goal and two extra points on a windy day that didn't adversely affect Bills kicker Tyler Bass, who made both field goal attempts and all six extra points.

Packers 24, Panthers 16: Aaron Jones

rushed for 145 yards and a touchdown as the Packers reached the end zone on their first three series before hanging on.

Aaron Rodgers threw for a season-low 143 yards but produced a touchdown pass — his 40th of the season — and a touchdown run for the Packers. Rodgers is the first player in NFL history to throw at least 40 touchdown passes in three separate seasons; he had 45 during his 2011 MVP campaign and 40 in 2016.

Green Bay (11-3) won its fourth straight and took a half-game lead over New Orleans (10-3) in the race for the NFC's best record. The Packers own a tiebreaker over the Saints after winning 37-30 at New Orleans on Sept. 27. Under the NFL's new 14-team playoff format this year, only the No. 1 seed in each conference earns a first-round bye.