

Nashville blast thought to be intentional

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — A recreational vehicle parked in the deserted streets of downtown Nashville exploded early Christmas morning, causing widespread communications outages that took down police emergency systems and grounded holiday travel at the city's airport.

Police were responding to a report of shots fired Friday when they encountered the RV blaring a recorded warning that a bomb would detonate in 15 minutes, Metro Nashville Police Chief John Drake said.

Police evacuated nearby buildings and called in the bomb squad. The RV exploded shortly afterward, Drake said.

"This morning's attack on our community was intended to create chaos and fear in this season of peace and hope. But Nashvillians have proven time and time again that the spirit of our city cannot be broken," Mayor John Cooper said at a news conference after issuing a curfew for the area.

Police believe the blast was intentional but don't yet know a motive or target, and Drake noted that officials had not received any threats before the explosion.

The chief said investigators at the scene "have found tissue that we believe could be remains, but we'll have that examined and

let you know at that time." Police could not say whether it potentially came from someone inside the RV.

Three people taken to area hospitals for treatment were in stable condition Friday evening, Cooper said.

Surveillance video published on a Twitter account Friday that appeared to be across the street from the blast captured the warning issuing from the RV, "... if you can hear this message, evacuate now," seconds before the explosion.

The blast sent black smoke and flames billowing from the heart of downtown Nashville's tourist scene, an area packed with honky-tonks, restaurants and shops.

Buildings shook and windows shattered streets away from the explosion near a building owned by AT&T that lies one block from the company's office tower, a landmark in downtown.

"We do not know if that was a coincidence, or if that was the intention," police spokesman Don Aaron said. He said earlier that some people were taken to the department's central precinct for questioning but declined to give details.

AT&T said the affected building is the central office of a telephone exchange, with network equipment in it.

The blast interrupted service, but the company declined to say how widespread outages were.

The AT&T outages site showed service issues in middle Tennessee and Kentucky. Several police agencies reported that their 911 systems were down because of the outage, including Knox County, home to Knoxville about 180 miles east of Nashville.

AT&T said that it was bringing in portable cell sites and was working with law enforcement to get access to make repairs to its equipment.

The company noted that "power is essential to restoring" service.

The Federal Aviation Administration temporarily halted flights out of Nashville International Airport because of telecommunications issues associated with the explosion.

Later Friday, the Metropolitan Nashville Airport Authority said most flights were resuming but advised passengers to check with their airline for updates due to possible delays.

The FBI will be taking the lead in the investigation, agency spokesman Joel Siskovic said. Federal investigators from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives were also on the scene.

'Unprecedented' mail volume delays gifts

Associated Press

SAN RAMON, Calif. — Some who mailed holiday presents weeks early this year found they didn't act early enough as Christmas arrived with their gifts stuck in transit.

The U.S. Postal Service said on its website that it was "experiencing unprecedented volume increases and limited employee availability due to the impacts of COVID-19."

Austin Race of Grand Rapids, Mich., placed an online order Nov. 30 for a collector's model die-cast of a NASCAR racing car.

It hadn't reached his father after the Postal Service passed through his neighborhood Thursday night, even though he was noti-

fied Dec. 8 that it was shipped by two-day priority mail.

His gift was in Opa-locka, Fla., the last time he checked the tracking number, about 750 miles south of where he ordered it in Mooresville, N.C.

Race, 21, resigned himself to telling his father he will have to wait a little longer for his gift. "I do understand the situation, but it's still kind of frustrating," he said.

Joanna Goldstein ordered Christmas ornaments online Nov. 17 for her 10-year-old son's soccer coach and her son's friend.

She figured it was ample time to arrive from a store about 80 miles from her home in Ann Arbor, Mich.

All appeared well Dec. 11 when she re-

ceived a notice from the Postal Service that the ornaments had been received in Columbus, Ohio.

Then the package made a journey through distribution centers in Warrendale, Pa., Grand Rapids, Mich., and Lansing, Mich., before apparently getting stuck in Detroit.

On Wednesday, she received another notice that delivery would be later than initially anticipated.

"I was frustrated last week thinking, 'C'mon, get here,' but now I am just sort of laughing it off," she said.

She told her son the ornaments will hang on the tree next year and they will have a story to tell about the long journey they took during the pandemic.

Roosevelt underway on new deployment

The Orange County Register

After two weeks of training off Southern California, the USS Theodore Roosevelt, its air wings and three guided-missile cruisers are heading westward out to sea on deployment.

The ship, its 5,500 sailors, and those in its strike group have been doing a “sustainment exercise” off California’s coast to prepare.

In the exercise, sailors tested their competence and ensured they and their equipment are ready to compete and win in a high-end fight, officials said. The group ex-

amined all its capabilities, including the ability for a long-range strike, information warfare, air defense and surface and sub-surface warfare.

Completing the training confirms “Carrier Strike Group Nine is ready to sail west to preserve freedom of the seas, deter aggression, and if necessary, win against any competitor,” Rear Adm. Doug Verissimo, the group’s commander, said in a statement.

Prior to the aircraft carrier’s departure, sailors were sequestered in accordance with the U.S. Pacific Fleet guidelines to reduce the risk of the coronavirus aboard the

ship, something the carrier is all too familiar with.

On Jan. 17, the Roosevelt left San Diego on a previous deployment to the Indo-Pacific region with about 4,845 sailors aboard. In early March, the coronavirus made its way onto the ship, and by mid-April, 1,273 sailors were sick.

The aircraft carrier was forced to stop in Guam so the infected crew could be quarantined. Aviation Ordnanceman Chief Petty Officer Charles Robert Thacker Jr. died.

The aircraft carrier returned to San Diego on July 9.

Heavy winds and rain knock out power to thousands

Associated Press

BOSTON — A storm packing a mix of heavy rains and winds knocked out power to thousands of homes across the Northeast region Christmas morning.

There were more than 7,000 customers without power early Friday in Massachusetts. State officials and utility companies had warned that the winds could knock down trees, bringing power lines down with them.

Winds gusted more than 60 miles per hour in some areas during the early morning hours.

The National Weather Service reported that one to two inches of rain had fallen across much of Connecticut, Rhode Island

and portions of Massachusetts by about 9 a.m. with additional rains on the way.

The combination of heavy rain and melting snow is resulting in flooding in some of the areas, the service said. There was heavy flooding on portions of Route 95 in Cranston, R.I.

Adding to the flooding woes were temperatures that rose into the 60s, accelerating the melting of existing snow cover.

Eversource was cancelling vacations for many employees and bringing in crews from as far away as Pennsylvania and Canada to help restore power in Massachusetts.

Unitil Corp., an electric and gas utility in New England, opened its regional emer-

gency operations centers in response to the high winds.

Thousands of New Jersey electric customers were also without power on Christmas Day.

Jersey Central Power & Light reported almost 13,200 customers without power shortly before midday Friday.

Public Service Electric & Gas Co. reported more than 7,370 customers affected in Bergen County and more than 1,000 in Hudson county. Atlantic City Electric Co. reported more than 1,000 customers affected in each of Salem, Cumberland, Gloucester and Atlantic counties.

The storm also left thousands without power in the Philadelphia suburbs.

Dems in Ga. Senate races take in more than \$200M

Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Democrats running for Georgia’s two U.S. Senate seats each raised more than \$100 million over two months, a massive haul that eclipsed campaign contributions to their Republican opponents and reflects the high stakes of the twin contests.

Jon Ossoff, who is taking on Sen. David Perdue, took in more than \$106 million from Oct. 15 through Dec. 16, according to his latest campaign finance report. Raphael Warnock, who is trying to unseat Sen. Kelly Loeffler, was close behind with a little over \$103 million.

Perdue reported \$68 million over the same two-month span, with Loeffler taking

in just under \$64 million. Three of the campaigns reported their financial data on Thursday. Loeffler submitted hers a day earlier.

The two races will determine which party controls the Senate — and likely how ambitious President-elect Joe Biden can be with his agenda.

If Republicans win one race, they will maintain a narrow majority, and the chamber will serve as a bulwark against Democratic legislation. But if Democrats carry both, the balance will be 50-50 — with Vice President-elect Kamala Harris delivering tie-breaking votes. That will likely enable Biden to enact a more ambitious agenda, as-

suming he can keep fellow Democrats on board.

Georgia’s two runoff races kicked off in November after Perdue and Loeffler failed to get more than 50% of the vote on Election Day. Early voting has already started for the Jan. 5 election.

“We’re humbled by the grassroots support and generosity that continues to power Reverend Warnock’s campaign to represent all Georgians in the U.S. Senate,” Jerid Kurtz, Warnock’s campaign manager, said in a statement.

Ossoff’s campaign said it was proud of its voter turnout work. Loeffler’s campaign did not release a statement.

Protests, Fort Hood crisis tested McCarthy

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — On June 1, federal police backed by National Guard troops fired tear gas at demonstrators near the White House, sending them running for cover in a barrage of pepper balls and flash grenades.

By nightfall, as the protesters snaked their way downtown, two Army helicopters roared low overhead in an apparent effort to disperse the crowds. The mission, authorized by Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy, stunned lawmakers and military law experts, prompting an investigation within the D.C. National Guard.

That incident is one of several tumultuous moments that have tested McCarthy, the top civilian official in charge of the military's largest force, over the past year.

Analysts say McCarthy has led soldiers through the trying times of the coronavirus pandemic and a strategic refocus on Russia and China, and that his tenure has been marked by relative stability.

But they describe his record elsewhere as mixed, saying he has lacked vision and failed to take responsibility for some of the Army's most visible challenges, including a leadership crisis at Fort Hood, calls to rename Army posts christened after Confederate officers and the events in the nation's capital.

McCarthy has said changes, such as an overhaul of a sexual crime prevention program recommended in a report on Fort Hood's troubled command, will make a difference.

McCarthy, who was appointed in September 2019, may be asked to stay on for the new administration, Defense News reported, which sometimes occurs in an effort to ensure continuity of leadership. The Biden presidential transition team declined to comment. A spokesperson for McCarthy did not make him available for an interview.

Few details about the helicopter mission have been made public beyond McCarthy's acknowledgment that he authorized it, with officials describing their intended role as observational. Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, told lawmakers in July the investigation was expected "within days," but it has not been released.

McCarthy and other senior defense officials were concerned that if unrest spiraled out of control, the Pentagon would escalate by sending a response unit of the 82nd Air-

borne into the District of Columbia, according to a defense official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Defense and law enforcement officials were satisfied with the results of the helicopter mission because it may have blunted the need for mobilizing active duty troops, according to the officer, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak with reporters.

But the mission was widely condemned by lawmakers and experts, who described it as a dangerous maneuver on mostly peaceful demonstrators.

McCarthy, a former defense company executive and Army Ranger with service in Afghanistan, has served in top Army leadership positions since early in the Trump administration, first as the undersecretary and two stretches as acting secretary until he secured the top job.

In July, McCarthy ordered an independent civilian review of Fort Hood after the disappearance and death of Spec. Vanessa Guillén, who was killed by another soldier in April. Her family said she was sexually harassed and that Army leaders didn't move quickly to find her.

The panel said in a report released Dec. 8 that care for soldiers was an afterthought. Hyper-focus on preparing for war allowed sexual harassment and assault to go undetected and unpunished, and Army leaders lacked initiative to corral violent crime, the review found, despite years of data that shows Fort Hood has more crime than any other Army post.

McCarthy's handling of public discussion over 10 Army posts named after Confederate officers could also help define his career, said Mike Jason, a retired Army officer who worked as a strategic planner for McCarthy until 2019.

After George Floyd's death led to a reckoning over racism, McCarthy said he supported a "bipartisan discussion" with the White House and lawmakers to rename the posts.

Trump said soon after his administration would not "even consider" any changes.

Jason said McCarthy had only a short window to make such a call on his own before Trump got involved.

Still, he said, "I think it was a missed opportunity to leave a moral legacy."

Judge: DOJ unlawfully moved day of execution

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal judge said the Justice Department unlawfully rescheduled the execution of the only woman on federal death row, potentially setting up the Trump administration to schedule the execution after President-elect Joe Biden takes office.

U.S. District Court Judge Randolph Moss also vacated an order from the director of the Bureau of Prisons that had set Lisa Montgomery's execution date for Jan. 12.

Montgomery had previously been scheduled to be put to death at the Federal Correctional Complex in Terre Haute, Ind., this month, but Moss delayed the execution after her attorneys contracted coronavirus visiting their client and asked him to extend the amount of time to file a clemency petition.

Moss prohibited the Bureau of Prisons from carrying out Lisa Montgomery's execution before the end of the year and officials rescheduled her execution date for Jan. 12.

But Moss ruled on Wednesday that the agency was also prohibited from rescheduling the date while a stay was in place.

The Justice Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Under the order, the Bureau of Prisons cannot reschedule Montgomery's execution until at least Jan. 1. Generally, under Justice Department guidelines, a death-row inmate must be notified at least 20 days before the execution.

Because of the judge's order, if the Justice Department chooses to reschedule the date in January, it could mean that the execution would be scheduled after Biden's inauguration on Jan. 20.

Biden "opposes the death penalty now and in the future" and would work as president to end its use in office, spokesman T.J. Ducklo has told The Associated Press.

But Biden's representatives have not said whether executions would be paused immediately once Biden takes office.

Montgomery was convicted of killing 23-year-old Bobbie Jo Stinnett in the northwest Missouri town of Skidmore in December 2004. She used a rope to strangle Stinnett, who was eight months pregnant, then a kitchen knife to cut the baby girl from the womb, authorities said.

US: Passengers from UK must test negative

Associated Press

The federal government said anyone bound for the U.S. from the United Kingdom must first test negative for the virus.

On Friday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention signed an order that mandates American citizens and others flying from the United Kingdom must be tested for the coronavirus, a move U.S. officials hope will thwart a new faster-spreading variant of the virus.

The requirement, which takes effect Monday, could affect tens of thousands of travelers per month but stops short of an outright ban, as dozens of other nations, including Canada, have done.

The decision follows President Donald Trump's order in March barring entry to the United States by many foreign nationals who had been in the U.K. in the past 14 days.

"This additional testing requirement will fortify our protection of the American public to improve their health and safety and ensure responsible international travel," the CDC said in a statement.

Passengers must get a viral test — meaning one that detects current infections — within three days of their flight, the CDC statement said.

Travelers are required to provide airlines written documentation of the results. PCR or antigen tests are both considered acceptable.

New York

NEW YORK — Gov. Andrew Cuomo urged New Yorkers to remain vigilant in the fight against the coronavirus, saying in a Christmas Day statement that the state finds itself in a "footrace" to distribute the vaccine amid rising cases.

The latest statistics showed the state's positivity rate falling slightly even as hospitalizations continued to rise.

The state on Friday an-

nounced 122 new deaths caused by COVID-19, bringing the state's official count to 29,270. But the governor sounded a note of cautious optimism on the 300th day of the pandemic.

"New York made it through Thanksgiving better than most places, so as we celebrate Christmas today it's critical we retain that momentum and remember that celebrating smart stops shutdowns," the Democrat said.

Texas

DALLAS — Coronavirus hospitalizations in Texas on Friday approached a peak hit as the pandemic surged over the summer, even amid holiday gatherings and travel that health officials have warned are likely to further spread the virus.

The state health department reported there were 10,868 patients hospitalized with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the state on Christmas, fewer than 30 people behind the record high set in July. Intensive care units in several parts of Texas were full or nearly full, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services.

Texas on Friday reported 200 more deaths from COVID-19. There were 3,123 newly confirmed cases of the virus and another 973 probable cases, according to the health department.

Wisconsin

MILWAUKEE — Wisconsin health officials on Friday reported slightly more than 1,500 new cases of the coronavirus, making up about 17.5% of the tests that were processed in the last day.

It's the third time in the last week that the daily report has shown fewer than 2,000 positive tests. The update showed five deaths in the last day, for a total of 4,679 fatalities. The death toll is the 30th highest per capita among all states at about 86 deaths per 100,000 people, ac-

cording to The COVID Tracking Project.

Wisconsin ranks 25th in the country for new cases per capita in the last two weeks. One in every 273 people in the state tested positive in the past week, the Johns Hopkins University study showed.

Pennsylvania

WASHINGTON CROSSING — An annual reenactment of George Washington's crossing of the Delaware River on Christmas morning rowed on in this COVID-19-impacted year, but onlookers had to watch it via video online.

Washington Crossing Historic Park said the reenactment filmed earlier in the month provided a "close-up view" of the event it called "a beloved community tradition that will continue for years to come." Crowd-size restrictions barred holding the Revolutionary War reenactment in the "traditional, in-person manner," organizers said.

Normally, thousands gather every Christmas morning on the banks of the river in Washington Crossing, Pa., and Titusville, N.J., to watch historical reenactors set out in boats to retrace the daring 1776 voyage of Washington and his troops.

South Dakota

SIOUX FALLS — Wildlife officials say South Dakota's outdoor recreation economy boomed in 2020, providing much-needed sales in several business sectors as well as hopes of reversing a long-term decline in the number of licensed hunters and anglers.

The state waived entry fees and did not collect visitor information for almost two months at the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Even so, state park visitation in 2020 has been roughly 31% higher than it was in 2019, said Al Nedved, deputy director of the South Dakota Game Fish and Parks Depart-

ment's parks division.

For the first time in several years, hunting and fishing license sales to state residents increased in South Dakota.

Hawaii

LIHUE — Kauai County in Hawaii is seeking approval to impose a post-travel resort bubble system that would allow incoming travelers to test out of their coronavirus quarantine after three days.

If the plan is approved by Gov. David Ige, incoming tourists that test negative for the coronavirus and who stay at a county-approved property could bypass a state-mandated 10-day quarantine with a negative coronavirus test that is taken after he or she has spent at least three days on the island, the Garden Island reported Thursday.

The program, if approved, would go into effect on Jan. 5, 2021.

North Carolina

CHARLOTTE — A North Carolina health care system said it is delaying COVID-19 vaccinations scheduled for next month after a controversy arose over who would get the initial round of doses.

Atrium Health said up to 97 vaccination appointments slated for January have been canceled, The Charlotte Observer reported. The action followed a report by several Charlotte television stations which cited a tweet by Atrium social media manager Katie McKiever saying she had scheduled her first vaccine appointment for early January.

According to guidance published in October, health care workers and medical first responders should get the vaccine first.

Atrium also said it has revised its internal plan for vaccine distribution to exclude non-frontline health care workers from the first phase.

Man arrested for tossing golf clubs into traffic

FL TAMPA — A Florida man was arrested after authorities said he tossed golf clubs into highway traffic and then slugged a trooper who pulled him over.

The Florida Highway Patrol said they received a call that a motorist was tossing golf clubs out of his van, which had a “cherry picker” boom and basket attached to the top, according to the Tampa Bay Times.

A trooper pulled over the van and its driver, Jonathan Day, confronted the trooper with a golf club, according to the Florida Highway Patrol.

Day initially complied with an order to put the club down but resisted as the trooper tried to take him into custody, striking the trooper with his fist and pulling at his uniform and radio, the Florida Highway Patrol said. Day was subdued with a stun gun.

Day, 41, is facing charges of battery on an officer, resisting an officer with violence and depriving an officer of means of protection or communication.

Covered police badges didn't violate policy

WA SEATTLE — Seattle's police watchdog agency said city police officers didn't violate any policies when they wore badges with black bands and kept their body-worn cameras turned off during protests this spring and summer.

The Seattle Times reported the Office of Police Accountability made the determination in new reports.

During Seattle protests earlier this year, protesters and others had accused officers of trying to conceal police misconduct by not recording their actions and by using black tape on their badges, which protesters said obscured officers' serial numbers.

OPA determined complaints about officers' badges were unfounded and officers' recordings were “lawful and proper” per the Seattle Police Department's policy on body-worn cameras in place at the time.

Prisons to allow smoking, starting in February

MS JACKSON — The head of Mississippi's prison system said inmates

will be allowed to smoke starting Feb. 1 — a move designed to break the trade in contraband tobacco that's smuggled inside.

Smoking has been banned for a decade in the state's 21 prisons and other facilities, but Corrections Commissioner Burl Cain said in a news release that some inmates have been lighting up, anyway.

Deputy Commissioner Jay Mallett said inmates have been paying up to \$500 a pound for smuggled tobacco, and those caught smoking have lost the chance for early release.

Parents in prison to be housed close to kids

NY ALBANY — A new bill signed into law in New York will require incarcerated parents be housed in prisons closest to the homes of their children.

More than 100,000 children around the state have at least one parent in prison, many serving time in facilities several hours away from their families.

“Children should not be deprived of the opportunity to have a relationship with their parents because of incarceration,” said State Senator Velmanette Montgomery, a Brooklyn Democrat who sponsored the bill.

Baltimore warns about overflow of sewage

MD BALTIMORE — Baltimore officials alerted residents about a sewer overflow that involved approximately 1,500 gallons.

Baltimore City Department of Public Works issued a news release saying that the overflow happened Dec. 22.

The news release said it happened in the northwest part of the city near the West Cold Spring Metro station. It identified the receiving water as Gwynns Falls.

Million-gallon hog waste spill investigated

NC RALEIGH — An investigation has begun into the failure of a hog lagoon which led to the spill of approximately 1 million gallons of untreated animal waste, North Carolina environmental officials said.

The N.C. Department of Environmental

Quality's Division of Water Resources said the spill occurred at a farm in Trenton in Jones County. A news release from the department said it was notified Dec. 21 and immediately conducted an on-site inspection.

The department said the spilled animal waste reached Tuckahoe Creek, which is approximately 300 feet from the lagoon and flows into the Trent River.

Child, grandparents rescued from national forest

OR NORTH BEND — Authorities found a 4-year-old girl and her grandparents who became stranded while looking for a Christmas tree in the Willamette National Forest in Oregon.

The girl's mother reported them missing when she went to the grandparents' home in Eugene and found no sign of the group.

Investigators picked up cellphone signals indicating they were last in the area of Fall Creek and a Coast Guard helicopter crew began a search. After several hours, the crew spotted their vehicle and notified search and rescue teams on the ground, who found the family unharmed.

State uses robotic deer to combat illegal hunting

KY CAMPBELLSVILLE — Kentucky wildlife officials are using robotic deer to catch illegal hunters.

The deer look-alike is used to catch “spot lighters,” who try to freeze deer with bright lights.

Kentucky hunting regulations say it's illegal to “deliberately cast the rays of a spotlight ... where wildlife or domestic livestock may reasonably be expected to be located.” The practice is illegal in many states.

The Lexington Herald-Leader reported that James Malone, 29, was arrested in Taylor County. State Fish and Wildlife officials said in an arrest citation that Malone pointed his vehicle's headlights “for an extended period of time” on what he thought was a deer.

Officials found what they suspected to be methamphetamine in Malone's vehicle, according to the citation. He was charged with spot lighting, drug charges and hunting without a license.

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Kamara runs wild in Saints' rout of Vikes

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Alvin Kamara expects a fine for wearing a pair of Christmas-themed shoes that, as it turned out, would also be worthy of a Hall of Fame display.

With a red shoe on his right foot and a green one on his left, Kamara tied an NFL record set in 1929 by running for six touchdowns in a game. He finished with a career-high 155 yards rushing to help New Orleans beat the Minnesota Vikings 52-33 on Friday and clinch a fourth straight NFC South title.

"It just feels good to have one of those days, just for the team," Kamara said, showering credit on the offensive line and insisting that he did "the small part."

"I'm not focused on personal, like, goals and yards and stuff like that," Kamara continued. "As long as the team has success, then personal success will come."

And it has come all season for Kamara, who during training camp signed a five-year contract worth up to \$75 million. He has since set Saints records for rushing TDs in a season with 16

and total TDs with 21 (he has five receiving).

As for wearing shoes that didn't conform to the NFL's uniform codes, Kamara said, "If they fine me, whatever it is, I'll just match it and donate to charity. You know, the Grinch always tries to steal Christmas."

Kamara slipped a couple of tackle attempts and then sprinted into the clear for a 40-yard touchdown on the game's opening drive. He added scoring runs of 1, 5, 6, 7 and 3 yards against a Minnesota defensive front hit hard by injuries, and equaled Hall of Fame fullback Ernie Nevers' achievement.

Minnesota (6-9) was eliminated from playoff contention while allowing the most points by any Vikings team since 1963.

"They just mashed us up front," Vikings coach Mike Zimmer said, calling his defense "the worst one I've ever had" as a coach. "We couldn't slow them down. It would be 8-yard gain, 7-yard gain."

The Saints (11-4) never punted, and set a record of yards gained in a game by a Vikings opponent with 583.

Saints coach Sean Payton said it felt like a CFL game, with many first-down conversions coming before New Orleans even got to third down. The Saints might have won by a greater margin if not for two interceptions of Drew Brees, one of them on a pass that deflected off receiver Emmanuel Sanders' hands.

Brees completed 19 of 26 throws for 311 yards in his second game back from rib and lung injuries that had sidelined him for four games.

Sanders had four catches for 83 yards, while tight end Jared Cook caught three passes for 82 yards. New Orleans' 264 yards rushing were the most by a Vikings opponent in Zimmer's seven seasons.

New Orleans native Irv Smith Jr. caught a pair of touchdown passes in the third quarter for the Vikings, the second pulling Minnesota to 31-27. But the Saints responded with two short touchdown runs by Kamara and one by reserve QB Taysom Hill in the fourth quarter to put the game out of reach.

Kirk Cousins passed for 283

yards and three touchdowns for the Vikings, who never led and trailed for good after Kamara's second TD in the first quarter.

Historical significance

Kamara equaled a record Nevers set for the Cardinals way back when they called Chicago home.

"It was awesome," Brees said. "Six touchdowns for a running back is just astounding."

Saints players celebrated the last TD by pretending to make snow angels on the Superdome turf, which center Erik McCoy planned during the final drive as something that stuck with the Christmas theme.

Payton, who spent part of his youth in the Chicago area, was thinking about Gale Sayers' six-TD game (four rushing, two receiving) against San Francisco in 1965 when he called the play that led to Kamara's sixth TD with just less than two minutes left.

"I'd say most of these players have no idea how good Gale Sayers was," Payton said, adding that Kamara's TD total "was a big deal. He played fantastic."

Erratic Rams running out of time to find consistency

Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — Consistency is something Los Angeles Rams coach Sean McVay always emphasizes.

The Rams have found it, but not in the way McVay wants.

The Rams head into a critical NFC West game at Seattle on Sunday having won their past four games against teams with winning records. They have also lost three straight against teams with losing records, including a defeat to the previously winless New York Jets last week that leaves them with no margin for error if the Rams want to claim a division title.

"To get to where we are trying to get to, you know, and get to the

playoffs and play to win it all, we got to be more consistent as a team overall," defensive tackle Aaron Donald said Thursday. "That's on all of us from offense to defense to special teams."

If they win their final two games against Seattle and Arizona, the Rams (9-5) would be assured their third division title in four seasons with McVay in charge because they would have swept the season series against the Seahawks (10-4). To get it, they will have to play much better than they did in the sleepy 23-20 loss to the Jets.

Most of the postmortem following that game has focused on quarterback Jared Goff and an offense that produced 97 yards

in the first half before stalling out in opposing territory in the fourth quarter. However, Donald said the defense wasn't without blame.

The Rams failed to force a takeaway, allowed the Jets to convert on 7 of 17 third downs and weren't able to stop them from running the final 3:54 off the clock.

"So we just have to be prepared, play better than we did last week, play more consistent so that everybody is on the same page. And if we do that, we know what we can do as far as the defense," Donald said.

The standard they expect was met in the 23-16 win over the Seahawks in Week 10, as the Rams

intercepted Russell Wilson twice, recovered a botched snap when he tried to extend a play and sacked him six times.

Donald and his teammates were able to focus their attention on Wilson as the Seahawks did not have their top two running backs, Chris Carson and Carlos Hyde, available because of injuries. They will play this time, which means the Rams will have to contend with a more balanced offense.

"They got two more of their playmakers on their team so, obviously, things are gonna be a little different for them as far as what they want to do in running the ball," Donald said. "We know what to expect."

Buffalo edges Marshall in Camellia Bowl

Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Kevin Marks looked like a super sub early, stalled against a stingy defense and then delivered the decisive blow.

Marks scored on a 1-yard touchdown run with 1:09 left after a clock-eating drive and Buffalo made a final defensive stop to beat Marshall 17-10 in the Camellia Bowl on Friday.

Subbing for the national leader in rushing yards per game, Jaret Patterson, Marks carried 35 times for 138 yards for the Bulls (6-1) against one of the nation's top run defenses.

Buffalo milked more than six minutes off the clock on the final 13-play, 88-yard drive. Quarterback Kyle Vantrease took a knee on first down and coach Lance Leipold even considered calling for a second one for a team that had only made its first field goal of the season in the first half.

"Obviously we needed every second we could get there to-

ward the end," Leipold said.

Grant Wells then took Marshall (7-3), which had rallied from a 10-0 deficit, to the Buffalo 20 with no timeouts. Kadofi Wright's sack helped force a fourth-and-11 and Eric Black added his second sack to end the threat.

Both teams lost their conference championship games.

Buffalo improved to 2-3 in bowls, also beating Charlotte in the 2019 Bahamas Bowl. Marshall dropped its final three games after a 7-0 start.

"We just didn't make enough plays offensively the last three weeks," Marshall coach Doc Holliday said.

The matchup between the nation's top rushing team and the No. 2 run defense lost some of its luster even before kickoff.

Patterson, who had 1,072 yards and 19 touchdowns in six games, didn't suit up after sustaining a right knee injury in the Mid-American Conference Championship Game. He

served as a cheerleader on the sideline.

"We thought it would be best for his future," James Patterson, Buffalo's linebacker and Jaret's brother, said of the prolific runner's decision not to play. "That's all that went into it. Nothing else."

Marks had 23 carries for 117 yards by halftime, though he was mostly shut down in the second half by a defense giving up just 88.9 rushing yards a game coming in. Marks said he found out he would be starting "at the end of the week." He wasn't surprised yards were hard to come by.

"It was all about patience," he said. "With a good defense like that you have to take what they give you."

The Thundering Herd still held Buffalo to 155 rushing yards, half of its own average.

Marshall tied it on Shane Ciucci's 21-yard field goal with 8:48 left in the third quarter, and that's where the score stood un-

til Marks' touchdown.

Like Buffalo, Marshall wasn't at full strength. Leading rusher Brenden Knox, C-USA defensive player of the year Tavante Beckett and starting right tackle Josh Ball opted out of the game. Beckett was one of three defensive starters missing.

It was the first NCAA bowl game played on Christmas Day since 2003.

The takeaway

Marshall: The offense went nowhere early but the defense withstood early scoring threats to keep the game tight. Punter Robert Lefevre helped out with fourth-quarter punts of 59 and 61 yards.

Buffalo: Got zip out of two impressive drives to open the game. Alex McNulty missed a 34-yard field goal — falling to 0-for-3 on the season — and then the Bulls failed on a fourth-down try from the Marshall 25. ... McNulty made a 25-yarder in the second quarter.

Heisman finalists: Tide teammates, Lawrence, Trask

Associated Press

Alabama teammates Mac Jones and DeVonta Smith along with Clemson's Trevor Lawrence and Florida's Kyle Trask have been named finalists for the Heisman Trophy.

The Heisman will be awarded Jan. 5 during a virtual ceremony. The coronavirus pandemic forced the cancellation of the usual trip to New York for the trophy presentation that comes with being a finalist.

Jones and Smith are the eighth set of teammates to be finalists together since the tradition started in 1982. Smith is trying to become the first wide receiver to win the Heisman since Michigan's Desmond Howard in 1991.

If it isn't Smith, who leads the nation in receptions (98) and receiving yards (1,511), the win-

ner will be a quarterback for the 13th time in the last 15 years.

Jones leads the nation in efficiency rating (202.34), completion percentage (76.5) and yards per pass (11.4), with 32 touchdown passes.

The top-ranked Crimson Tide will play No. 4 Notre Dame in the College Football Playoff semifinals on Jan. 1.

Jones or Smith would become Alabama's third Heisman winner. Running backs Mark Ingram (2009) and Derrick Henry (2015) were the Tide's first Heisman winners.

Lawrence was the preseason favorite to win the award, but missing two games after contracting COVID-19 slowed his campaign. The junior quarterback and presumptive first selection in the next NFL Draft

did not play against Boston College and at Notre Dame.

He did play in Atlantic Coast Conference championship rematch against the Fighting Irish last weekend and led the Tigers to a blowout victory. On the season, Lawrence has thrown for 2,753 yards and 22 touchdowns in nine games, helping Clemson reach the playoff for the third time in his career.

No. 2 Clemson plays No. 3 Ohio State in the Sugar Bowl semifinals on Jan. 1. Lawrence would be the Tigers' first Heisman winner.

Trask leads the country with 43 touchdown passes and 4,125 yards. The senior is trying to join Steve Spurrier, Danny Wuerffel and Tim Tebow as Heisman-winning quarterbacks from Florida.

The rest of the top 10 was revealed in order, starting with Alabama running back Najee Harris. The Crimson Tide are the second team to have three players in the top five in Heisman voting.

In 1946, Army running back Glenn Davis won the Heisman, fellow running back Doc Blanchard finished fourth and quarterback Arnold Tucker was fifth.

Iowa State running back Breece Hall was sixth this year, followed by Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields, BYU quarterback Zach Wilson, Notre Dame quarterback Ian Book and Florida tight end Kyle Pitts.

Pitts is the first tight end to finish in the top 10 of the Heisman voting since Notre Dame's Ken MacAfee was third in 1977.

James becomes No. 2 scorer on Christmas

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Anthony Davis scored 28 points and LeBron James had 22 while becoming the second-leading Christmas scorer in NBA history during the Los Angeles Lakers' 138-115 victory over the Dallas Mavericks on Friday night.

Montrezl Harrell scored 17 of his 22 points in the second half, and Dennis Schröder had 18 points and six assists in a second strong game for both new additions to the NBA champions. Los Angeles outrebounded Dallas 53-27 and closed out its first win of the season with a dominant fourth quarter.

Luka Dončić had 27 points and seven assists in his first starring role in the NBA's showcase Christmas evening game for Dallas. Josh Richardson and Trey Burke had 17 points apiece as the Mavs started 0-2 with a late fade at Staples Center.

James moved into second place behind Kobe Bryant for the most points scored on Christmas, passing Oscar Robertson in the third quarter. James has 383 points in 15 games on Christmas, while

Bryant had 395 in 16 holiday appearances.

Celtics 123, Nets 95: Kyrie Irving scored 37 points in his return to Boston and Kevin Durant added 29, leading Brooklyn to the win.

Jarrett Allen added 11 rebounds for the Nets, who remained perfect so far this season and sent Boston to its first loss. Irving was 7-for-10 from three-point range in his first regular-season game at TD Garden since he opted out of his Celtics contract in 2019.

Jaylen Brown scored 27 points for the Celtics, and Jayson Tatum had 20 points and eight boards. The Celtics beat Milwaukee in their opener on Wednesday on Tatum's last-second shot over Giannis Antetokounmpo, but they couldn't do it again in their second straight matchup against a team expected to contend in the Eastern Conference this season.

The game began after a moment of silence for former Celtics player and coach K.C. Jones, who died earlier Friday.

Clippers 121, Nuggets 108: Kawhi Leonard had 21 points before taking an elbow to the

face in the fourth quarter, Paul George scored 23 points and visiting Los Angeles beat Denver.

The Clippers led by 11 with 6:11 left when Serge Ibaka went up for a rebound and caught the side of his teammate's face with his right elbow. Leonard lay bleeding on the court before walking to the locker room.

Leonard was ruled out shortly thereafter, but the Clippers didn't need him to close out a Nuggets team that upset them in the second round of the Western Conference semifinals last season.

Nikola Jokic finished with 24 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds for Denver, which has dropped its first two games of the season. Jamal Murray added 23 points, 13 coming in the fourth.

Heat 111, Pelicans 98: Duncan Robinson made seven three-pointers — tying the Christmas single-game mark — and scored 23 points, leading Miami to the victory.

Goran Dragic added 18 points, and Erik Spoelstra moved to 8-0 on Christmas as coach of the Heat. Bam Adebayo

scored 17 for Miami, and Avery Bradley finished with 12.

The Heat lost Jimmy Butler at halftime with right ankle stiffness.

Zion Williamson had 32 points and 14 rebounds in 38 minutes for New Orleans — the rebounds and minutes both being career highs. Brandon Ingram finished with 28 points.

But the Pelicans shot 40% to Miami's 51%.

Bucks 138, Warriors 99: Khris Middleton scored 31 points and Milwaukee won its first Christmas Day home game in more than half a century.

Middleton went 6-for-8 from three-point range, leading a strong performance from deep for his team. Milwaukee was 20-for-37 from beyond the arc, while Golden State was 10-for-45.

The Warriors were outscored by 65 points in their first two games, the second-highest total in NBA history through two games to 71 points for the 1987-88 Clippers.

Milwaukee's only other Christmas home game came during the franchise's first season in 1968.

Johnson, Minnesota knock off fourth-ranked Iowa

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Brandon Johnson made all four of his three-point attempts in overtime and finished with 26 points and nine rebounds, leading Minnesota's late surge to upset No. 4 Iowa 102-95 on Friday night.

Marcus Carr had 30 points on 6-for-13 shooting from three-point range and eight assists, and Liam Robbins added 18 points and four blocks for the Gophers (8-1, 1-1 Big Ten). They trailed by seven points with 44 seconds left in regulation and outscored the Hawkeyes 29-15 the rest of the way.

Luka Garza had 32 points on

11-for-27 shooting and 17 rebounds for the Hawkeyes (7-2, 1-1), who allowed 99 points in their first loss last week to No. 1 Gonzaga. C.J. Fredrick scored 23 points and Joe Wieskamp added 14 points and nine rebounds, but a 55-38 rebounding edge wasn't enough for Iowa to overcome the barrage of three-balls by the 6-foot-8 graduate transfer Johnson.

Carr made a stepback three-pointer with 31 seconds left to bring Minnesota to 81-78. Joe Toussaint, who made his four other free-throw attempts in the final minute of regulation, missed a pair of foul shots. Then Carr hit the tying three-pointer

with 5.7 seconds remaining, bringing the Gophers' bench players leaping onto the court.

No. 9 Wisconsin 85, No. 12 Michigan State 76: D'Mitrik Trice scored a season-high 29 points, lifting the visiting Badgers over the Spartans.

Wisconsin (8-1, 2-0 Big Ten) won at the Breslin Center for the first time since 2004 and extended its Big Ten winning streak to 10 games, dating to last season when it shared the conference championship with Michigan State and Maryland.

Michigan State (6-2, 0-2) trailed by two points before Wisconsin scored 14 of the last 21 points in the final 4:03.

Joey Hauser scored a career-high 27 points. Aaron Henry was the only other Spartan to score in double figures, but he was 5-for-13 from the field for 12 points.

No. 19 Michigan 80, Nebraska 69: Franz Wagner had 20 points and the Wolverines scored 10 straight points early in the second half to pull away from the host Cornhuskers.

Michigan (7-0, 2-0 Big Ten) started slow in its first game since Dec. 13 but stunned Nebraska (4-5, 0-2) with the two-minute flurry that began with Isaiah Livers' three-pointer.