

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## US launches winter booster, test campaign

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden was set to kick off a more urgent campaign for Americans to get COVID-19 booster shots Thursday as he unveils his winter plans for combating the coronavirus and its omicron variant with enhanced availability of shots and vaccines but without major new restrictions.

The plan includes a requirement for private insurers to cover the cost of at-home COVID-19 tests and a tightening of testing requirements for people entering the U.S. regardless of their vaccination status. But as some other nations close their borders or reimpose lockdowns, officials said Biden was not moving to impose additional restrictions beyond his recommendation that Americans wear masks indoors in public settings.

Biden said Wednesday that the forthcoming strategy, which was to be unveiled during a speech at the National Institutes of Health, would fight the virus “not with shutdowns or lockdowns, but with more widespread vaccinations, boosters, testing and more.”

The White House released details of Biden’s plan early Thursday, in advance of the speech.

The Biden administration has come to view widespread adoption of booster shots as its most effective tool for combating COVID-19 this winter. Medical experts have said boosters provide enhanced and more enduring protection against COVID-19, including new variants.

“There’s a national campaign to get the 100 million eligible Americans who have not yet gotten their booster a booster,”

White House COVID-19 response coordinator Jeff Zients said Thursday on CBS.

About 100 million Americans are eligible for boosters under current U.S. policy, with more becoming eligible every day. Convincing those who have already been vaccinated to get another dose, officials believe, will be far easier than vaccinating the roughly 43 million adult Americans who haven’t gotten a shot despite widespread public pressure campaigns to roll up their sleeves.

And while Biden’s vaccination-or-testing requirement for workers at larger employers has been held up by legal challenges, the president on Thursday planned to renew his call for businesses to move ahead and impose their own mandates on workers so they can stay open without outbreaks.

In an effort to encourage more people to take the booster doses, the Biden administration is stepping up direct outreach to seniors — the population most vulnerable to the virus. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services will send a notice to all 63 million Medicare beneficiaries encouraging them to get booster doses, the White House said. The AARP will work with the administration on education campaigns for seniors.

So far about 42 million Americans, about half of them seniors, have received a booster dose. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this week broadened its booster dose recommendation to cover all Americans aged at least 18 starting six months after their second dose of the mRNA vaccines from Pfizer or Moderna.

## Omicron, delta spell return of unpopular restrictions

*Associated Press*

PARIS — Greeks who are over age 60 and refuse coronavirus vaccinations could be hit with monthly fines of more than one-quarter of their pensions — a get-tough policy that the country’s politicians said will cost votes but save lives.

In Israel, potential carriers of the new omicron variant could be tracked by the nation’s domestic security agency in seeming defiance of a Supreme Court ruling from the last go-round.

Weekly protests in the Netherlands over the country’s 5 p.m. lockdown and other new restrictions have descended into violence, despite what appears to be overwhelming acceptance of the rules.

With the delta variant of COVID-19 pushing up cases in Europe and growing fears over the omicron variant, governments around the world are weighing new measures for populations tired of hearing about

restrictions and vaccines.

It’s a thorny calculus made more difficult by the prospect of backlash, increased social divisions and, for many politicians, the fear of being voted out of office.

“I know the frustration that we all feel with this omicron variant, the sense of exhaustion that we could be going through this all over again,” British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Tuesday, two days after the government announced that masks would be mandatory again in stores and on public transportation and required all visitors from abroad to undergo a COVID-19 test and quarantine. “We’re trying to take a balanced and proportioned approach.”

New restrictions, or variations on the old ones, are cropping up around the world, especially in Europe, where leaders are at pains to explain what looks like a failed promise: that mass vaccinations would mean an end to widely loathed limitations.

“People need normality. They need families, they need to see people, obviously safely, socially distancing, but I really think, this Christmas now, people have had enough,” said Belinda Storey, who runs a stall at a Christmas market in Nottingham, England.

In Greece, residents over 60 face fines of \$113 a month if they fail to get vaccinated. The fines will be tacked onto tax bills in January.

About 17% of Greeks over 60 are unvaccinated despite various efforts to prod them to get their shots, and nine in 10 Greeks currently dying of COVID-19 are over 60.

“I don’t care whether the measure will cost me some extra votes in the elections,” Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said Wednesday after lawmakers passed the measure. “I am convinced that we are doing the right thing, and I am convinced that this policy will save lives.”

# Lawmakers reach deal on spending measure

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders reached agreement Thursday on a stopgap spending bill to keep the federal government running through mid-February, though a temporary shutdown was still possible with some Senate Republicans holding out over the Biden administration's COVID-19 vaccine mandates for some workers.

The House was expected to take up the spending measure later in the day. It would extend spending to Feb. 18, keeping it at current levels, though \$7 billion is included to support Afghanistan evacuees.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., chairman of

the House Appropriations Committee, had been pushing for the legislation to cover a much shorter time period, but Republicans were insistent that more time was needed to work out differences on a spending bill covering the entire fiscal year.

"The end date is February 18. While I wish it were earlier, this agreement allows the appropriations process to move forward toward a final funding agreement which addresses the needs of the American people," DeLauro said in a statement.

If the House approves the measure, as expected, the bill would then be considered by the Senate for passage ahead of a midnight

Friday deadline. But conservative Republicans opposed to Biden's vaccine rules want Congress to take a hardline stand against the mandated shots, even if it means shutting down federal offices over the weekend.

One GOP senator after another left a private lunch meeting Wednesday voicing concern they will be blamed for even a short stoppage of the federal government that will not play well with the public. In the Senate, any single senator can hold up proceedings to stall a vote.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Democrats are prepared to support the funding bill and urged Republicans not to engage in shutdown politics.

## McConnell slow walking 'must-pass' defense bill

*McClatchy Washington Bureau*

WASHINGTON — Back in early October, Mitch McConnell took to the Senate floor to thrash Democrats for leaving the annual bill that funds national defense "in procedural limbo for months."

His No. 2, Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, joined him weeks later to complain, "We can't afford to wait any longer to deal with it."

Yet now, as Democrats attempt to push through the \$768 billion stipend for the Pentagon as the year careens toward a close, it's McConnell who wants to slow things down, requesting a "reasonable number of amendments" during a "normal process" on the Senate floor.

"The Democratic Leader wants to block the Senate from fully and robustly debating a number of important issues," McConnell charged. "The [National Defense Authorization Act] is not finished yet. So the Senate cannot be finished yet either."

Democrats have a hunch as to why the Republican leader is pumping the brakes on legislation he's even said must pass — and eventually will pass. The more time Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer is consumed with hammering out an agreement on the defense appropriation, the less time he has to muscle through President Joe Biden's largest legislative prize: the \$2.2 trillion Build Back Better social spending bonanza, which cleared the U.S. House just be-

fore Thanksgiving.

"When we tried to get consent to move on this package of [NDAA] amendments, our Republican colleagues came down to the floor and objected not once but seven times," Schumer complained on Tuesday. "So we have had ample debate. This has been a fair and bipartisan and reasonable process that has showed respect to the other side. But this is a new Republican Party, unfortunately."

McConnell wants more — potentially significantly more than the 18 amendments originally agreed to by the chair and ranking Republican member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, even though there were only seven amendments in 2020, when McConnell was majority leader.

## Rand: US Army has to 'thread the needle' with Russia

**BY JOHN VANDIVER**

*Stars and Stripes*

U.S. Army moves to shore up Europe's deteriorating security situation could help solve the dilemma of how to check Russian aggression without sparking a dangerous escalation, the Rand Corp. think tank says in a new report.

The report argues that the Army will need to find a balance between deterrence and provocation in its approach to great-power adversaries like Russia.

"For example, the Army could take the lead in examining potential constraints in the deployment, posture and capabilities of

ground forces in the European region in ways that would enhance stability," Rand wrote in the report, which is titled "Stabilizing Great-Power Rivalries."

Ground forces, with an emphasis on light units over heavy tank brigades, could "thread the needle" in the tensions with the Kremlin, according to Rand. A step too far would be to put armored brigades in the Baltic states, the report contends.

It calls armored brigades "among the most provocative capabilities to rivals."

The study, which traces the history of rivalries between large powers and examines the factors that can provoke conflict, says

there are "serious grounds for concern" over the stability of American relations with both Russia and China.

The report focuses on recommendations for the Army. It comes as the United States and fellow NATO members deal with a sharp rise in tensions with Russia, which the West fears is poised to reinvade Ukraine.

"The Army, like all services, will serve the nation's interests most effectively if it continuously thinks in terms of stabilizing the rivalries rather than merely providing capabilities to threaten the adversary," says the report.

# Michigan teen charged in school shooting

Associated Press

OXFORD TOWNSHIP, Mich. — The parents of a teenager accused of killing four students at a Michigan school were summoned to discuss his behavior just a few hours before the violence, a sheriff said.

The disclosure was made Wednesday as Ethan Crumbley, 15, was charged as an adult with two dozen crimes, including murder, attempted murder and terrorism for a shooting Tuesday at Oxford High School in Oakland County.

“He deliberately brought the handgun that day with the intent to murder as many students as he could,” assistant prosecutor Marc Keast said

while successfully arguing for no bail for Crumbley and a transfer to jail from a juvenile facility.

No motive was offered. But prosecutor Karen McDonald said the shooting was premeditated, based on a “mountain of digital evidence” against Crumbley.

Investigators found that he had recorded a video the night before the bloodshed in which he discussed killing students, Lt. Tim Willis of the sheriff’s office said.

“This was not just an impulsive act,” McDonald told reporters.

During his arraignment, Crumbley replied, “Yes, I do,”

when asked if he understood the charges. Defense attorney Scott Kozak entered a plea of not guilty.

Earlier, Sheriff Mike Bouchard told reporters that Crumbley’s parents were called to the school Tuesday “for behavior in the classroom that was concerning.” The teen remained in school, however, and the shooting occurred a few hours later.

Bouchard didn’t say what had worried school officials. He said investigators believe the gun was already in the 1,700-student school.

“There is nothing that he could have faced that would warrant senseless, absolutely brutal violence on other kids,”

the sheriff said, noting that Crumbley had an additional 18 rounds of ammunition when he was arrested.

In court, Keast said Crumbley entered a bathroom with a backpack and came out with a semi-automatic handgun, firing at students while moving down the hallway. The four students who were killed were 16-year-old Tate Myre, 14-year-old Hana St. Juliana and Madisyn Baldwin and Justin Shilling, both 17.

Three students were in hospitals Wednesday night, including a 17-year-old girl in critical condition, the sheriff’s office said. Others who were injured were discharged.

## Christmas tree buyers face lower supply, higher prices

Associated Press

ALAMEDA, Calif. — Even Christmas trees aren’t immune to the pandemic-induced shortages and inflation plaguing the economy.

Extreme weather and supply chain disruptions have reduced supplies of both real and artificial trees this season. American shoppers should expect to have fewer choices and pay up to 30% more for both types this Christmas, industry officials said.

“It’s a double whammy — weather and supply chain problems are really hampering the industry,” said Jami Warner, executive director of the American Christmas Tree Association, an industry trade group. “Growers have been hard hit by floods, fires, smoke, drought, extreme weather conditions.”

Record-breaking heat and wildfires in late June took a heavy toll on Christmas tree farms in Oregon and Washington, two of the nation’s largest growers.

Warner could not provide an estimate of how many fewer

trees there will be this year but because it takes up to 10 years to grow, the crop loss will be felt for many seasons to come.

The shortage of truck drivers is making it harder and more expensive to transport live trees from farms to stores and tree lots.

Warner’s advice: “Shop early. If you see something you like, buy it.”

At Crystal River Christmas Trees, owner Dale Pine and his nephew Stacy Valenzuela struggled to get enough trees to sell at their tree lot in Alameda. Many of its suppliers in Oregon lost trees in the triple-digit heat wave.

“It was looking pretty grim for a while,” Valenzuela said. “Every single day you’re on the phone checking, ‘Hey, you got anything? If you do, send it my way.’ So a lot of work to get these trees on the ground this year.”

Crystal River had to raise prices this year because the costs of trees, labor and truck delivery have all gone up, Valenzuela said.

## Oil detected in school’s water near Hawaii military housing

BY WYATT OLSON  
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Preliminary tests disclosed the presence of petroleum in tap water from an elementary school near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, the Hawaii Department of Health said Wednesday.

Samples collected Tuesday from Red Hill Elementary School, which is near military housing and uses the Navy’s water system, were tested at a lab at the University of Hawaii and found positive for a “petroleum product,” the health department said in a news release.

Samples have been sent to Eurofins Scientific in California for further analysis, the health department said.

Residents of several military housing communities on and around the joint base began complaining of foul-smelling tap water on Sunday. Some have complained of an oily sheen. Others have complained of illnesses and rashes.

The health department has advised residents in homes us-

ing the Navy water system to avoid using tap water for drinking, cooking and oral hygiene. In homes where odor or sheen has been detected, the health department advises residents to not even use the water for bathing, dishwashing or laundry.

The commander of Navy Region Hawaii, Rear Adm. Timothy Kott, said during a town hall meeting Tuesday night that Navy technicians had sampled and flushed lines from the three wells that supply water to roughly 7,000 homes.

The Navy had tested another 80 samples arising from residents’ complaints, he said during the gathering at Moanalua Terrace, one of the affected Navy housing communities. No trace of “hydrocarbons” was found in any of the samples, he said.

The Navy sent samples to a lab in Washington state where more sensitive testing could detect much more minute levels of “hydrocarbons, fuels and oils.” They expected results as early as Wednesday.

# Report: Services fail to secure explosives

Associated Press

The Marine Corps demolition specialist was worried — about America, and about the civil war he feared would follow the presidential election.

And so, block by block, he stole 13 pounds of C4 plastic explosives from the training ranges of Camp Lejeune.

“The riots, talk about seizing guns, I saw this country moving towards a scary unknown future,” the sergeant later wrote in a seven-page statement to military investigators.

“I had one thing on my mind and one thing only, I am protecting my family and my constitutional rights.”

His crime might have gone undetected, but authorities caught a lucky break in 2018 as they investigated yet another theft from Lejeune, the massive base on coastal North Carolina. In that other case, explosives ended up in the hands of some high school kids.

These are not isolated cases. Hundreds — and possibly thousands — of armor-piercing grenades, hundreds of pounds of plastic explosives, as well as land mines and rockets have been stolen from or lost by the U.S. armed forces over the past decade, according to an ongoing Associated Press investigation into the military’s failure to secure all its weapons of war.

Still more explosives were reported missing and later recovered.

Troops falsified records to cover up some thefts, and in other cases didn’t report explosives as missing, investigative files show. Sometimes, they failed to safeguard explosives in the first place.

The consequences of those failures can be deadly.

In August, an artillery shell exploded at a Mississippi recycling yard.

Chris Smith suddenly found himself cradling a co-worker who was bleeding profusely from his legs. The man died

right there.

“For no reason at all,” Smith said in an interview.

Two days later, an intact shell was found at the scrap yard.

The AP unearthed dozens of explosives investigations by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, Army Criminal Investigation Command and Defense Criminal Investigative Service. In the majority of these 63 cases, the military didn’t realize explosives were gone until someone recovered them where they shouldn’t be.

These were not rusty war trophies cast out of grandpa’s attic. They were taken from military shipments or bases.

Military officials said thieves in the ranks are a small minority of service members and that — compared to overall stockpiles — the amounts of lost or stolen explosives are minuscule.

“We want to get the number to zero, so there is no loss, but it doesn’t mean that we don’t take seriously losses that happened,” Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Uriah Orland said.

The AP’s AWOL Weapons investigation has shown that poor accountability and insider thefts have led to the loss of more than 2,000 military firearms since 2010. Some guns were used in civilian crimes, found on felons or sold to a street gang.

In response, Congress is set to require that the military give lawmakers detailed loss and theft reports every year.

One thing those reforms won’t do: Make it harder to steal explosives such as C4.

Explosives already are harder to account for than firearms.

While troops check guns in and out, explosives are distributed with the presumption they will be detonated.

Although at least two people are supposed to sign consumption reports, it’s an honor system.

Spokespeople for the four armed services described explosives security as a high priority and said they could account for nearly all explosives. The amounts that are missing add up, however, given the military’s vast supplies.

AP sought detailed loss or theft data from 2010 through 2020.

The Army provided a chart that totaled nearly 1,900 entries for missing explosives, about half of which it said were recovered.

The majority was described as C4/TNT. Other categories included artillery, mortars, land mines, grenades, rockets and armor-piercing 40 mm grenades shot from a launcher.

Despite a painstaking, manual records review, Army researchers couldn’t always determine amounts, spokesman Lt. Col. Brandon Kelley said. So, for example, it was not possible to know exactly how many pounds of C4/TNT were represented in the 1,066 entries, Kelley said.

The Air Force provided a chart that reported about 50 pounds of C4, more than 800 feet of detonating cord and several dozen 40 mm armor-piercing grenades had disappeared without being recovered.

The Navy said that only 20 hand grenades have been stolen, with all but two recovered. When the AP produced military investigative records showing an additional 24 grenades were reported missing from a ship’s armory in 2012, Navy spokesman Lt. Lewis Aldridge said the case was “beyond the 2-year local records retention requirement.”

The Marine Corps released data that was too unclear to calculate a precise tally.

AP’s rough analysis showed that thousands of armor-piercing grenades and hundreds of pounds of plastic explosives were reported lost or stolen.

“Some of it was later reco-

vered and often these reports are attributed to human error, such as miscounts or improper documentation,” Capt. Andrew Wood said.

Naval Criminal Investigative Service files obtained under the Freedom of Information Act gave an inside picture of the two insider theft cases at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune.

As demolition experts, both had exceptional access to C4.

During the summer of 2016, Sgt. Travis Glosser feared Hillary Clinton would beat Donald Trump in the presidential election, and society might disintegrate.

So he began accumulating leftovers until he had what he described as “a respectable amount” of C4 — 10 blocks, weighing nearly 13 pounds.

“I mean, you know how crazy the world is nowadays,” Glosser told an NCIS agent in June 2018, when he surrendered.

After Trump won, he buried the explosives until word began circulating that another demolition specialist and sergeant, Alex Krasovec, was being investigated for explosives theft.

Glosser eventually confessed, then led bomb handlers to the munitions.

Both Krasovec and Glosser pleaded guilty to theft of military property. Each was sentenced to less than two years of confinement in military prison, and both were knocked down in rank. Krasovec was booted from the service with a bad conduct discharge; Glosser is appealing his case.

Glosser’s wife told the AP he would not comment.

Under questioning from authorities, he insisted he never planned to wreak havoc and said he had no ties to a militia.

“At no time did I ever intend or even think about selling, giving, or even showing anyone” the explosives, he wrote.

“I also have never had any intent to harm anyone.”

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Police: Bank robber out of jail, robs once again

**FL** BELLEAIR BEACH — A serial Florida bank robber once dubbed the “I-4 bandit” was arrested for a new holdup just months after his release from prison, police said.

David Marc Ratcliff, 55, was caught after a brief chase in the Gulf Coast town of Belleair Beach following a robbery at a Wells Fargo branch in nearby Clearwater, authorities said.

Ratcliff was released from federal custody in June after serving most of a 25-year prison sentence for committing a string of bank robberies in the late 1990s, according to federal Bureau of Prisons records.

The earlier 19 robberies were linked by Interstate 4, which bisects central Florida, giving him the “bandit” nickname.

### Small avalanche delays city's holiday tradition

**AK** ANCHORAGE — A holiday tradition in Alaska's largest city for more than 60 years got off to a dim start this year.

A 300-foot wide, brightly illuminated star situated high above Anchorage in the Chugach Mountains is traditionally lit the day after Thanksgiving. When military crews arrived to light the star, however, only about half of the 350 or so bulbs worked. Airmen worked for three days in extreme conditions before finding the cause of the problem.

A small avalanche rained down rocks and snow on the star, which is situated at about the 4,000-foot level of Mount

Gordon Lyon, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson spokesperson Erin Eaton said.

Airmen from the 773rd Civil Engineer Squadron Electrical Shop had to harness up as a safety precaution to conduct repairs in falling snow and steep terrain, anywhere from 25- to 45-degree angles, she said.

### Man catches girl tossed out of burning house

**MO** ST. LOUIS — A St. Louis man was hailed as a hero after he caught a 3-year-old girl tossed by her mother from the second-floor window of a burning home.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that the fire broke out in an apartment building in north St. Louis. Authorities said Arnez Merriweather, 30, lives in the complex in a building next to the one that caught fire.

The smoke was so thick that Merriweather and others couldn't get inside to help, so a woman came to the window and tossed the child to him.

The girl and her mother were taken to a hospital for treatment of minor injuries.

### Police: Driver stole lumber, led chase

**NC** WILSON'S MILLS — A driver stole a trailer loaded with lumber from a construction site and led law enforcement officers on a high-speed pursuit on Thanksgiving Day, authorities said.

A Wilson's Mills police officer stopped a pickup truck leaving a building site with a load of lumber since there had also been a theft at the same site a week earlier, Chief A.Z. Wil-

liams said.

After stopping in the middle of the road, the driver sped off and got on U.S. Route 70 going the wrong way, Williams said. Eventually the driver got onto the right side of the road and reached speeds of up to 100 mph, he said.

In the truck, police found a loaded AR-15, cocaine and marijuana, Williams said. Two men and a woman were arrested and face multiple charges, he said.

### Volunteers rescue bird with plastic on beak

**IL** EVANSTON — A sandhill crane that couldn't eat because a piece of plastic was wedged on its beak is on the mend after getting a helping hand from a group of suburban Chicago volunteers.

Shana Conner, a volunteer with the Chicago Bird Collision Monitors, helped rescue the crane after getting a call that the troubled bird had been seen in Rogers Park.

Scott Judd, one of the volunteers, said the crane didn't give up without a struggle. But they finally netted it and Conner pulled the plastic piece from its beak. The bird was then placed in a cage and soon laid down.

The bird was taken to the Willowbrook Wildlife Hospital for treatment.

### Ancient trees illegally cut down in monument

**NM** ALBUQUERQUE — Several dozen ancient alligator juniper trees were illegally cut down at El Malpais National Monument in western New Mexico, and authorities with the National Park

Service are trying to find out who's responsible.

Known for their unique furrowed bark, alligator junipers grow very slowly. A seed can take up to 18 months to mature after pollination and the growth rate for young trees is about 0.6 inches per decade, slowing even further as they get older.

Officials said the trees that were cut down were likely hundreds of years old.

The initial illegal tree cutting was discovered in 2020. But park law enforcement monitoring the area over the past year have reported additional trees cut down, with the latest incident happening in October.

### 13-year-old arrested in carjacking after chase

**CA** ANTIOCH — A 13-year-old boy suspected in a carjacking was arrested after leading police on a chase and crashing the stolen vehicle in the parking lot of an Oakley coffee shop, police said.

Antioch police officers spotted the vehicle after it was carjacked in Oakland and when they began to follow it, it drove through Antioch and into neighboring Oakley, the East Bay Times reported.

The driver lost control of the vehicle after hitting the center median and collided with a decorative boulder in the parking lot of a Starbucks in Oakley, Antioch police Sgt. Rick Hoffman said in a statement.

A male ran from the vehicle and after a search in a nearby neighborhood, Antioch and Oakley police officers arrested the 13-year-old from Concord, he said.

— From wire reports

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# Georgia 'D' tough challenge for 'Bama

*Associated Press*

The going only gets tougher for Alabama's normally explosive offense.

While the Crimson Tide were held out of the end zone for the first 59 minutes and 36 seconds by Auburn, now they face the nation's top defense.

Heisman Trophy front-runner Bryce Young and the fourth-ranked Crimson Tide are gearing up to square off against No. 1 Georgia on Saturday in the Southeastern Conference championship game.

Making matters more challenging, Alabama tailback Brian Robinson Jr. is nursing a left leg injury and his status is uncertain for the game. If he can't play, that leaves Trey Sanders as the Tide's only healthy scholarship running back against a defense allowing a nation's best 6.9 points and 229.7 total yards per game.

The Bulldogs' formidable front seven, led by defensive lineman Jordan Davis and linebacker Nakobe Dean, is also a huge challenge for an Alabama offensive line that has struggled at times.

"What really motivates us is to make sure we come with our 'A' game," Crimson Tide left tackle Evan Neal said. "We're all competitors, man. It's what it's all about. You're the best? OK, let's line up and go out there and play. That's what it's all about."

Alabama didn't come with its best for that Auburn game, even if the Tide ultimately

turned a 10-0 fourth-quarter deficit into a 24-22 quadruple-overtime victory.

Alabama mustered just 68 yards on 30 first-half plays and allowed seven sacks in the game.

Young led the Crimson Tide to 217 fourth-quarter yards, including a 97-yard drive over the final 95 seconds.

The finishing flourish rescued the team's playoff hopes and vaulted Young back to leading Heisman candidate status, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

Leading receiver Jameson Williams also missed most of the game after a first-half targeting penalty in punt return coverage. The winning touchdown pass with 24 seconds left went to freshman Ja'Corey Brooks, just his fourth catch of the season and second of the game.

But Alabama still ranks seventh in passing and total offense, averaging 341.8 yards per game through the air and 492.2 overall.

Young has passed for 3,901 yards and 40 touchdowns against just four interceptions. He's completing 68.9% of his passes.

"It's like he's composed at all times and has great presence in the pocket, great distributor of the ball," Georgia coach Kirby Smart said. "Knows where all his outlets are. Can draw the defense to him and dish the ball, much like a point guard in basketball."

"This is just one of the best I've seen as

far as quick release and getting the ball out, distributing the ball really good."

Then there's the backfield, where Nick Saban said he has never been down to one scholarship runner.

Others moved to the position as emergency fill-ins, but that could be the plight his players face in this one if Robinson can't go.

Sanders has run for 221 yards and two touchdowns.

"We've got to get them ready to play the game," Saban said. "There's nothing else we can do about that. Injuries are a part of the game."

The Crimson Tide has leaned heavily on Robinson at times, but Young's biggest weapon has been Williams, along with fellow 1,000-yard receiver John Metchie III.

Williams has been the big-play threat, with 1,261 yards, 13 touchdowns and a 20.67-yard average per catch. Metchie has 90 catches for 1,045 yards and seven touchdowns.

He also has plenty of faith in the Alabama offense even facing by far its biggest challenge.

"I'm extremely confident," Metchie said. "I think we're concerned about ourselves more and playing our best brand of football, knowing that we're going against a really good defense. But I think for us, it's just playing our best brand of football."

## Notre Dame set to promote Freeman to head coach

*Associated Press*

Notre Dame is working on a deal to promote defensive coordinator Marcus Freeman to head coach to replace Brian Kelly, a person with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press on Wednesday night.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because nothing had been finalized, though the first piece of the Fighting Irish's plan to regroup after Kelly left for LSU earlier this week had already fallen into place.

Offensive coordinator Tommy Rees informed Notre Dame he would remain with the Fighting Irish instead of joining Kelly in Baton Rouge, La. The Irish released a video on Twitter of Rees telling the team he was staying put.

The next step is elevating the 35-year-old Freeman, who would become the second Black head football coach at Notre Dame after Tyrone Willingham (2002-04).

The person told AP that Kelly also had interest in bringing Freeman to LSU. Kelly left Notre Dame after 12 seasons and with the Fighting Irish still in contention for a spot in the College Football Playoff. He was introduced Wednesday as the Tigers' coach.

Notre Dame athletic director Jack Swarbrick, who was scheduled to attend a CFP expansion meeting in Dallas, instead spent Wednesday in South Bend, Ind., meeting with Rees and Freeman.

The 29-year-old Rees, a former Fighting Irish quarterback, returned to the team as quarterbacks coach in 2017 and was promoted to offensive coordinator in 2020.

Freeman, 35, joined Kelly's staff this year after being hired away from Cincinnati. Landing Freeman, who was also being pursued by LSU last offseason, was considered a major victory for Kelly and Notre Dame.

Freeman, a former Ohio State linebacker, is considered a rising star in college coaching and in his time with the Irish he has played a major role in assembling a recruiting class that's ranked No. 5 in the country by 247 Sports two weeks before signing day.

On the field, Freeman and Rees have helped the Irish go 11-1 in what was expected to be a rebuilding year after last season's playoff appearance. Notre Dame is sixth in the CFP rankings.

Freeman spent four seasons at Cincinnati as defensive coordinator for Luke Fickell, helping the Bearcats become a playoff contender.

The Bearcats are fourth in the CFP rankings heading into the American Athletic Conference championship game on Saturday and have a chance to become the first team from outside the Power Five conferences to reach the playoff.

# Rangers top Flyers, win fourth straight

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Chris Kreider scored his 16th goal and Igor Shesterkin stopped 33 shots to help the New York Rangers beat the Philadelphia Flyers 4-1 on Wednesday night for their fourth straight win.

Artemi Panarin had a goal and an assist, Jacob Trouba and Dryden Hunt also scored and Kaapo Kakko added two assists as the Rangers won for the eighth time in nine games. New York has won six in a row at home.

Shesterkin made 11 saves in the first period, 15 in the second and seven in the third to improve to 12-3-2 with a 2.15 goals-against average this season.

Morgan Frost scored and Carter Hart had 24 saves for Philadelphia, which lost its seventh straight (0-5-2).

**Red Wings 4, Kraken 3 (SO):** Adam Erne scored the decisive goal in a shootout and host Detroit won its fourth straight game by beating Seattle.

The Red Wings took the shootout 2-1, with Dylan Larkin also converting.

Robby Fabbri, Vladislav Namestnikov and Lucas Raymond scored in regulation for

Detroit.

Ryan Donato had two goals and Vince Dunn scored the other for the Kraken.

Thomas Greiss made 21 saves for the Red Wings in his 150th career victory. Seattle goalie Philipp Grubauer stopped 23 shots.

**Maple Leafs 8, Avalanche 3:** Auston Matthews scored three goals for his fourth career hat trick and streaking Toronto thumped visiting Colorado.

John Tavares had a goal and two assists for Toronto (17-6-1), while William Nylander scored one and set up another. Jack Campbell made 28 saves.

Jason Spezza, Travis Dermott and Pierre Engvall had the other goals for the Maple Leafs, who have won five straight games and are 15-2-0 over their last 17. Michael Bunting added three assists.

Nazem Kadri had two goals and Samuel Girard also scored for Colorado (11-7-1). Jonas Johansson stopped 33 shots as the Avalanche lost for the second time in three games after winning six in a row.

Colorado star Nathan MacKinnon, who had two assists, returned to the lineup after missing eight games with a lower-body injury.

**Oilers 5, Penguins 2:** Connor McDavid had a goal and three assists, Zach Hyman scored twice and host Edmonton defeated Pittsburgh.

Kailer Yamamoto and Evan Bouchard also scored for the Oilers (16-5-0), who won their third game in a row and improved to 9-1-0 on home ice despite getting outshot 34-22.

Jake Guentzel and Teddy Blueger each had a goal for the Penguins (10-8-5), who have lost three straight. Pittsburgh was 15-0-4 in its previous 19 games against Edmonton.

**Ducks 6, Golden Knights 5:** Troy Terry scored his 15th goal during host Anaheim's four-goal second period, and Trevor Zegras and Sonny Milano had three assists apiece in a victory over Vegas.

Rickard Rakell, Josh Manson and Hampus Lindholm also scored in the second period for the Ducks, who have won 11 of 15 after back-to-back victories over Pacific Division rivals Los Angeles and Vegas.

Jamie Drysdale scored in the third period and Isac Lundestrom added a shorthanded empty-net goal for Anaheim. Anthony Stolarz made 34 saves.

Max Pacioretty and Mattias Janmark had a goal and an as-

ist apiece for the Golden Knights, who have lost three of four. Robin Lehner stopped 28 shots and repeatedly kept his team in the game.

Zach Whitecloud and Janmark scored shorthanded for Vegas after the Ducks had taken a three-goal lead. Will Carrier and Reilly Smith also scored for the Golden Knights.

Anaheim played without captain Ryan Getzlaf, who appeared to injure his left ankle on Tuesday night early in the Ducks' 5-4 shootout victory over the Kings.

**Canucks 6, Senators 2:** J.T. Miller scored and added two assists to lead visiting Vancouver over skidding Ottawa.

Luke Schenn, Tyler Motte, Tanner Pearson, Bo Horvat and Alex Chiasson also had goals for the Canucks, who finished a 2-3-0 road trip. Quinn Hughes had four assists and Thatcher Demko made 19 saves.

Adam Gaudette scored in his Senators debut after being claimed on waivers from Chicago. Brady Tkachuk also had a goal for the Senators and Filip Gustavsson stopped 29 shots.

Ottawa went 1-10-1 in November and is mired in a six-game losing streak.

# Teams spend big, then MLB locks out players

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Before getting locked out, players loaded up Wednesday as big league teams unlocked their coffers for an unprecedented spending spree.

Major League Baseball clubs committed to a one-day record \$1.4 billion in salaries Wednesday, hours before the league locked out players following the 11:59 p.m. expiration of the sport's collective bargaining agreement.

Six nine-figure contracts were handed out, including two by the Texas Rangers — shortstop Corey Seager got \$325 million over 10 years and infielder Marcus Semien will make \$175 million over seven years.

The Detroit Tigers got infielder Javier

Báez for a \$140 million, six-year deal, ace Max Scherzer was assured \$130 million over three years from the New York Mets, and right-hander Kevin Gausman landed with the Toronto Blue Jays for \$110 million over five years. Twins center fielder Byron Buxton also finalized a \$100 million, seven-year contract to remain with Minnesota.

It was the first time teams combined to spend over \$1 billion in a single day.

"This is actually kind of fun," Scherzer said. "I'm a fan of the game, and to watch everybody sign right now, to actually see teams competing in this kind of timely fashion, it's been refreshing because we've seen freezes for the past several offseasons."

The 27 deals announced Wednesday totaled \$1,423,250,000, part of roughly \$2 billion in new contracts handed out since the end of the World Series ahead of the CBA expiration.

"This year was a situation where we received some calls early and had some interest in what we were asking for," said Semien, a free agent for the second straight year. "It became easier to narrow a decision down. What it came down to was an opportunity to build something."

The union and league are likely headed for a protracted labor dispute after the average major league salary fell on opening day in 2021 for the fourth consecutive season.

# Magic rally past Nuggets, end skid at 7

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Cole Anthony scored 24 points, Wendell Carter Jr. added 18 and the Orlando Magic rallied from a 16-point deficit to beat the Denver Nuggets 108-103 on Wednesday night and end their seven-game losing streak.

The Magic took their first lead of the night at 106-103 when rookie Franz Wagner drilled a step-back three-pointer with 1:45 to play. Wagner had 15 points, while his brother, Moritz Wagner, chipped in 12 points off the bench.

“I came off a pick-and-roll looking to pass it early, but they messed up the switch and I was just open and shot a three,” Franz Wagner said. “Obviously, it felt really good.”

**Bucks 127, Hornets 125:** Giannis Antetokounmpo scored on a driving layup with two seconds left to give host Milwaukee a victory over the Charlotte for its eighth consecutive victory.

Antetokounmpo had 40 points and 12 rebounds and Khris Middleton added 21

points for the Bucks.

LaMelo Ball had a career-high 36 points for the Hornets, followed by Kelly Oubre Jr. with 25 and Miles Bridges with 22 points.

**Celtics 88, 76ers 87:** Jayson Tatum scored 26 points with a career-high 16 rebounds, shaking off a hard fourth-quarter fall to lead host Boston over Philadelphia.

Tatum scored 11 points in the fourth. Robert Williams III blocked Georges Niang's shot at the buzzer to give the Celtics the victory.

**Hawks 114, Pacers 111:** Trae Young made two crucial free throws in the final seconds of the game to help Atlanta win at Indiana.

Pacers rookie Chris Duarte came up with a steal late in the game, but was unable to convert a contested layup. Young was fouled and made the final two of his 33 points. Young also had 10 assists and eight rebounds for the Hawks.

**Mavericks 139, Pelicans 107:** Luka

Doncic scored 18 of his team-high 28 points in the first quarter and dished out 14 assists in 27 minutes to power Dallas to a win at New Orleans.

The Mavericks set a franchise record by shooting 57-for-83 from the floor (68.7%), beating the previous high of 67.7% from March 24, 1983.

**Kings 124, Clippers 115:** De'Aaron Fox scored 24 points and Terence Davis added 23 in Sacramento's win at short-handed Los Angeles.

**Rockets 114, Thunder 110:** Jae'Sean Tate scored a career-high 32 points and added 10 rebounds, seven assists and five blocked shots, sparking a fourth-quarter rally to lead short-handed Houston to a win at Oklahoma City.

**Wizards 115, Timberwolves 107:** Montrezl Harrell scored 27 points and Bradley Beal added 19 to lift host Washington over Minnesota.

**Cavaliers 111, Heat 85:** Kevin Love scored 22 points to help Cleveland snap a 20-game losing streak in Miami.

# Crean gets his 400th win as Georgia stuns Memphis

Associated Press

ATHENS, Ga. — Jabri Abdur-Rahim's three-pointer with less than 2 minutes remaining gave Georgia the lead as it snapped a four-game losing streak by beating No. 18 Memphis 82-79 on Wednesday night.

The three-pointer by Abdur-Rahim, who scored 15 points, gave the Bulldogs a 78-77 lead over the Tigers, who led most of the second half. Kario Oquendo, who scored a game-high 24 points, followed with a steal and jam that extended the lead to three points.

With the win, Georgia coach Tom Crean is 400-285 in 22 years as a coach, which includes stints at Indiana and Marquette.

**No. 5 UCLA 73, Colorado 61:** Tyger Campbell scored 21 points and the host Bruins won their Pac-12 opener, recovering after blowing most of a 17-point, first-half lead to beat the Buffaloes.

Johnny Juzang added 15 points and Myles Johnson had

12 points and 10 rebounds for UCLA (7-1, 1-0 Pac-12), which overcame the loss of Jaime Jaquez Jr. midway through the first half.

**No. 6 Villanova 71, Penn 56:** Collin Gillespie scored 26 points, Brandon Slater had 16 and the Wildcats topped the host Quakers.

Villanova (5-2) used an early 13-0 run that gave them a needed cushion by halftime.

**No. 10 Arkansas 97, Central Arkansas 60:** Stanley Umude scored 17 points off the bench and the host Razorbacks won their seventh straight game to start the season.

Arkansas (7-0) forced the Bears into 14 turnovers in the second half.

**Utah Valley 72, No. 12 BYU 65 (OT):** Fardaws Aimaq had 24 points and 22 rebounds, Justin Harmon also scored 24 points and the host Wolverines stunned the Cougars in overtime.

Connor Harding added 10

points for Utah Valley (7-1), which beat BYU for the second time in school history.

**Oklahoma 74, No. 14 Florida 67:** Tanner Groves scored 20 points to lead the host Sooners to a win.

**No. 19 Iowa State 83, Arkansas-Pine Bluff 64:** Izaiah Brockington had 23 points and 10 rebounds for his third double-double of the season, and the host Cyclones shook off a slow start to beat the Golden Lions.

**No. 20 Southern California 93, Utah 73:** Isaiah Mobley scored 21 points and tied a career high with 13 rebounds, Bogie Ellis added 19 points, and the host Trojans opened Pac-12 play with a win over the Utes.

**No. 21 Auburn 85, UCF 68:** Walker Kessler had 17 points, a career-high 14 rebounds and six blocks, freshman Jabari Smith scored 20 points, and the host Tigers defeated the Knights.

**No. 22 Michigan State 73, Louisville 64:** Malik Hall

scored eight of his 15 points in a 1:34 stretch early in the second half, helping the host Spartans build a big lead they needed to hold off the Cardinals in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge.

**No. 23 Wisconsin 70, Georgia Tech 66:** Brad Davison scored nine straight points midway through the second half and finished with 27, leading the visiting Badgers to a win.

**North Carolina 72, No. 24 Michigan 51:** Caleb Love scored 22 points to help the host Tar Heels take control after halftime, and they handed the Wolverines a loss in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

**No. 25 Seton Hall 85, Wagner 63:** Jared Rhoden had 15 points and 11 rebounds, and Kadary Richmond added 10 points, leading the host Pirates past the Seahawks.

**Navy 75, William & Mary 56:** John Carter Jr. scored 16 points and grabbed six rebounds and the host Midshipmen topped the Tribe.