

High price to Ukraine invasion for Russia

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration has plenty of options to make good on its pledge to hit Russia financially if President Vladimir Putin invades Ukraine, from sanctions targeting Putin's associates to cutting Russia off from the financial system that sends money flowing around the world.

The United States and European allies have made no public mention of any plans to respond militarily themselves if Putin sends troops massed along the border into Ukraine, a former Soviet republic with close historical and cultural ties to Russia but now eager to ally with NATO and the West.

Instead, payback could be all about the money.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week promised financial pain — “high impact economic measures that we’ve refrained from taking in the past.” President Joe Biden on Friday said the U.S. had developed the “most comprehensive and meaningful set of initiatives to make it very, very difficult for Mr. Putin.”

The United States over the past decade already has put a range of sanctions in place

against Russian entities and individuals, many of them over Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea and its support for armed separatists in eastern Ukraine in 2014. U.S. sanctions also have sought to punish Russia for election interference, malicious cyber activities and human rights abuses.

Since 2014, the West also has helped Ukraine build up its military. So while Putin denies any intention of launching an offensive, his troops would face a Ukrainian army much more capable of putting up a fight.

The sanctions now imposed on Russians include asset freezes, bans on doing business with U.S. companies and denial of entry to the United States. But in seeking to punish Russia, the West over the years has weighed even bigger financial penalties.

That includes the so-called nuclear option: blocking Russia from the Belgium-based SWIFT system of financial payments that moves money among thousands of banks around the world.

The European Parliament this year approved a nonbinding resolution calling for that step if Russia does invade Ukraine.

When the U.S. successfully pressured

SWIFT to disconnect Iranian banks over Iran's nuclear program, the country lost almost half of its oil export revenue and a third of its foreign trade, said Maria Shagina, an expert on sanctions and energy politics affiliated with the Carnegie Moscow Center think tank.

The impact on Russia's economy would be “equally devastating,” Shagina writes. Russia depends on its oil and natural gas exports for more than one-third of its federal revenues, and depends on SWIFT to make petrodollars flow.

Russia has worked since 2014 to insulate its domestic financial systems from such a cutoff. A SWIFT cutoff would cause indirect pain for Western economies as well.

The White House and Kremlin announced Biden and Putin will speak in a video call Tuesday.

Biden will press U.S. concerns about Russian military activities on the border and “reaffirm the United States' support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine,” White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Saturday, confirming the planned call after first word came from Moscow.

Austin: Allies, innovation key to competition with China

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon intends to work better with private industry to develop high-tech systems and to strengthen relations with allies in the Indo-Pacific region in order to maintain a competitive edge over China, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Saturday.

Speaking at the Reagan National Defense Forum in California, Austin said recent military activity and aggressive moves by China in the region, including near the self-ruled island of Taiwan, are disturbing. And while he said the U.S. is still committed to the long-

standing “One China” policy, it is working to bolster Taiwan's ability to defend itself.

“We're clear-eyed about the challenge that China presents. But China is not 10 feet tall. This is America,” said Austin. “America isn't a country that fears competition. And we're going to beat this one with confidence and resolve and not panic and pessimism.”

Austin's speech comes as the U.S. struggles to counter China's growing military and economic power, and its advancements in space, cyber and nuclear capabilities, while also avoiding direct conflict. Tensions between the two nations

have spiked as China has dispatched an increasing number of fighter jets toward Taiwan, fueling worries about a possible invasion, even as the U.S. and its allies sail warships through the Taiwan Strait.

America's “One China” policy recognizes Beijing as the government of China but allows informal relations and defense ties with Taipei.

Asked whether China's moves around Taiwan appear to be training for potential future military operations, Austin said it certainly “looks a lot like them exploring their true capabilities and, sure, that it looks a lot like rehearsing.”

But, he added that the U.S. doesn't want a conflict with China, so it's important for the nations' militaries to communicate more and be transparent.

Austin said the U.S. must also strengthen its network of allies and partners in the Pacific region.

“We're not seeking an Asian version of NATO or trying to build an anti-China coalition. And we're not asking countries to choose between the United States and China,” Austin said. “Instead, we're working to advance an international system that is free and stable and open.”

Pilots getting improved bladder relief system

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

Air Force pilots, especially female ones, should soon have an easier and safer way to answer the call of nature in flight during long missions.

The service plans to provide an improved in-flight bladder relief device to pilots by the spring, it announced last week.

The Omni third-generation Skydrate will be available for men and women, but the urine-collecting apparatus is especially geared toward female fighter pilots, an Air Force statement said.

"A pilot should be focused on taking the fight to the enemy, not on whether their bladder relief device is going to work or be comfortable to use," Maj. Nikki Yogi, an F-35A Lightning II pilot who participated in company tests of the device, said in an Air Force statement.

The Air Force has long sought a safe way for female pilots to relieve themselves while flying sorties that can last up to 16 hours. Female air crews often deprive

themselves of liquid to avoid having to urinate in flight, a practice called tactical dehydration.

It can lead to reduced endurance and G-force tolerance, the Air Force said.

The latest version of the Omni hands-free device has a larger collection bag, varied hose lengths and improved flow rates, among other features. For women, it provides more pad sizes to account for anatomical differences, according to the Air Force.

The batteries last for 16 hours or 12 full 60-second bladder relief cycles, Omni Defense Technologies says on its website.

Last year, the service began accepting industry proposals for such devices in response to its Sky High Relief Challenge.

Air Combat Command worked with Air Force Materiel Command and other units to develop and test Skydrate within a year, the service said.

The device was tested by 30 female air crew members at the Omni facility, and nine pilots at three installations participated in flight testing.

Former Marine heirloom returns to Okinawa home

BY MARI HIGA
Stars and Stripes

NAHA, Okinawa — A sign, "Welcome back to Okinawa," stands next to a bronze temple bell at the entrance to the Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum.

Visitors who pause to learn more about this bell come away knowing only that it spent 75 years in Florida after the end of World War II. It was one of many cultural items feared lost forever in 1945 during the Battle of Okinawa, the last major battle in the Pacific.

Its prewar story is a mystery.

"We don't know anything about the bell," said Kyoko Sakihara, a museum curator.

She welcomed the bell's return because it, like other artifacts, are the keys to uncovering Okinawa's history. Now that the bell is back, scholars and curators can study when and where it was made and where it originally hung.

In August, the descendants of Marine Gen. Roy Stanley Geiger, who commanded American forces during the Okinawa campaign, sent the bell back to the island from Pensacola, Fla. It was a postwar heirloom in Geiger's family until his granddaughter, Melanie Lee Curtis, agreed to return it.

"I can remember my grandmother, Mrs. Geiger, ringing the bell, when I was little, when I was playing on the beach," Curtis told Stars and Stripes by phone Nov. 16. "And you heard the bell from a mile away when she rang it. That meant it's time for me to come home."

The bell stands 26 inches tall, weighs 88 pounds and is decorated with Buddhist symbols. Atop the bell is a double-headed dragon handle loop. The upper third of the bell is covered with dots, giving it the appearance of the Buddha's head.

Horizontal bands run around the lower part of the bell. The striking point, where the bell is rung with a wooden beam, is in the motif of a lotus, the sacred flower in Buddhism.

Many of Okinawa's temple bells were made in the late 15th century during the Ryukyu Kingdom period, Sakihara said. This bell could be from that period, but it lacks an inscription to tell its origin.

The bell was formally unveiled on Okinawa at a ceremony Nov. 2.

Tainted water prompts Army, Navy to pay hotel bills for 100s of families

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Navy and Army are footing hotel bills for hundreds of families affected by petroleum-tainted tap water at 10 military housing communities on Oahu near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

The authorization for temporary lodging, or TLA, began on Friday and is limited to active-duty service members and civilian employees living in housing in the communities of Red Hill, Catlin Park, Halsey Terrace, Radford Terrace, Doris Miller, Hale Na Koa, Earhart Village, Officer Field and Moanalua Terrace, the Navy said in a Facebook posting Friday.

Also included is Aliamanu Military Reservation, which is administered Army

Garrison Hawaii.

Directions for applying for temporary lodging are posted on Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam Water Resources and Updates, a new website created to address water concerns.

It is still unknown how many households are affected and how many will move to the island's hotels, most of which are in Waikiki Beach.

Testing by the Navy found that petroleum had contaminated its Red Hill well, one of three that the service uses to supply water to roughly 7,000 households. The well was isolated from the water system on Sunday, soon after residents began complaining about foul-smelling water which sometimes carried an oily sheen.

Inside race to test omicron's true threat

The Washington Post

Microbiologist Pei-Yong Shi has studied all the coronavirus variants: alpha, beta, gamma, delta, “delta-plus,” lambda and mu. So he was ready for omicron, the variant that incited global anxiety unlike any of the variants that came before.

Like most scientists, he was shocked by the sheer number of mutations. He also knew exactly what to do next.

Shi runs a high-containment laboratory at the University of Texas Medical Branch, in Galveston, and collaborates closely with Pfizer. Over Thanksgiving, his team began engineering a replica of the new variant to test against the antibodies generated by vaccines. But it doesn't happen overnight: It will take about two weeks to build the omicron replica, another few days to confirm that it's an accurate facsimile and one more week to pit the virus against blood samples from vaccinated people.

Shi and colleagues around the world are in an urgent race to gauge the danger posed by omicron, which is rapidly seeding itself everywhere. As the tally of cases mounts, what happens inside labs over the next few weeks will help scientists determine the true potential of the virus, tipping off government officials and pharmaceutical companies about whether they need to revise their global vaccination campaign.

His message: Be patient. Wait for the data.

“I think there is a lot of over-reaction, and we just have to sit tight,” Shi said. “There are no results yet, these are just the mutations. What does that mean? We have to see.”

There's no doubt that omicron is different — and worrisome. It is riddled with mutations, some known to help the coronavirus dodge the body's immune defenses. Others are newcomers, a complete mys-

tery. Omicron has more than 30 genetic changes in the coronavirus spike where vaccines train their firepower.

But the scientific community is focused, not freaked out — perhaps because it has seen this movie before: A new variant pops up, and everyone on the planet is desperate to know how bad it is. Science ensues.

First, researchers will test how well the virus is equipped to dodge current vaccines. At the same time, they will watch closely what happens in the real world. Most scientists are betting omicron will have some capacity to slip past the virus-blocking antibodies that form a primary line of defense — but no one knows yet how deft an escape artist it will turn out to be. Many also believe vaccines are likely to retain a level of protection, particularly against severe illness.

Even the worst-case omicron possibility — faster-than-delta transmission, a sharp erosion

in the protection afforded by vaccines and higher rates of severe disease — isn't a hopeless scenario. Companies will reboot omicron-specific vaccines and test them. Vaccine makers have already begun adapting their vaccines as a precaution, and even ran a dress rehearsal of this strategy earlier this year against the beta variant.

Omicron is still studded with question marks. Does it, as some preliminary data from South Africa suggest, spread more easily than delta? Can it evade the multiple lines of defense mustered by vaccines? Is it more pathogenic — capable of causing severe disease?

“Working on it! No data yet!” Penny Moore, the scientist whose laboratory in South Africa first revealed the immune-evading potential of the beta variant, wrote in an email. “We have to create the spike by introducing the many mutations, or grow the live virus.”

3rd party probing school's actions before shooting

Associated Press

PONTIAC, Mich. — A third party will investigate events at Oxford High School that occurred before a school shooting that left four students dead and six other students and a teacher wounded, the Michigan district's superintendent said.

Oxford Community Schools Superintendent Tim Throne said in a statement that he called for the outside investigation because parents have asked questions about “the school's version of events leading up to the shooting.” He also elaborated on interactions with the student leading up to the shooting.

“It's critically important to the victims, our staff and our entire community that a full and transparent accounting be made,” Throne said.

His comments came after a news conference Friday by Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald that detailed numerous warning signs from the student charged in the shooting: his search for gun ammunition on a cellphone, and a drawing that showed a

bullet with the words “blood everywhere” above a person who appears to have been shot along with “my life is useless” and “the world is dead.”

“Of course, he shouldn't have gone back to that classroom. ... I believe that is a universal position. I'm not going to chastise or attack, but yeah,” McDonald said. Asked if school officials may potentially be charged, she said: “The investigation's ongoing.”

On Tuesday at the school, roughly 30 miles north of Detroit, the student was sent back to the classroom after a school meeting with his parents. Three hours later, the shooting occurred.

“The school should have been responsible to relay that to the sheriff's office. It looks like this could have been prevented,” Robert Jordan, founder and director of St. Louis-based Protecting Our Students, said Friday. “People died because of those mistakes.”

The suspect in the Oxford High shooting, Ethan Crumbley, 15, is now charged as an adult with murder, terrorism and other

crimes.

On Friday, prosecutors charged his parents, James and Jennifer Crumbley, with four counts each of involuntary manslaughter. They pleaded not guilty on Saturday and a judge imposed a combined \$1 million bond.

The 9mm semi-automatic pistol used in the shooting was bought at a local gun shop on Black Friday by James Crumbley as an early Christmas present for his son, authorities said.

In his statement Saturday, Throne elaborated on the events of Tuesday morning, saying the student was taken to the guidance counselor's office where he claimed the drawing was part of a video game he was designing and that he planned to pursue video game design as a career. He worked on homework while waiting for his parents as counselors watched him.

“At no time did counselors believe the student might harm others based on his behavior, responses and demeanor, which appeared calm,” Throne said.

Dole, a soldier and a senator, dies at 98

BY NIKKI WENTLING
AND CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON—The Capitol Rotunda fell still and silent, save for the staccato of camera shutters and the hum of faraway conversations.

Robert Joseph Dole sat in his wheelchair in the center of a circle of reporters and onlookers, staring toward the flag-draped casket of his World War II comrade, old political rival and friend, former President George H.W. Bush. While the cameras clicked, Dole — his body worn by age and war wounds — was lifted from his wheelchair by an aide. The old soldier stood more than 10 seconds, then raised his left hand in a farewell salute.

“I never went there with the intention of saluting. I intended to stand up and bow and sit down,” Dole told *Stars and Stripes* in a March 2019 interview. “But when I got up, it must’ve been my subconscious. My left arm just started going up.”

The military and its traditions, including saluting a fallen comrade, were important to Dole, who died Sunday at 98.

“It is with heavy hearts we announce that Senator Robert Joseph Dole died early this morning in his sleep,” according to a state-

ment from the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. “At his death, at age 98, he had served the United States of America faithfully for 79 years.”

Dole’s life, which included service as Senate majority leader, unsuccessful presidential candidate and champion of veterans’ rights, was nearly cut short by severe wounds suffered in April 1945 during fighting in the final weeks of World War II. His crippled right arm was a lifelong reminder of the price he and his generation paid for the defense of the United States. Throughout his public career, he championed veterans’ issues and was a driving force behind construction of the World War II Memorial, where he spent his final years greeting fellow veterans.

“The World War II generation knew how to put country first,” said Sheila Bair, a Dole staffer from 1981-88 and former chairwoman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. “Dole understood that. One of the reasons he was such an effective leader is because he had put his life on the line. ... He had a deep respect for the military.”

Like so many of his generation, Dole struggled through a childhood scarred by the Great Depression, only to face service in

history’s most destructive war.

He dropped out of the University of Kansas and enlisted in the Army in 1942, serving as a platoon leader with the 10th Mountain Division. In April 1945, he was severely wounded in the fighting southwest of Bologna, Italy.

“There are differing accounts, but there was some sort of explosion — a machine gun, or a mortar that was thrown — and his body was riddled with shrapnel,” said Audrey Coleman, associate director and director of museums and archives at the Dole Institute of Politics in Lawrence, Kan. “He was left for dead, essentially.”

A medic pumped Dole with morphine to ease the pain. Using Dole’s blood, the medic drew the letter “M” on Dole’s forehead as a warning not to give him more of the narcotic, or else it might kill him, Coleman said.

Dole would spend the next four years in rehabilitation, but he would never fully recover. The *New York Times* reported Dole was left without feeling down his right arm, all the way to his hand. His left arm was functional, but some of the fingers were numb.

“It took years to get up and be able to walk around by myself,” Dole said in March 2019. “It was like with a lot of GIs — it was a tough time. But I’m still here at 95

feeling pretty good.”

After 36 years in Congress, Dole used his political acumen to champion a cause for veterans — a World War II memorial on the National Mall.

In 1997, one year after his final presidential bid, he took over as the national chairman of the fundraising campaign for the National World War II Memorial. With help, he raised more than \$190 million from more than 600,000 individual contributors. The memorial was completed in 2004, and Dole spoke at its dedication.

“We have raised this memorial to commemorate the service and sacrifice of an entire generation,” Dole said at the time. “What we dedicate today is not a memorial to war, rather it’s a tribute to the physical and moral courage that makes heroes out of farm and city boys and that inspires Americans in every generation to lay down their lives for people they will never meet, for ideals that make life itself worth living.”

“I never underestimated the guy,” said Bill Lacy, a former Dole campaign worker who today directs the Dole Institute of Politics. “Once I got to know him, you get to understand what strong willpower, what commitment and focus is. He’s just an extraordinary individual.”

Last ‘Band of Brothers’ officer, Shames, dies at 99

Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. — Edward Shames, a World War II veteran who was the last surviving officer of “Easy Company,” which inspired the HBO miniseries and book “Band of Brothers,” has died. He was 99.

An obituary posted by the Hollomon-Brown Funeral Home & Crematory said Shames, of Norfolk, Va., died peacefully at his home on Friday.

Shames was involved in some of the most important battles of World War II. During the

war, he was a member of the renowned Easy Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.

“He made his first combat jump into Normandy on D-Day as part of Operation Overlord. He volunteered for Operation Pegasus and then fought with Easy Company in Operation Market Garden and the Battle of the Bulge in Bastogne,” according to the obituary.

Shames was the first member of the 101st to enter Dachau concentration camp, just days

after its liberation.

“When Germany surrendered, Ed and his men of Easy Company entered Hitler’s Eagle’s Nest where Ed managed to acquire a few bottles of cognac, a label indicating they were ‘for the Fuhrer’s use only.’ Later, he would use the cognac to toast his oldest son’s Bar Mitzvah,” the obituary said.

After the war, Shames worked for the National Security Agency as an expert on Middle East affairs. He also served in the U.S. Army Reserve Division and later retired as a colo-

nel.

Easy Company was the subject of Stephen Ambrose’s 1992 book, “Band of Brothers,” upon which the HBO miniseries was based. The 2001 miniseries, created by Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg, followed Easy Company from its training in Georgia in 1942 all the way to the war’s end in 1945. Shames was portrayed by British actor Joseph May.

Shames is survived by his sons Douglas and Steven, four grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man who put razor blades in pizza dough sentenced

ME PORTLAND — A man accused of putting razor blades and screws in pizza dough at supermarkets in Maine and New Hampshire was sentenced to four years and nine months in federal prison.

The sentencing of Nicholas Mitchell, 39, of Dover, N.H., followed an agreement with prosecutors in which he pleaded guilty in June to one of two counts of tampering with a consumer product. He also must pay nearly \$230,000 in restitution to Hannaford Supermarkets.

Mitchell tearfully apologized for his actions. He said he did it to get back at the pizza dough company that fired him, not to hurt anybody.

Surveillance video from last year showed him handling pizza dough and loitering around a refrigerated case before exiting the store without buying anything.

Woman arrested after baby left in Walmart

AL NORTHPORT — A woman who was seen pushing a shopping cart with a baby inside was arrested on drug charges after the child was found abandoned inside a Walmart store in Alabama, police said.

Melissa A. Smith, 37, of Tuscaloosa, was arrested on marijuana possession and other charges after store workers called authorities to report a 4-month-old girl was found alone in a cart in the store, Assistant Chief Keith Carpenter of the Northport Police Department said.

Smith isn't the child's mother, he said, and it wasn't clear what she was doing with the baby.

"We don't believe it was an abduction but we don't know the whole story yet," he said. "We believe we know who the mother is, but we haven't made contact yet."

Man buys plot, puts more signs criticizing town

RI PORTSMOUTH — A Rhode Island man involved in a legal tussle with the town of Portsmouth earlier this year over signs on his property critical of town officials is back at it.

Michael DiPaola recently bought a plot of land on a busy road on which he placed more signs, including one that includes a picture of actors Jim Carrey and Jeff Daniels as Lloyd and Harry from the movie "Dumb and Dumber," and complaining of "corruption, selective enforcement, conflict of interest and harassment," The Newport Daily News reported.

DiPaola, a real estate developer, said the town selectively enforces zoning codes.

"They will crucify me, but they will let other people get away with anything," DiPaola said. "It's selective enforcement, it's favoritism."

Man arrested for stolen SUV with military ordnance

AZ PHOENIX — Arizona authorities have arrested a man who was allegedly driving a stolen vehicle that had an inactive military ordnance inside.

State Department of Public Safety officials said Timothy Carpenter, 36, is facing one count of theft of transportation

among other charges including outstanding warrants.

Detectives spotted the stolen SUV at a north Phoenix motel and tried to arrest Carpenter, but he drove off, authorities said.

He later jumped out of the vehicle and tried to flee but was taken into custody, officials said.

When DPS troopers searched the SUV, a suspicious device was found.

Man admits pocketing nonprofit groups' funds

WV CHARLESTON — A West Virginia man has pleaded guilty to defrauding a nonprofit group.

Walter Greenhowe, 72, of Dunbar, entered the plea in federal court to three counts of wire fraud.

Greenhowe was president of the community improvement nonprofit for the Dunbar, Pinewood and Institute areas of Kanawha County.

According to court records, Greenhowe admitted using the nonprofit's debit card from 2014 to 2018 to pocket more than \$130,000 from ATMs at various roadside gaming parlors. Greenhowe admitted the transactions were unauthorized by the nonprofit.

Teen killed as brother sells homemade gun

GA ATLANTA — A 14-year-old Georgia girl was killed when her younger brother was trying to sell a homemade gun, and he fired a shot at people who took the weapon without paying, a sheriff said.

The shot struck Kyra Scott, and she died as her mother was

trying to take her to a hospital, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported.

Douglas County Sheriff Tim Pounds said Kyra's 13-year-old brother and the man who was allegedly trying to buy a homemade gun, Yusef McArthur El, 19, were both arrested and charged with murder. McArthur El is also charged with robbery-sudden snatch.

Pounds said the boy had ordered all the parts he needed to make guns, including semiautomatic weapons, and the boy had been selling them.

"According to the investigation, he was shooting at the folks that took his weapon," Pounds said. "But instead, he shot his sister. And it's so sad his sister's death happened."

Bernese mountain dog wins excellence award

MA ATTLEBORO — A dog owned by a Massachusetts family has been named one of five recipients of this year's AKC Humane Fund Awards for Canine Excellence.

The winners of the awards for hard-working dogs that have significantly improved the lives of their owners and communities were chosen from a pool of nearly 1,000 nominations, the organization said in a statement.

Teddy, an 8-year-old Bernese mountain dog owned by George, Pamela and Caleigh Brown, of Attleboro, won in the therapy dog category. Teddy has provided support for people in a wide range of situations, including going into a prison following the death of a corrections officer and comforting EMS personnel after the death of a coworker.

— From wire reports



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Alabama, Michigan, Georgia, Cincinnati make CFP

Associated Press

Cincinnati will play Alabama and Michigan will face Georgia on New Year's Eve after being selected to the College Football Playoff as a surprise-free field of four was set Sunday.

Fourth-seeded Cincinnati becomes the first team to break through college football's glass ceiling and reach the CFP from a non-Power Five conference. The Bearcats (13-0) won the American Athletic Conference and head into the postseason as the only unbeaten team in the country.

Coach Luke Fickell and Cincinnati made history with little debate. Playoff selection committee chairman Gary Barta said on ESPN there was strong consensus for the team at No. 4 ahead of No. 5 Notre Dame, which had only one loss — to the Bearcats in South Bend, Ind., in early October. Ohio State finished sixth.

The rest of the committee's final rankings and the matchups for the other four New Year's Six bowls were to be announced later

Sunday.

Cincinnati's reward will be a matchup with the defending national champions in the Cotton Bowl. The Crimson Tide is in the playoff for the seventh time in the postseason format's eight-year history after handing Georgia its first loss of the season in the Southeastern Conference title game Saturday.

Alabama (12-1) seemed to be a loss away from being eliminated from playoff contention heading into its game with Georgia. Instead, Bryce Young and the Tide lit up the Bulldogs' vaunted defense to earn the top seed.

"Not only did Alabama beat Georgia, but the way they beat them — they controlled the game, pretty much from start to finish," Barta said on ESPN.

Barta said the committee gave no consideration to avoiding a rematch between the Tide and Bulldogs in the first round when seeding the teams.

Nick Saban's Alabama dynasty has won

three playoff championships to go along with three BCS titles since 2009.

Georgia (12-1) managed to stay in the field as the third seed, becoming the second team to lose its conference title game and make the playoff. Notre Dame did the same thing last season, when it lost a rematch with Clemson in its one season playing in the ACC, a move prompted by pandemic-altered schedules.

The Bulldogs will be making their second CFP appearance when they meet No. 2 Michigan (12-1) in the Orange Bowl. Coach Jim Harbaugh and the Wolverines are in the playoff for the first time after winning the Big Ten for the first time since 2004. Michigan, which went 2-4 last season, is also the first team to make the playoff after being unranked in the AP preseason Top 25.

This is the third time two teams from the same conference are in the CFP and second time it has happened with the SEC.

This year's semifinal winners will play for the national championship on Jan. 10 in Indianapolis.

Bears hold on for Big 12 title, end Cowboys' CFP chances

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Dezmon Jackson came up inches short on a desperate, fourth-down dive in the final seconds for Oklahoma State, knocking the fifth-ranked Cowboys out of contention for a spot in the four-team playoff.

"Just heartbreak," Oklahoma State guard Josh Sills said.

Baylor safety Jairon McVea knocked Jackson out of bounds without letting him reach the pylon with 24 seconds remaining in the Big 12 championship game Saturday, preserving a 21-16 victory for the ninth-ranked Bears a year after they won only two games in coach Dave Aranda's debut season.

"This moment is something they can never take away," Baylor linebacker Terrel Bernard said.

After the Bears (11-2, CFP No. 7) won their third Big 12 title, they didn't get the chaos needed for them to have a chance to make the final four for the first time in the College Football Playoff rankings Sunday.

Alabama (CFP No. 1) and Georgia (CFP No. 3) both made the playoff after the Crimson Tide handed the Bulldogs their first loss

in the SEC title game. Michigan (CFP No. 2) overwhelmed Iowa in the Big Ten title game, and future Big 12 team Cincinnati (CFP No. 4) remained the only undefeated team by winning the American Athletic Conference.

Aranda recalled Oklahoma State coach Mike Gundy telling him "that winning is hard" before an earlier meeting between the teams. The Big 12 title game was a sure example of that.

Blake Shapen, starting again for injured quarterback Gerry Bohanon (right hamstring) threw three TDs while completing his first 17 passes as Baylor took a 21-3 lead in the first half.

But the Cowboys (11-2) rallied back, then went 89 yards on 17 plays on that final drive before coming up just shy.

After having first-and-goal from 2 following a pass interference penalty, Jackson gained a yard and was held for no gain before an incomplete pass by Spencer Sanders.

On fourth down from the 1, Jackson tried to sweep wide left, but with McVea in pursuit, he barely missed while trying to reach the pylon in the front corner of the end zone.

No. 17 Pitt routs No. 18 Wake in ACC title game

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Erick Hallett II saw the receiver running to his side and knew the ball was coming his way.

He cut in front to snag a jumping interception and began sprinting for the end zone with the ball clutched in his right hand — then extended the ball as he crossed the goal line for the touchdown that transformed No. 17 Pittsburgh's lead into a rout.

It was the highlight on a night full of them for a defense that powered the Panthers to the first Atlantic Coast Conference championship in program history.

Hallett's 19-yard score was one of Pittsburgh's four interceptions to help the Panthers beat No. 18 Wake Forest 45-21 in Saturday night's ACC title game. It came on the heels of A.J. Woods having a 75-yard interception return that fell only 3 yards short of taking it all the way for the score early in the fourth quarter. And it all came as the Panthers locked up the high-scoring Demon Deacons after the opening quarter and ultimately carried Pitt to its first league title since leaving the Big East in 2013.

"In the second quarter we used that take-it mentality," Woods said.

No. 16 Alabama holds off No. 3 Gonzaga

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Jaden Shackelford scored 20 of his 28 points in the first half, Jahvon Quinerly and JD Davison both hit key three-pointers later, and No. 16 Alabama held off Gonzaga's big second-half rally for a 91-82 win over the third-ranked Bulldogs.

The Crimson Tide (7-1) made 10 of their 13 three-pointers in the first half, led by Shackelford's sharp shooting from deep. Alabama led by 16 at halftime and withstood every charge the Bulldogs made in the second half to hand Gonzaga its second loss in three games.

Drew Timme led Gonzaga (7-2) with 23 points.

No. 6 Villanova 81, Saint Joseph's 51: Collin Gillespie scored 23 points to lead the host Wildcats.

Justin Moore added 16 points and Eric Dixon had 12 for Villanova (6-2), which won its 10th straight in a series dating to 1921 between the Big Five rivals that are separated by just seven miles.

Jordan Hall scored 22 points for the Hawks (4-4).

No. 4 Baylor 99, Arkansas-Pine Bluff 54: LJ Cryer led five players in double figures with his 20 points, and the host Bears beat the Golden Lions.

Baylor (8-0) led by 10 after a Kendall Brown layup with 14:14 left in the first half. Arkansas-Pine Bluff (1-8) never got the margin back to single digits.

Jonathan Tchamwa Tchatchoua added 14 points and 13 rebounds for the Bears, who dominated on the boards 49-24.

No. 10 Arkansas 93, Little Rock 78: Au'Diese Toney and JD Notae had 18 points each to lift the host Razorbacks past the Trojans.

Arkansas (8-0) built its lead to 15 points at the break, but staved off an attempted rally

by Little Rock (4-5), which went on an 18-8 run to start the second half.

The Razorbacks had three other players score in double figures: Devo Davis with 16 and Chris Lykes with 14.

No. 13 Tennessee 69, Colorado 54: Freshman Kennedy Chandler scored 16 of his season-high 28 points in the first half and the visiting Vols pulled away.

Tennessee (6-1) overcame a slow start to win their third straight since an 18-point loss to No. 6 Villanova. Santiago Vescovi had 13 points.

Evan Battey had 12 points and Tristan Da Silva scored 11 for Colorado (6-3).

No. 17 UConn 88, Grambling State 59: R.J. Cole scored 18 points to help the host Huskies, who were playing without two injured starters, rout the Tigers.

Freshman Jordan Hawkins added 15 points for Connecticut (8-1), which is off to the program's best start since going 9-0 to open the 2013-14 season.

Mississippi 67, No. 18 Memphis 63: Jarkel Joyner scored 20 points and the Rebels converted 10 of 11 free throws in the final four minutes to defeat the visiting Tigers.

Mississippi (6-2) built a 62-51 lead on a jumper by Luis Rodriguez with 2:10 remaining. It relied on the free throw shooting to send Memphis (5-3) to its third straight loss.

Nysler Brooks made three free throws in the final 32 seconds to preserve the win.

No. 19 Iowa State 64, Creighton 58: Caleb Grill scored a season-high 16 points, Izaiah Brockington had all 12 of his points in the second half and the host Cyclones stayed unbeaten with a win over the Bluejays.

Iowa State is 8-0 under first-year coach T.J. Otzelberger and an overhauled roster

after going 2-22 last season.

No. 20 USC 63, Washington State 61: Chevez Goodwin sank a layup and the free throw with 16 seconds left to lift the undefeated Trojans past the host Cougars.

Goodwin led No. 20 USC (8-0, 2-0 Pac-12) with 14 points and added five rebounds. Drew Peterson scored 13 points for the Trojans, while Max Agbonkpolo scored nine points and had a key block with 6 seconds left.

No. 21 Auburn 86, Yale 64: K.D. Johnson scored 19 points, Jabari Smith added 17 points and seven rebounds and the host Tigers blew past the Bulldogs.

No. 22 Michigan State 81, Toledo 68: Max Christie had 14 points, Gabe Brown scored 12 and the host Spartans built a big lead early to beat the Rockets.

No. 23 Wisconsin 89, Marquette 76: Johnny Davis scored 25 points to lead four Badgers in double figures as they downed the visiting Golden Eagles.

No. 24 Michigan 72, San Diego State 58: Hunter Dickinson had 23 points and 14 rebounds, freshman Caleb Houston scored a season-high 17 points and the host Wolverines beat the Aztecs.

No. 25 Seton Hall 113, Nyack 67: The Host Pirates had a trio come off the bench and combine for 66 points in a win over the Div. II Warriors.

Air Force 76, Army 58: A.J. Walker scored 23 points and the host Falcons won their seventh consecutive game.

Air Force (7-1) never trailed as it built a 9-0 lead and extended the margin to 32-8 with 7:38 before halftime. Walker scored seven straight during a 23-0 run and the Falcons led 45-13 at halftime.

Jalen Rucker scored 17 points for the Black Knights (4-4) and Aaron Duhart had 11.

Source: Oklahoma targeting Clemson's Venables as coach

Associated Press

Oklahoma is targeting Clemson defensive coordinator Brent Venables to be its new head coach, a person with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press on Sunday.

Oklahoma was "going hard after" Venables and an agreement could be reached later Sunday, said the person, who

spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal was not done.

Venables would replace Lincoln Riley, who left last week to take over at USC.

Venables was on Oklahoma's staff under Bob Stoops as co-defensive coordinator from 1999 to 2003 and defensive coordinator from 2004 to 2011. He was co-defensive coordinator when

the Sooners won the 2000 national title. He left Oklahoma for Clemson in 2012 and won the Broyles Award in 2016 as the nation's top assistant coach.

Venables' Clemson defense led the nation in scoring defense in 2018, and his 2020 unit tied for the nation's lead in sacks. This season, Clemson ranks second nationally in scoring defense, ninth in total defense,

eighth in rushing defense and sixth in pass efficiency defense.

Oklahoma was caught off guard when Riley took the job at USC. The Sooners quickly made Stoops interim coach to calm things down during recruiting. Stoops reassured the fan base that things would be fine at a program that has won seven national titles and had seven Heisman Trophy winners.

Bulls win matchup of East's top teams

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Zach LaVine scored 31 points, DeMar DeRozan had 29 and the Chicago Bulls beat the Brooklyn Nets 111-107 on Saturday night.

Nikola Vucevic and Ayo Dosunmu each added 11 points for the Bulls.

Kevin Durant led Brooklyn with 28 points and LaMarcus Aldridge had 20. James Harden added 14 points and 14 assists, but shot 5-for-21 from the field.

Spurs 112, Warriors 107: Derrick White scored 25 points, Dejounte Murray had 22 points and 12 rebounds, and San Antonio held off a furious rally to beat host Golden State.

White hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 1:43 left in the game to give the Spurs a 107-106 lead.

Bucks 124, Heat 102: Pat Connaughton made seven three-pointers and scored 23 points, and Milwaukee avenged an embarrassing loss from the second game of the season, beating visiting Miami despite playing

without Giannis Antetokounmpo.

The Bucks led by as many as 31 points in the second half against a depleted Heat team missing Jimmy Butler and Bam Adebayo due to injuries. Antetokounmpo sat out with a right calf injury.

Grizzlies 97, Mavericks 90: Desmond Bane scored a career-high 29 points, and Memphis held on to beat host Dallas in its first game since setting an NBA record with a 73-point victory.

Tyus Jones had 16 points and seven assists for the Grizzlies, who haven't trailed at all while going 4-0 since star guard and leading scorer Ja Morant was sidelined with a left knee sprain.

The Mavericks dropped to 0-4 this season without young sensation Luka Doncic. They were also missing his European sidekick, Kristaps Porzingis, and lost their fourth consecutive game without their top two scorers going back to last season.

Nuggets 113, Knicks 99: Nikola Jokic

scored 32 points and had 11 rebounds in just 27 minutes, leading visiting Denver over New York.

The Nuggets never trailed in winning for only the third time in 10 games.

The Knicks have lost three straight and fell to 5-8 at Madison Square Garden this season.

Celtics 145, Trail Blazers 117: Jayson Tatum and Dennis Schröder scored 31 points apiece and Boston rode a sizzling start to a victory over host Portland.

CJ McCollum scored 24 points for the Trail Blazers.

Kings 104, Clippers 99: Terrence Davis scored 23 of his 28 points in the second half and Sacramento beat visiting Los Angeles for the second time in four nights.

Tyrese Haliburton added 18 points, six rebounds and five assists for the Kings, who beat the Clippers 124-115 on Wednesday in Los Angeles.

De'Aaron Fox had 17 points, seven rebounds and five assists.

Ovechkin scores 750th goal, Caps defeat Jackets

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Alex Ovechkin scored his 20th goal of the season and the 750th of his NHL career to help the Washington Capitals beat the Columbus Blue Jackets 3-1 Saturday night and snap a two-game skid.

Ovechkin became the second-fastest player to reach the 750-goal mark, doing so in his 1,222nd regular-season game. Wayne Gretzky, whose record of 894 Ovechkin is chasing, got to 750 in 1,001 games.

Ovechkin joined Marcel Dionne, Jaromir Jagr and Mats Sundin as the only players to score 20 or more goals in each of his first 17 seasons in the NHL.

After ending a two-game goal drought, Ovechkin now trails Jagr by 16 goals for third on the career list.

Rookie Aliaksei Protas scored his second career goal by following his own rebound in the first. Garnet Hathaway sealed it with an empty-netter with 1:27 remaining in regulation.

Predators 4, Canadiens 3: Filip Forsberg scored with 11.1

seconds remaining in overtime, giving host Nashville a victory over Montreal.

Eeli Tolvanen, Tanner Jeannot and Luke Kunin also scored, and Juuse Saros made 20 saves for the Predators, who have won two of its last three games.

Lightning 3, Bruins 2 (OT): Steven Stamkos scored at 1:31 of overtime, and Tampa Bay bounced back after blowing a two-goal lead with an overtime win at Boston.

Taylor Raddysh had his first career goal, a short-handed score in the first period, and Ondrej Palat also scored for the defending Stanley Cup champions. Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 37 shots, and Stamkos recorded a point for the sixth straight game. Charlie Coyle and Curtis Lazar scored after the Bruins fell behind 2-0 early in the second period. Jeremy Swayman made 22 saves for Boston, which outshot the Lightning 39-25.

Red Wings 4, Islanders 3 (OT): Moritz Seider scored 3:33 into overtime and host Detroit handed New York its 10th

straight loss.

Filip Hronek, Sam Gagner and Givani Smith also scored for the Red Wings, who won their season-high fifth straight. Alex Nedeljkovic had 20 saves.

Rangers 3, Blackhawks 2: Artemi Panarin and Ryan Strome each had a goal and two assists, and host New York beat Chicago for its sixth straight win.

Adam Fox added a goal and an assist and Alexandar Georgiev made 25 saves for the Rangers, who have won 10 of their last 11.

Penguins 4, Canucks 1: Jake Guentzel scored three goals in the second period and added an assist as Pittsburgh won at Vancouver.

Guentzel scored two power-play goals after the Canucks had three players sent to the penalty box in quick succession.

Wild 4, Maple Leafs 3 (SO): Kirill Kaprizov scored in the third round of a shootout and host Minnesota beat Toronto for its sixth straight win.

Jordan Greenway, Mats Zuccarello and Marcus Foligno had

goals in regulation for Central Division-leading Minnesota, which has outscored its opponents 28-12 during the win streak.

Senators 6, Avalanche 5 (OT): Brady Tkachuk scored his second goal 51 seconds into overtime, giving host Ottawa a win over Colorado.

Tkachuk added an assist. Tim Stutzle also added two goals and an assist. Josh Norris and Austin Watson also scored for the Senators, who won consecutive games for the first time this season.

Hurricanes 6, Sabres 2: Teuvo Teravainen scored two goals and host Carolina rode an early burst of offense to a win over Buffalo.

Martin Necas, Ian Cole, Vincent Trocheck and Nino Niederreiter also scored for the Hurricanes.

Panthers 4, Blues 3 (SO): Sam Reinhart and Anton Lundell scored in the shootout, and host Florida rallied from three one-goal deficits to beat St. Louis.