

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Deadly tornadoes, storms hit US states

*Associated Press*

MAYFIELD, Ky. — Kentucky's governor said at least 70 may have died in the state and the toll was climbing after tornadoes and severe weather ripped through at least five states, leaving widespread devastation.

Gov. Andy Beshear said the twister touched down for more than 200 miles in Kentucky and the death toll could exceed 100 across 10 or more counties.

"This has been the most devastating tornado event in our state's history," Beshear said at a news conference Saturday.

The storms hit a candle factory in Kentucky, an Amazon facility in Illinois and a nursing home in Arkansas. Beshear said about 110 people were in the Mayfield factory when the tornado hit.

By late morning, officials had confirmed 18 deaths. But Beshear said the toll was certain to rise, with at least 10 people feared dead in his state's Muhlenberg County and an undetermined number in and around the city of Bowling Green.

Kentucky State Police Trooper Sarah Burgess said rescue crews were using heavy equipment to move rubble at the candle factory in western Kentucky. Coroners were called to the scene and bodies were recovered, but she didn't know how many. She said it could take a day and potentially longer to remove all of the rubble.

Rescue efforts were complicated because Mayfield's main fire station and emergency

services hub were also hit by the tornado, said Jeremy Creason, the city's fire chief and EMS director.

"We have been working tirelessly through the night," he said. "We had to at times crawl over casualties to get to live victims to get them out."

Multiple buildings in downtown Mayfield were destroyed. The tornado sheered the roofs off some, downed trees and left debris scattered across a wide area.

President Joe Biden tweeted Saturday that he was briefed on the situation and pledged the affected states would "have what they need as the search for survivors and damage assessments continue."

Kyana Parsons-Perez, an employee at the factory, was trapped under 5 feet of debris for at least two hours until rescuers managed to free her.

In an interview with NBC's "Today," she said it was the "absolutely the most terrifying" event she had ever experienced. "I did not think I was going to make it at all."

Just before the tornado struck, the building's lights flickered. She felt a gust of wind, her ears started "popping" and then, "Boom. Everything came down on us." People started screaming, and she heard Hispanic workers praying in Spanish.

Among those who helped rescue the trapped workers were inmates from the nearby Graves County Jail, she said.

"They could have used that moment to try to run away or anything, but they did not.

They were there, helping us," she said. Elsewhere in Graves County, the landscape was a scene of devastation with uprooted trees, downed utility poles, a store destroyed and homes severely damaged.

At least one person died at an Amazon facility in Edwardsville, Ill., Police Chief Mike Fillback told reporters Saturday morning. The roof of the building was ripped off and a wall about the length of a football field collapsed.

Two people at the facility were taken to hospitals in St. Louis, about 25 miles away, Fillback said. The chief said he did not know their medical conditions. About 30 people who were in the building were taken to the police station for evaluation.

Early Saturday, rescue crews were still sorting through the rubble. Fillback said the process could take several more hours. Cranes and backhoes were brought in to help move debris.

"This is a devastating tragedy for our Amazon family and our focus is on supporting our employees and partners," Amazon spokesperson Richard Rocha said in a written statement.

Workers at a National Weather Service office had to take shelter as a tornado passed near their office in Weldon Spring, Mo., about 30 miles west of St. Louis. One person died and two others were injured in building collapses near the towns of Defiance and New Melle, both just a few miles from the weather service office.

## Pentagon is considering booster mandate for troops

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon said Friday that there are "active discussions" within the department about making the COVID-19 vaccine booster shots mandatory for service members, even as thousands refuse or seek exemptions from the initial shot requirement.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said there have been no final decisions on the matter, but added that Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin "absolutely encourages people, if they can and if they qualify, to get the booster. But right now there is no requirement for it."

The Defense Department in August announced that it would begin requiring all members of the military — including National Guard and Reserves — to get the COVID-19 vaccine. The military services sent out specific guidelines on the mandate, set their own deadlines and laid out the repercussions for those who refused and were not granted a medical, religious or administrative exemption.

Since then, deadlines for the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps have all passed, and thousands still have not gotten the vaccine or are seeking an exemption, which involves a lengthy process including meet-

ings with commanders, chaplains and medical personnel.

Speaking to reporters at a Pentagon press conference, Kirby said about 96.4% of all active duty personnel have gotten at least one shot. The percentage plunges when members of the National Guard and Reserves are included. Only about 74% of the total military force, including the active duty, Guard and Reserve, are fully vaccinated, but the Army Guard has until next June to get the shots.

Kirby said the numbers are trending in the right direction, but "we know there's more work to do."

# Churchill XO fired after refusing vaccine

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Navy commander has been fired from his job as the executive officer of a warship because he refused to get a COVID-19 vaccine as required and refused to be tested for the virus, Navy officials said Friday.

Cmdr. Lucian Kins was relieved of his duties Friday as second in command of the USS Winston Churchill, a destroyer,

by Navy Capt. Ken Anderson, commander of Naval Surface Squadron 14. Officials said Kins was the first naval officer to be fired as a result of a vaccine refusal.

Navy spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Jason Fischer declined to give the precise reason why Kins was relieved of command, citing privacy concerns. Fischer, who is spokesman for the Naval Surface Force Atlantic, said the

reason for the firing was that Anderson lost confidence in Kins' ability to perform his duties after he failed to obey a lawful order.

Other officials, however, said it was because Kins refused the order to get the vaccine, and refused testing to ensure he did not have the virus.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel issues. One official

said Kins has requested a religious exemption, which was denied. Kins is appealing that denial.

Fischer said Kins has been reassigned to the staff of Naval Surface Squadron 14.

Lt. Cmdr. Han Yi, the ship's plans and tactics officer, is temporarily serving as the Churchill's executive officer until a permanent replacement is identified.

# New York reinstates indoor mask mandate

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Facing a cold-weather surge in COVID-19 infections, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul announced Friday that masks will be required in all indoor public places unless the businesses or venues implement a vaccine requirement.

Hochul said the decision to reinstate a mask mandate was based on a rising number of cases and hospitalizations, which has been especially pro-

nounced in parts of upstate New York.

New York enacted a mask mandate at the beginning of the pandemic in April 2020 that ended in June 2021 for vaccinated individuals. The new mask mandate applies to both patrons and staff and will be in effect from Monday to Jan. 15, after which the state will reevaluate.

"We're entering a time of uncertainty and we could either

plateau here or our cases could get out of control," Hochul warned at a public appearance in New York City.

New York joins several states with similar indoor mask mandates, including Washington, Oregon, Illinois, New Mexico, Nevada and Hawaii.

Mask mandates have become a hot-button issue. For weeks, Hochul has said local governments will decide whether to reimpose COVID-19 protocols.

She's expressed caution about whether resistant communities would follow stricter rules.

Hochul's announcement Friday was cheered by some fellow Democrats and a union representing retail and grocery workers, even as Republicans called it an overreach and an unnecessary burden on businesses.

Violators could face civil and criminal penalties, including a maximum fine of \$1,000.

# Anti-ISIS task force shifts its focus toward Africa

By CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. and its allies are stepping up efforts to counter the Islamic State in Africa as U.S. forces wind down their combat role against ISIS in Iraq.

Earlier this month in Brussels, the U.S. and Italy announced the formation of the Africa Focus Group within the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, the State Department said. Morocco and Niger will co-chair with the U.S. and Italy, said an agency statement issued Dec. 3.

U.S. and allied officials have warned of a proliferating terrorist threat in Africa, prompting Secretary of State Antony Blinken to say this summer that Washington supports greater coalition efforts there.

More than 2,100 people were killed in ISIS-initiated attacks in Africa between October 2020 and October 2021, Blinken said in a video Dec. 2 following the first meeting of the Africa Focus Group.

Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said in June that he had urged the creation of an Africa-focused working group after witnessing an "alarming phenomenon" of proliferating terrorist cells in east Africa and the Sahel region, the swath below the Sahara spanning the north and west of the continent.

The anti-ISIS coalition was created a little more than seven years ago, as the terrorist group swept across large swaths of Iraq and Syria.

It ousted the terrorist group from the last of its territorial holdings in early 2019, but

the United States and its partners say the militants remain a threat in both countries.

While supporting increased focus on Africa, the U.S. will still be keeping a close eye on Syria and Iraq, Blinken said in June.

This month, the coalition welcomed the African country of Burkina Faso as its 84th member.

The Africa Focus Group is expected to help the coalition build up civilian institutions and synchronize those efforts with existing initiatives, the State Department said.

News of the group's creation came just days before the announcement Thursday of the formal end of the Pentagon's combat mission in Iraq. Thursday also marked the fourth anniversary of Baghdad's declaration that ISIS had been defeated in Iraq.

# UK seeks G-7 unity over Russia's 'malign behavior'

Associated Press

LIVERPOOL, England — Top diplomats from the Group of Seven industrialized nations gathered Saturday beside the River Mersey in Liverpool with host country Britain, seeking to demonstrate “a show of unity against global aggressors” amid a crisis over Russia’s intentions towards Ukraine.

The U.K. is seeking elusive consensus from the wealthy nations’ club in response to what it calls “malign behavior” by Russia, and over tensions with China and Iran.

“We need to defend ourselves against the growing threats from hostile actors,” British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said as she opened the meeting of foreign ministers from the U.K., the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan. “And we need to come together strongly to stand up to aggressors who are seeking to limit the bounds of freedom and democracy.”

The U.S. and its NATO allies are concerned that the movement of Russian troops and weapons to the border region with Ukraine may be a prelude to an invasion and have said they would inflict heavy sanctions on Russia’s economy if that happens.

Moscow denies planning to attack Ukraine and accuses Kyiv of its own allegedly

aggressive designs.

Truss and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed how to deter Russia from “further aggression against Ukraine” in a one-on-one meeting, the State Department said. Britain said the two warned that a Russian incursion “would be a strategic mistake for which there would be serious consequences.”

The State Department announced Saturday that the top American diplomat for Europe, Karen Donfried, will visit both Kyiv and Moscow this week “to reinforce the United States’ commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity” and to seek a diplomatic solution to the crisis. After meeting with Ukrainian and Russian officials, Donfried will go on to Brussels to talk with NATO and European Union allies.

The weekend meeting at the dockside Museum of Liverpool was the final major event of Britain’s year-long G-7 presidency. The diplomats in Liverpool also plan to discuss lagging efforts to vaccinate the world against the coronavirus, tensions in the western Balkans, Afghanistan and North Korea, and China’s muscle-flexing in the Indo-Pacific region.

# Capitol rioters’ posts influencing their sentencing

Associated Press

For many who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, self-incriminating messages, photos and videos that they broadcast on social media before, during and after the riot are influencing even their criminal sentences.

Earlier this month, U.S. District Judge Amy Jackson read aloud some of Russell Peterson’s posts about the riot before she sentenced the Pennsylvania man to 30 days imprisonment. “Overall I had fun lol,” Peterson posted on Facebook.

The judge told Peterson that his posts made it “extraordinarily difficult” for her to show him leniency.

“The ‘lol’ particularly stuck in my craw because, as I hope you’ve come to understand, nothing about January 6th was funny,” Jackson added. “No one locked in a room, cowering under a table for hours, was laughing.”

Among the biggest takeaways so far from the Justice Department’s prosecution of the riot is how large a role social media has played, with much of the most damning evidence coming from rioters’ own words and videos.

FBI agents have identified scores of rioters from public posts and records subpoenaed from social media platforms. Prosecutors use the posts to build cases. Judges now are citing defendants’ words and images as factors weighing in favor of tougher sentences.

As of Friday, more than 50 people have been sentenced for federal crimes related to the riot. In at least 28 of those cases, prosecutors factored a defendant’s social media posts into their requests for stricter sentences, according to an Associated Press review of court records.

Many rioters used social media to celebrate the violence or spew hateful rhetoric. Others used it to spread misinformation, promote baseless conspiracy theories or play down their actions. Prosecutors also have accused a few defendants of trying to destroy evidence by deleting posts.

Approximately 700 people have been charged with federal crimes related to the riot. About 150 of them have pleaded guilty. More than 20 defendants have been sentenced to jail or prison terms or to time already served behind bars. Over a dozen others received home confinement sentences.

# Inflation feeds angst about \$2T bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Government reports on rising inflation and the potential costs of President Joe Biden’s social and environment legislation raised fresh questions Friday about the bill’s fate, with both sides hoping the new numbers would influence pivotal Sen. Joe Manchin.

The moderate Manchin, D-W.Va., has spent months forcing Democrats to trim the 10-year, \$2 trillion package, arguing it’s too expensive and at times citing growing inflation as a reason to slow work on the bill. On Friday, the Labor Department said consumer prices grew last month at an annual rate of 6.8%, the highest in 39 years.

A separate report from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said that if many of the bill’s temporary spending boosts and tax cuts were made permanent, it would add \$3 trillion to the price tag. That would more than double its 10-year cost to around \$5

trillion. Democrats called the projections from the Republican-requested report fictitious.

Manchin aides did not respond to requests for comment. Manchin said in a brief interview Thursday that he wanted to know “where we are in inflation and where we are on the true price” of the bill, adding he was “very concerned.”

The latest inflation figures prompted Biden to use some of his strongest language yet, telling reporters at the White House on Friday, “I think this is the peak of the crisis.” While the numbers illustrate a clear political danger for the administration, the recent performance of financial markets suggests investors don’t see inflation as a long-term problem.

Friday’s reports popped out two weeks before Christmas, by when Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., hopes to end months of talks among Democrats and finally push a compromise bill through the Senate.

# Techs race to fix software flaw

Associated Press

BOSTON — A critical vulnerability in a widely used software tool — one quickly exploited in the online game Minecraft — is rapidly emerging as a major threat to organizations around the world.

“The internet’s on fire right now,” said Adam Meyers, senior vice president of intelligence at the cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike. “People are scrambling to patch,” he said, “and all kinds of people scrambling to exploit it.” He said Friday morning that in

the 12 hours since the bug’s existence was disclosed that it had been “fully weaponized,” meaning malefactors had developed and distributed tools to exploit it.

The flaw may be the worst computer vulnerability discovered in years. It was uncovered in a utility that’s ubiquitous in cloud servers and enterprise software used across industry and government. Unless it is fixed, it grants criminals, spies and programming novices alike easy access to internal networks where they can loot valuable da-

ta, plant malware, erase crucial information and much more.

“I’d be hard-pressed to think of a company that’s not at risk,” said Joe Sullivan, chief security officer for Cloudflare, whose online infrastructure protects websites from malicious actors. Untold millions of servers have it installed, and experts said the fallout would not be known for several days.

Amit Yoran, CEO of the cybersecurity firm Tenable, called it “the single biggest, most critical vulnerability of the last decade”

— and possibly the biggest in the history of modern computing.

The vulnerability, dubbed ‘Log4Shell,’ was rated 10 on a scale of one to 10 the Apache Software Foundation, which oversees development of the software. Anyone with the exploit can obtain full access to an unpatched computer that uses the software,

Experts said the extreme ease with which the vulnerability lets an attacker access a web server — no password required — is what makes it so dangerous.

## US scrutinizing ability to play games on Teslas

Associated Press

DETROIT — Last August, Vince Patton was watching a YouTube video of a Tesla owner who had made a startling observation: Tesla drivers could now play a video game on their car’s touch-screen dashboard — while the vehicle is moving.

Curious to see for himself, Patton drove his own 2021 Tesla Model 3 to an empty community college parking lot, activated a game called “Sky Force Reloaded” from a menu and did a few loops.

“I was just dumbfounded that, yes, sure enough, this sophisticat-

ed video game came up,” said Patton, 59, retired broadcast journalist who lives near Portland, Ore.

He tried Solitaire, too, and was able to activate that game while driving. Later, he found he could browse the internet while his car was moving.

Patton, who loves his car and says he has nothing against Tesla, worries that drivers will play games and become dangerously distracted.

“Somebody’s going to get killed,” he said. “It’s absolutely insane.”

Which is why early last month,

Patton decided to file a complaint with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the government’s road safety agency.

“NHTSA needs to prohibit all live video in the front seat and all live interactive web browsing while the car is in motion,” Patton wrote in his complaint. “Creating a dangerous distraction for the driver is recklessly negligent.”

On Wednesday, NHTSA confirmed that it’s looking into the matter. News of Patton’s complaint was first reported Tuesday by The New York Times.

“We are aware of driver concerns and are discussing the fea-

ture with the manufacturer,” a NHTSA spokeswoman wrote in an email. “The Vehicle Safety Act prohibits manufacturers from selling vehicles with design defects posing unreasonable risks to safety.”

The spokeswoman declined to provide further details of its conversations with Tesla. The agency has not opened a formal investigation, which would involve requests for documents and other detailed information. Tesla, which has disbanded its media relations department, did not respond to messages from The Associated Press.

## Nonprofit: Pandemic tech tools raise risk of everyday tracking

Associated Press

LONDON — Tech tools like digital contact tracing apps and artificial intelligence that European governments rolled out to combat COVID-19 failed to play a key role in solving the pandemic and now threaten to make such monitoring widely accepted, a new report shows.

The health surveillance technologies that many European countries deployed after the coronavirus pandemic erupted last year were often adopted without enough transparency, safe-

guards or democratic debate, according to a report released Thursday by AlgorithmWatch, a nonprofit research group that tracks the impact of AI systems.

Authorities scrambled to develop new technologies or use existing ones to combat the virus’s spread. They built digital contact tracing apps to track who infected people had been around and later developed vaccine passports to verify people had received COVID-19 shots in order to travel or get into concerts, restaurants and other businesses. Some used

drones and devices to enforce social distancing rules.

Many of these systems used “automated decision-making” technology, which reduced the complex social challenges posed by COVID-19 to a set of technology issues in need of tech solutions, the Berlin-based nonprofit said.

AlgorithmWatch acknowledged that technology played a role in helping save some lives during the pandemic, such as through the use of artificial intelligence to efficiently distribute vaccines.

But the report’s authors said the most worrying trend was how the pandemic was used to “further entrench and normalize the surveillance, monitoring, measuring and prediction of an increasing number of daily activities — now essentially including public and personal health purposes.” That’s an even larger problem considering the “bugs, fakery, data leaks” the group says are present in such tools, and the growing number of uses for information from COVID-19-fighting tech around the world.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Display pairing Bible, explicit books removed

**VA** McLEAN — A northern Virginia library has removed a display that placed the Bible alongside two books that activists have sought to remove from school libraries for being pornographic and obscene.

The display at the Dolley Madison library in McLean included the books “Lawn Boy” by Jonathan Evison and “Gender Queer” by Maia Kobabe along with the Bible and a number of troll dolls.

The display was removed; it’s not clear how long it had been in place. In a statement, Fairfax County Public Library Director Jessica Hudson said the “holiday reading display was intended to highlight the freedom to read and the fact that many library patrons have more time during the holidays to do so. It was not the intention of staff to create a display that could be construed as offensive.”

### Skier hurt in avalanches caused by humans

**NH** NORTH CONWAY — Two skiers were caught in human-caused avalanches on Mount Washington and one of them was seriously injured, the mountain’s avalanche center said.

A skier triggered an avalanche near the top of Left Gully, the first human-caused avalanche of the season. That triggered a second avalanche. The skier was carried about 800 feet and was not hurt.

That avalanche hit another skier, who was carried more than 450 feet and hit several

rocks, the center said. That person was injured and was carried out in a five-hour rescue mission.

### State hopes to use prison site for school

**CT** MANSFIELD — State officials are working on a plan that would transform the site of a former prison into a technical high school.

The University of Connecticut, which had taken control of the former Bergin Correctional Institution in Mansfield in 2015, transferred the 35-acre site and 25 adjoining acres back to the state Office of Policy and Management.

Paul Hinsch, the state’s policy director for asset management, said officials have been searching for a site to replace the old Windham Technical High School for over a decade.

The prison site could work, he said, because it already has infrastructure such as sewer and water hookups and the needed land for athletic fields.

The existing prison buildings would be torn down and no students will ever serve detention in a former prison cell, he said.

### Ex-treasure hunter still in jail, 6 years later

**OH** COLUMBUS — A former deep-sea treasure hunter is preparing to mark his sixth year in jail for refusing to disclose the whereabouts of 500 missing coins made from gold found in an historic shipwreck.

Research scientist Tommy Thompson, 69, has been held in contempt of court since Dec. 15,

2015, for that refusal. He is also incurring a daily fine of \$1,000.

Thompson’s case dates to his discovery of the S.S. Central America, known as the Ship of Gold, in 1988. The gold rush-era ship sank in a hurricane off South Carolina in 1857 with thousands of pounds of gold aboard, contributing to an economic panic.

Thompson says he’s already said everything he knows about the coins. Thompson pleaded guilty in April 2015 for his failure to appear for a 2012 hearing and was sentenced to two years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. But Thompson’s criminal sentence has been delayed until the issue of the gold coins is resolved.

### Picasso among artwork donated to college

**MA** BOSTON — Works by Pablo Picasso, Mary Cassatt and Winslow Homer are among 30 pieces of art worth more than \$20 million that alumnus and legendary investment manager Peter Lynch is donating to Boston College’s art museum, the university announced.

The works — 27 paintings and three drawings — were collected by Lynch and his late wife Carolyn.

The donation includes a \$5 million grant to support the ongoing curation and exhibition at the McMullen Museum of Art of what will be called the Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection, making the total gift one of the largest in the Jesuit university’s history.

The collection also includes works by John Singer Sargent, Albert Bierstadt and Jack But-

ler Yeats.

### Woman arrested for trying to drown son

**CA** MARYSVILLE — A Northern California woman was arrested after she allegedly tried to kill her son, 4, smothering him on a muddy embankment of an irrigation canal and then submerging herself and the boy into 5 feet of water when an officer arrived, authorities said.

Taylor Delaine Green, 31, of Dobbins, was arrested near Marysville after she fought with a California Highway Patrol officer, who had wrestled the boy from her arms, and tried to reach for his gun, CHPatrol Officer Brian Danielson said.

She is facing two counts of attempted murder, child endangerment, resisting arrest, trying to take an officer’s gun and driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, Danielson said.

### Statues to feature city’s Hall of Famers

**AL** MOBILE — Statues of Hank Aaron and other local heroes who made the baseball and football Halls of Fame are planned for a public space celebrating the heritage of the city of Mobile.

The Hall of Fame Courtyard is aimed at drawing more people to the city’s riverfront, Al.com reported.

The goal is to have the first statue finished and displayed in downtown Mobile next year, with the others delivered in 2023, said Matt Anderson, Mobile’s director of civic and cultural affairs.

— From Associated Press

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# Chiefs going for sixth straight victory

*Associated Press*

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Kansas City Chiefs probably look back wistfully these days to their last game against the Raiders.

It was the only time in about two months their offense looked like normal.

Andy Reid's high-powered, thrill-a-minute cast of characters that carried the Chiefs to consecutive Super Bowls has been uncharacteristically stuck in neutral this season. The Chiefs have topped 22 points just once since mid-October, and that was in a 41-14 rout of their AFC West rival in Las Vegas last month.

"Every day is different in this league. That's why you have to prep and focus so much this week," said Reid, who needs one win to reach 100 in Kansas City. "You have to remember, the other team is playing. You're not doing it against air. You have to go out and execute and do it every day."

The Chiefs (8-4) have won

five straight to take a one-game lead on the Chargers and a two-game lead on the Broncos and Raiders (6-6) as they seek a sixth straight AFC West crown. But their winning streak has been fueled by their suddenly stingy defense, which has held three of its last four opponents to fewer than 10 points.

That includes the Packers — albeit without Aaron Rodgers — along with the Cowboys and the Broncos.

"They are all great players and sometimes it just takes a little bit to be, 'OK, this is what we are going to be good at right now,'" Raiders quarterback Derek Carr said. "From the first half of the year to the second half, are they doing things much different? I mean, you still see the same things. Maybe they are executing a little bit better and things like that, but any time I play these guys I know what I'm in for and it's going to be a tough match."

What began as such a promising season for the Raiders is starting to spiral into another

forgettable one. Their loss to the Chiefs last month came during a three-game skid, and last week's loss to Washington made it four in their last five.

Much like the Chiefs, the culprit for the Raiders has been an inconsistent offense.

Unlike the Chiefs, their defense hasn't been able to bail them out.

"In the games that have either gone down to the wire for us, or certainly the ones we've had a chance to win at the end, we started fast," said Raiders interim coach Rich Bisaccia, whose team has been outscored by 30 points in the first quarter.

"When it goes in your favor that way, you feel like you can keep rolling. When it doesn't, well, we've been 14 down and come back and won a game as well this year. So, either way, we have to keep going. But we'd certainly love to start fast."

## Welcome back

The Chiefs' defense could be even stingier this week with the

return of Rashad Fenton, who is rated among the league's top cornerbacks by Pro Football Focus. The versatile Fenton missed last week's game with a knee injury.

## Welcome back, Part 2

The Raiders' defense also could get a lift if cornerback Trayvon Mullen can play for the first time since a foot injury in Week 4. They also could have tight end Darren Waller, who has been dealing with a knee issue, and linebacker Denzel Perryman, who has had an ankle injury. Both were day to day this week.

## Tasty target

The Chiefs have done a good job of taking advantage of Raiders safety Johnathan Abram's coverage issues the past two seasons. Abram was beaten for the game-winning TD pass by Travis Kelce in the second meeting in 2020 and allowed nine catches on nine targets for 127 yards and two TDs in their Week 10 loss this season.

# Brady, streaking Buccaneers host struggling Bills

*Associated Press*

TAMPA, Fla. — It's December, Tom Brady is playing well and barreling toward another division title.

Even though the Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback's no longer ruling the AFC East, what Brady's accomplishing after switching uniforms looks awfully familiar to the struggling Buffalo Bills.

To put it mildly, Brady absolutely had his way with the once downtrodden Bills during a two-decade stint with the New England Patriots, winning 32 of 35 games between the division rivals — setting the NFL record for most wins by a QB against one opponent and claiming 17 AFC East titles.

The reigning Super Bowl champion Bucs (9-3) can clinch their first NFC South crown since 2007 with a win over the Bills (7-5) and some outside help on Sunday, when Buffalo faces its old nemesis for the first time since Brady moved to Tampa Bay in 2020.

"They are a very tough team, a very resilient team. They challenge you in every way," Brady said. "Last year, they were in the AFC championship game. They've obviously got a dynamic offense and the top defense in the league."

That's true to a certain extent.

The Bills have a top-10 offense and are averaging 28 points, which is tied for fifth in the NFL. The defense is No. 1

against the pass and ranks first overall, too, while limiting opponents to only 16.3 points per game.

The reality, though, is lately Buffalo has hardly resembled the team which, a year ago, won its most games since 1991, its first division title since 1995, and enjoyed its deepest playoff run in 27 years before losing to the Kansas City Chiefs in the AFC title game.

The Bills are 3-4 in their past seven games and are coming off a tough 14-10 home loss to New England in which the Patriots ran the ball 46 times for 222 yards and only attempted three passes.

The offense, at best, has been inconsistent after a strong start

to the season. Josh Allen has thrown for nine touchdowns over the past five games, while also turning the ball over the same number of times with seven interceptions and two lost fumbles during the same stretch.

Allen is confident the Bills can pull out of the funk.

"There's no panic in our locker room. We're extremely united right now with what we need to do," the quarterback said. "We're a hungry team and we want to go out there and prove what type of team we are, not to (the media) or anybody else, but to ourselves because we know the type of guys that we have in this locker room and the team that we can be."

# Harbaugh named AP coach of the year

Associated Press

Michigan's Jim Harbaugh is The Associated Press college football coach of the year after leading the Wolverines to their first Big Ten title in 17 years and a berth in the College Football Playoff.

Harbaugh is the first Michigan coach to win the AP Coach of the Year Award presented by Regions Bank, and the first from the Big Ten since Penn State's Joe Paterno in 2005.

"It's a tremendous reflection on the entire staff, players," Harbaugh told the AP. "Everybody shares in it. A rising tide lifts all ships."

He received 22 of 53 first-place votes and 103 points from a panel of AP Top 25 voters to finish ahead of Cincinnati's Luke Fickell, who had 16 first-place votes and 88 points.

Baylor's Dave Aranda was third and Michigan State's Mel Tucker was fourth. Georgia's Kirby Smart was fifth with a first-place vote and Utah State's Blake Anderson

was sixth, receiving three first-place votes.

Alabama's Nick Saban and Wake Forest's Dave Clawson also received first-place votes.

Michigan is the first school to sweep the AP coach of the year in football and men's basketball in the same calendar year since the football award was established in 1998. Juwan Howard won coach of the year in men's basketball for the 2020-21 season.

Harbaugh came into his seventh season as coach of his alma mater on a hot seat after going 2-4 in the Big Ten's abbreviated schedule in 2020. After his first losing season with Michigan, Harbaugh took a pay cut and had his buyout reduced, putting the school in better position to make a coaching change if this season didn't go well.

Harbaugh also made staff changes on the defensive side of the ball in the offseason.

Everything came together for the Wolverines this season. They beat Ohio State to snap an eight-game losing streak in the

valry and reached the Big Ten title game for the first time, where they routed Iowa.

While Harbaugh has chosen not to gloat about Michigan's turnaround, when there were plenty of skeptics, his brother was not above it.

"He's always been a great coach," Baltimore Ravens coach John Harbaugh told reporters. "And all those that want to pile on, especially some of the local media there, there you have it. Back in your face. That's how I look at it. He'd never say that, but I'll say it."

No. 2 Michigan (12-1) faces No. 3 Georgia (12-1) in its first College Football Playoff appearance on Dec. 31 at the Orange Bowl.

"I love this team. I love this '21 team," Harbaugh said. "They've got a bounce in their step every day. They've got a smile on their face. They've worked incredibly hard."

## Durant helps power Nets to win over Young, Hawks

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Kevin Durant scored 31 points, including a go-ahead jumper midway through the fourth quarter, and the Brooklyn Nets proved to be resilient once again, beating the Atlanta Hawks 113-105 on Friday night.

The Nets, protecting their slim lead over Chicago for the best record in the Eastern Conference, improved to 8-0 following losses this season. Durant and LaMarcus Aldridge, who had 15 points, were rested in Wednesday night's 114-104 loss at Houston.

James Harden had 20 points and 11 assists for Brooklyn, which is 2-0 against Atlanta this season.

Trae Young led Atlanta with 31 points. John Collins had 20 and Kevin Huerter added 19.

There were three ties early in the final period, including at 95-all. Durant's jumper sparked an 8-0 run that gave the Nets a 103-95 lead.

**Suns 111, Celtics 90:** JaVale McGee had season highs of 21 points and 15 rebounds, Chris Paul added 12 assists and host Phoenix rolled past Boston.

The Suns won for the 20th time in 21 games despite missing starters Devin Booker (hamstring) and Deandre Ayton (non-COVID-19 illness).

McGee picked up the slack, shooting 9 of 16 from the field and even knocking down a three-pointer, which was just the 11th in his 14-year career.

Seven Suns scored in double figures. Cam Payne had 17 points while Jae Crowder and Cameron Johnson both added 16.

Jayson Tatum led the Celtics with 24 points.

**Bucks 123, Rockets 114:** Giannis Antetokounmpo had 41 points and 17 rebounds, and visiting Milwaukee snapped Houston's seven-game winning streak.

Bobby Portis and Middleton added 21 points each for Milwaukee as the Bucks won for the 11th time in 13 games.

**Lakers 116, Thunder 95:** LeBron James scored 33 points on 13-of-20 shooting and Los Angeles rolled past host Oklahoma City.

James — who sat out the Lakers' first two games against the Thunder this season, both losses — had six assists and five rebounds. Avery Bradley added a season-high 22 points for the Lakers, who moved one game above .500.

**Hornets 124, Kings 123:** Sacramento's three-game winning streak ended when De'Aaron Fox missed two free throws with 2.4 seconds left to give host Charlotte the victory.

Charlotte rookie James Bouknight, the

11th pick in the 2021 draft, poured in a career-high 24 points on six three-pointers.

**Raptors 90, Knicks 87:** Gary Trent Jr. scored 24 points, Fred VanVleet had 17 points and 11 assists, and Toronto won its 10th straight home meeting against New York.

Scottie Barnes had 12 points and a career-high 15 rebounds and Pascal Siakam had 13 points and 12 rebounds for the Raptors, who let a 20-point first quarter lead slip away but held on to win their third in four games.

**Pacers 106, Mavericks 93:** Caris LeVert scored 26 points and Domantas Sabonis added 22 points and 10 rebounds to lead Indiana past visiting Dallas.

Luka Doncic had 27 points, nine rebounds and nine assists for Dallas. Kristaps Porzingis added 22 points as the Mavericks lost for the fourth time in five games.

**Cavaliers 123, Timberwolves 106:** Jarrett Allen had 21 points and 10 rebounds and Cleveland used a fast start to cruise past host Minnesota.

Kevin Love scored 18 points and had 13 rebounds off the bench against his former team.

**Pelicans 109, Pistons 93:** Brandon Ingram scored 26 points and New Orleans extended visiting Detroit's losing streak to 11

Since starting 1-12, the Pelicans have won seven of 15 games.

# Rangers top Sabres, continue hot start

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Alexander Georgiev stopped 36 shots and the New York Rangers extended one of the best starts in team history with a 2-1 win over the Buffalo Sabres on Friday night.

The Rangers hung on for the victory after a video review determined Buffalo defenseman Rasmus Dahlin was offside to negate Victor Olofsson's goal with 57 seconds remaining.

Mika Zibanejad got his first goal in 15 games and Alex Lafreniere also scored for the Rangers. Adam Fox assisted on both goals to take over the NHL points lead among defenseman with 29.

The Rangers improved to 18-5-3, matching the franchise mark for most wins through 26 games. That record was set by the 1994 Stanley Cup champion team, which opened 18-6-2.

The Sabres extended their winless skid to 0-5-1 but avoided

being shut out in consecutive games thanks to Brett Murray's goal. Minor-league callup Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen stopped 29 shots and has lost five straight since winning his NHL debut in April.

**Flyers 4, Golden Knights 3:** Max Willman scored his first NHL goal and visiting Philadelphia beat Las Vegas to end a 10-game winless streak.

Kevin Hayes, Sean Couturier and James van Riemsdyk also scored for the Flyers. Carter Hart made 41 saves. Philadelphia is 1-8-2 since Nov. 18.

**Avalanche 7, Red Wings 3:** Colorado became the first team in 26 years to score seven goals in three straight games with a win over visiting Detroit.

Andre Burakovsky had two goals and Darren Helm scored in his first game against his former team. J.T. Compher had a goal in his return from an injury, Nathan MacKinnon, Samuel Girard and Cale Makar also

scored, and Devon Toews had three assists for the Avalanche.

**Canucks 4, Jets 3:** Elias Pettersson scored the lone goal in the shootout to give host Vancouver a win over Winnipeg.

The Swedish center deftly stick handled his way in, waited out Winnipeg goalie Eric Comrie, then wrapped a shot around his outstretched frame.

Nils Hoglander had a pair of goals for Vancouver, while Connor Garland also scored. **Penguins 4, Capitals 2:** Danton Heinen, Brock McGinn and Kasperii Kapanen scored, Sidney Crosby had two assists and visiting Pittsburgh held on to beat Washington.

The Penguins controlled the play for the first two periods before the Capitals mounted a comeback in the third. Pittsburgh extended its winning streak to three. Washington's brief two-game streak came to an end.

**Predators 3, Devils 2:** Juuse

Saros made 29 saves and visiting Nashville defeated New Jersey.

The start was Saros' first after missing the last two games with an undisclosed illness that the team stressed was not COVID-19. Roman Josi and Eeli Tolvanen scored in the second period, and Yakov Trenin added a goal in the third for Nashville, which has won four straight.

New Jersey has lost five of seven, and seven of 10 overall.

**Panthers 3, Coyotes 1:** Patric Hornqvist and Sam Bennett scored 10 seconds apart in the first period, and Sam Reinhard scored in his fourth straight game to give visiting Florida a win over Arizona.

The Panthers scored all three goals in the first period, and Sergei Bobrovsky had 22 saves.

The Panthers have a point in 22 of 26 games this season and lead the NHL with 40 points, one more than Minnesota.

## Bettman says NHL is still committed to Olympics

Associated Press

The NHL is sticking to its plan to allow its players to compete in the Beijing Olympics.

For now.

Speaking at the conclusion of the board of governors meeting in Florida, Commissioner Gary Bettman said Friday the league will continue to honor its commitment to giving players the opportunity to compete for gold in February.

But there is still no clarity on what happens if an NHL player tests positive for COVID-19 in China, including the length of a potential quarantine and if the individual will be allowed to leave the country during that period. Any significant disruption to the NHL schedule also could alter the league's thinking on the Olympics.

"We made a promise," Be-

ttman said during a news conference at the Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa following the board's first face-to-face meeting since 2019. "It's not like we haven't expressed our concerns. But in the final analysis, subject to some caveats, with all of the issues that are being raised ... the players, for the most part, seem to continue to be saying they want to go."

The league made that promise to the NHL Players' Association when the extension to the current collective bargaining agreement was signed ahead of pandemic-delayed 2019-20 season. The two parties then inked a deal with the International Ice Hockey Federation on the Games in September.

"Our concerns have only been magnified," Bettman said of going to Beijing. "But ultimately, we made a commit-

ment."

Vegas Golden Knights goalie Robin Lehner became the first player to opt out earlier this week.

"We have concerns, and we've expressed those to the players' association," Bettman said. "We've seen that a number of players are now expressing concerns. We'll have to see how this ultimately plays out."

Deputy commissioner Bill Daly said the league could pull out of the Olympics at any point because of COVID-19, but Jan. 10 is the deadline to nix the plan without financial penalty.

The NHL went to every Olympics from 1998 through 2014 before declining to send its players to the 2018 Games in South Korea.

Owners have always been

lukewarm on the showcase even under perfect health and safety conditions for a number of reasons, including the disruption to the league calendar.

"I don't think that this is going to be the ideal Olympic experience in terms of the lockdowns in the Olympic Village and everything else that's going on," Bettman said. "But again, we made a promise to the players, and I'm going, to the best of our ability, adhere to it, understanding that there may be consequences that nobody's gonna like."

"But we made a promise."

Bettman said the salary cap, which has remained stagnant at \$81.5 million during the pandemic, will rise by \$1 million next season. He added league revenues are expected to hit \$5.2 billion in 2021-22 — a return to pre-pandemic levels.