

Air Force discharges 27 vaccine refusers

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Air Force has discharged 27 people for refusing to get the COVID-19 vaccine, making them what officials believe are the first service members to be removed for disobeying the mandate to get the shots.

The Air Force gave its forces until Nov. 2 to get the vaccine, and thousands have either refused or sought an exemption. Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek said Monday that these are the first airmen to be administratively discharged for reasons involving the vaccine.

She said all of them were in their first term of enlistment, so they were younger, lower-ranking personnel. And while the Air Force does not disclose what type of discharge a service member gets, legislation working its way through Congress limits the military to giving troops in vaccine refusal cases an honorable discharge or general discharge under honorable conditions.

The Pentagon earlier this year required the vaccine for all members of the military, including active duty, National Guard and the

Reserves. Each of the services set its own deadlines and procedures for the mandate, and the Air Force set the earliest deadline. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has said the vaccine is critical to maintaining the health of the force and its ability to respond to a national security crisis.

None of the 27 airmen sought a medical, administrative or religious exemption, Stefanek said. Several officials from the other services said they believe that so far only the Air Force has gotten this far along in the process and discharged people over the vaccine refusal.

As a result, they were formally removed from service for failure to obey an order.

Stefanek said it is also possible that some had other infractions on their records, but all had the vaccine refusal as one of the elements of their discharge.

It is not unusual for members of the military to be thrown out of the service for disobeying an order; discipline is a key tenet of the armed services. As a comparison, Stefanek said that in the first three quarters of 2021, about 1,800 airmen were discharged for failure to follow orders.

According to the latest Air Force data, more than 1,000 airmen have refused the shot and more than 4,700 are seeking a religious exemption. As of last week, a bit more than 97% of the active-duty Air Force had gotten at least one shot.

Members of the Navy and the Marine Corps had until Nov. 28 to get the shots and their Reserve members have until Dec. 28. Army active-duty soldiers have until Wednesday, and members of the Army National Guard and the Reserves have the most time to be vaccinated, with a deadline of next June 30.

Across the military, the vaccine reaction has mirrored that of society as a whole, with thousands seeking exemptions or refusing the shots. But the overall percentage of troops — particularly active-duty members — who quickly got the shots exceeds the nationwide numbers.

As of Dec. 10, the Pentagon said that 96.4% of active-duty personnel have gotten at least one shot. The number plummets to about 74%, however, when the Guard and Reserve are included.

Long road to tornado recovery underway in Kentucky

Associated Press

MAYFIELD, Ky. — Workers, volunteers and members of the National Guard fanned out in areas of Kentucky slammed by a series of tornadoes to begin the long process of recovery, including replacing thousands of damaged utility poles, delivering bottles of drinking water and continuing to search for the dead.

The tornado outbreak Friday that killed at least 88 people in five states — 74 of them in Kentucky — cut a path of devastation that stretched from Arkansas, where a nursing home was destroyed, to Illinois, where an Amazon distribution center was heavily damaged.

In Kentucky, Gov. Andy Beshear said the death toll could grow as authorities continued to work around debris that slowed recovery efforts. Nearly 450 National Guard members have been mobilized in the state, and 95 of them are searching for those presumed dead.

“With this amount of damage and rubble, it may be a week or even more before we have a final count on the number of lost lives,” the governor said.

Kentucky authorities said the sheer level of destruction was hindering their ability to tally the damage. Still, efforts turned to repairing the power grid, sheltering those whose homes were destroyed and delivering supplies.

Across the state, about 26,000 homes and businesses were without electricity, according to poweroutage.us, including nearly all of those in Mayfield. More than 10,000 homes and businesses had no water as of Monday, and another 17,000 are under boil-water advisories, Kentucky Emergency Management Director Michael Dossett told reporters.

A fund set up by the state collected \$6 million in donations, according to the governor. Kentucky first lady Brittainy Beshear launched a Christmas toy drive for

children affected by the storm. She is asking for unwrapped toys, books, and gift cards of \$25 that will be distributed to families in need.

State and local officials said it could take years for some of the hardest-hit areas to fully recover.

“This again is not going to be a week or a month operation, folks. This will go on for years to come. This is a massive event,” Dossett said.

Five twisters hit Kentucky in all, including one with an extraordinarily long path of about 200 miles, authorities said.

In addition to the deaths in Kentucky, the tornadoes also killed at least six people in Illinois, where the Amazon distribution center in Edwardsville was hit; four in Tennessee; two in Arkansas, where the nursing home was destroyed and the governor said workers shielded residents with their own bodies; and two in Missouri.

Hearing held for sailor charged in fire

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Navy prosecutors alleged that a sailor charged with setting the fire that destroyed the USS Bonhomme Richard last year was “disgruntled” after dropping out of Navy SEAL training, while his defense lawyers said there was no physical evidence connecting him to the blaze.

Prosecutor Cmdr. Richard Federico told the court Monday that text messages show Seaman Apprentice Ryan Sawyer Mays lied to family, friends and investigators about why he left SEAL training and that he was angry about being reassigned to the Bonhomme Richard. They also said he used foul language with a superior days before the blaze.

Mays denied igniting the amphibious assault ship that burned for nearly five days and

injured dozens aboard.

Defense attorneys said fellow sailors considered Mays “arrogant” because he had come from SEAL training. They disputed that Mays hated the Navy more than any other sailor assigned to deck duty like he was, which involves cleaning the ship.

The junior sailor was charged with aggravated arson and the willful hazarding of a vessel.

The hearing will determine whether there is enough evidence to proceed with a military trial. Scheduled to testify Tuesday is a key witness for the government, a crew member who reported seeing Mays go down to the ship’s lower storage area where investigators say cardboard boxes were ignited.

Left with extensive structural, electrical

and mechanical damage, the billion-dollar ship was scrapped.

Defense Attorney Gary Barthel pointed out no DNA linked to Mays was found at the scene, and he questioned why investigators concluded Mays did it just because they found a lighter among his belongings.

“Were there other individuals on the ship with lighters?” Barthel asked the lead fire investigator for the Navy, who agreed there likely were.

Navy prosecutors argued the case was carefully investigated. They have collected more than 28,000 pages of material and hours of video to build their case.

Defense lawyers objected to the hearing, saying they were not given enough time to review the evidence against Mays.

Damaged Navy submarine arrives in San Diego

By ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

The fast-attack submarine involved in an undersea collision in October completed a trip from Guam to San Diego entirely on the ocean’s surface, a media report said.

The USS Connecticut pulled into San Diego on Sunday after departing Guam sometime last month, where it stopped for repairs after striking an undersea

mountain in the South China Sea, according to a Tuesday report from U.S. Naval Institute News. It cited unnamed Navy officials who said the trip was made entirely along the surface.

U.S. submarines are significantly slower and more vulnerable when traveling on the surface, according to the National Museum of the U.S. Navy’s website.

The Connecticut is in a “safe

and stable condition” in port in San Diego, a Submarine Force Pacific spokeswoman, Cmdr. Cindy Fields, told Stars and Stripes by phone Tuesday.

The voyage comes two months after the nuclear-powered submarine struck an underwater mountain in international waters in the Indo-Pacific region.

The exact location of the incident was not disclosed, but an

unnamed defense official said it occurred in the South China Sea, according to an Oct. 8 report from USNI News.

The collision, which resulted in minor injuries to about a dozen sailors, also led to the removal of the Connecticut’s commander, executive officer and enlisted chief.

The Seawolf-class submarine is expected to undergo repairs in Bremerton, Wash.

Austin sending deputy to Hawaii amid water woes

By WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks is slated to visit Hawaii this week to see firsthand how contaminated water has affected more than 3,000 displaced residents of military housing residents.

“I have asked Deputy Secretary Hicks to visit the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility this week during her travel to Ha-

waii and to consult with Navy leaders, local officials, experts, and affected personnel and families,” Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a statement Monday.

Late last month, families living on and near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam began complaining of foul-smelling tap water with a visible oily sheen.

The Navy tracked the source of contamination to its Red Hill well, one of the three used in the

service’s water distribution system. That well has been shut off since the complaints began, and efforts to remove fuel from the well have begun.

Hicks launched a junket Monday that also includes stops in Michigan, Colorado, California and Nebraska. In Hawaii, she is expected to meet with officials at U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. Her trip follows a visit last week by Carlos Del Toro, the secretary of the Navy, and

Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, who met with local officials and scores of residents whose lives were upended by the crisis.

The Army and Navy are paying hotel bills to temporarily relocate anyone affected by tainted water.

The Navy has tracked the origin of the contamination to a Nov. 20 jet fuel spill connected with the Red Hill underground storage tanks.

Blinken calls out China hostility on Asia tour

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, speaking in Indonesia on Tuesday, employed some familiar catchphrases to explain the United States' stance on the Indo-Pacific region and why it makes the better global partner.

"Now we talk a lot about a free and open Indo-Pacific, but we don't often actually define what we mean by that," Blinken said at a Jakarta university during a swing through Southeast Asia that includes stops in Malaysia and Thailand. "Freedom is about the ability to write your future and have a say in what happens in your community and your country, no matter who you are or who you know."

Blinken arrived Monday in

Indonesia, a nation the State Department describes as a strategic partner. He met with Indonesian President Joko Widodo to discuss how the two countries can work together in the region, according to a State Department briefing.

Blinken's trip abroad touches on countries often at odds with China, the assertive presence in the region, and his speech reflected that atmosphere. America's interests are also at stake in the Indo-Pacific, Blinken said.

"We all have a stake in ensuring that the world's most dynamic region is free from coercion and accessible to all," he said in remarks that were streamed online. "This is good for people across the region; it's

good for Americans, because history shows that when this vast region is free and open, America is more secure and more prosperous."

He also called out Myanmar, or Burma, where military authorities unseated the popularly elected government under Aung San Suu Kyi in February, imprisoned her and her supporters, killed others in street demonstrations and detained many more.

"We'll also stand up against leaders who don't respect their people's rights, as we're seeing now in Burma," he said. "We'll continue to work with our allies and partners to press the regime to cease its indiscriminate violence, release all those unjustly detained, allow unhinder-

ed access and restore Burma's path to inclusive democracy."

He turned also to North Korea and its pursuit of nuclear weapons, and China, whose aggressive behavior is cause for concern among nations that still maintain economic and cultural ties with the Asian giant. Blinken unholstered another catchphrase.

"Finally, we'll work with our allies and partners to defend the rules-based order that we built together over decades to ensure the region remains open and accessible," he said. "The goal of defending the rules-based order is not to keep any country down. Rather it's to protect the right of all countries to choose their own path, free from coercion, free from intimidation."

None to be disciplined over errant Kabul drone strike

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has accepted recommendations that no U.S. military personnel be disciplined for an errant drone strike in Kabul that killed 10 civilians, including an Afghan employee of an American aid organization and seven children, as the war in Afghanistan came to a chaotic end this summer, the Pentagon said Monday.

Military officials had said previously that the attack on Aug. 29 was not the result of criminal negligence. In November, the Air Force inspector general who led an independent investigation of the incident said that while the strike did not violate laws of war, the evidence suggested that mistakes were made as a result of what he called confirmation bias on the part of the analysts and commanders involved.

That review did not recommend any disciplinary action either, despite Pentagon leaders'

admission that the strike was a "tragic mistake."

The recommendations Austin approved were offered to him last month by the commander of U.S. Central Command, Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, and the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, Gen. Richard Clarke. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters during a news briefing Monday that "there was no recommendation by either of them about accountability."

Instead, the recommendations they made were primarily concerned with "how intelligence is gathered, analyzed, shared, assessed and developed" into targeting recommendations as well as how such information is communicated, Kirby said. He declined to offer further detail, saying the recommendations were classified.

Spokesmen for U.S. Central Command and U.S. Special Operations Command had no comment.

Video to honor deceased naval officer draws TikTok attention

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

A TikTok video of an American Airlines crew member paying tribute to a Navy officer whose remains were being flown home to North Carolina earlier this month has been viewed over 16 million times.

After requesting over the public address system that all service members and veterans aboard raise their hands, the crew member asks surrounding passengers to thank them.

He then says there's an "extra person on board" who is not in the passenger cabin, but in the cargo hold.

"His name is Lt. Cmdr. Daniel Nin," the man says in the video. "He was serving for us up in the New England states, and we're taking him to Raleigh-Durham so he can be laid to rest by his mother and survived by his 8-year-old son."

The video, recorded by a TikTok user named @randyrose71, had garnered more than 2.9 million likes in five days as of Tues-

day morning. Celebrity Jenny McCarthy, who is followed by 1.7 million users of the app, said in the comments that it made her cry.

"God bless to all who serve their lives for us," said McCarthy's comment, which itself garnered some 40,000 likes.

But the video led to a case of mistaken identity, as many viewers heard a different last name. Articles soon popped up about Daniel Min, apparently based on trending online activity using that name. The articles incorrectly identified the dead naval officer as an Army lieutenant, whose LinkedIn profile says he is based in Oklahoma.

Nin lived in Rhode Island, where he was the academic director for the Navy Supply Corps School at Naval Station Newport.

The 2008 Naval Academy graduate was found unresponsive in his off-base apartment and pronounced dead there Nov. 15, Cmdr. Brian Wierzbicki, a spokesman for Naval Education and Training Command, said Monday in an email.

UN: Iran providing 'blurred image' of nukes

Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates — The head of the United Nations nuclear watchdog warned Tuesday that the restrictions faced by his inspectors in Iran threaten to give the world only a “very blurred image” of Tehran’s program as it enriches uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels.

Speaking in a wide-ranging interview to The Associated Press, Rafael Mariano Grossi said he wanted to tell Iran that there was “no way around” his inspectors at the International Atomic Energy Agency if the

Islamic Republic wanted to be “a respected country in the community of nations.”

“We have to work together,” Grossi said after he visited that country’s first nuclear power plant. “They must work together. I will make sure they understand that in us they will have a partner.”

Grossi’s insistence that the Vienna-based IAEA remained “an auditor” for the world came as negotiations falter in Vienna to revive Tehran’s tattered nuclear deal. Hours earlier, the chief of Iran’s civilian nuclear program insisted his country would refuse the agen-

cy access to a sensitive centrifuge assembly plant.

That plant in Karaj came under what Iran describes as a sabotage attack in June. Tehran blamed the assault on Israel amid a widening regional shadow war since former President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from Iran’s landmark nuclear accord with world powers. Iran since has refused the IAEA access to replace cameras damaged in the incident.

Since the nuclear deal’s collapse, Tehran has started enriching uranium up to 60% purity — a short technical step

from weapons-grade levels of 90%. The deal limited enrichment to 3.67%, enough to be used in a power plant. The nation’s stockpile of enriched uranium grows every day far beyond the scope of the 2015 accord, which saw Tehran agree to limit its nuclear program in the exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. It also spins ever-more advanced centrifuges also barred by the deal.

Apparently responding to the criticism, Iranian negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani wrote on Twitter: “Some actors persist in their blame game habit, instead of real diplomacy.”

Calif. faces flooding threat

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Rain drenched Southern California on Tuesday as a powerful storm slid down the state, snarling traffic as vehicles spun out and raising the threat of mudslides in areas scarred by wildfires.

Nearly 7 inches of rain fell before dawn in one area of Santa Barbara County, northwest of Los Angeles, the National Weather Service said.

Residents of communities near the Alisal Fire burn scar in Santa Barbara County were ordered Monday to evacuate over concerns that heavy rains might cause flooding and debris flows that could inundate hillside homes. A similar order was issued for people living in several communities near another burn scar in the San Bernardino Mountains east of Los Angeles.

Snow continued falling in the mountains of Northern California after it started coming down last weekend. Avalanche warnings were in effect in the Mono and Inyo county areas of the eastern Sierra Nevada.

Motorists spun out on whitened mountain passes and people outside wielded umbrellas that flopped in the face of fierce

winds.

Near Lake Tahoe, the Kirkwood Mountain Resort ski area was closed Monday, saying on social media that it was not safe to open with 17 inches of overnight snow and high winds.

“It’s just so bad and so thick,” said California Highway Patrol Officer Carlos Perez. “We’re telling people that if they don’t need to be around this area, they probably shouldn’t travel.”

The multiday storm, a powerful atmospheric river weather system that was sucking up moisture from the Pacific Ocean, was expected to dump more than 8 feet of snow on the highest peaks in California and Nevada.

The storm prompted officials to shut down a 40-mile stretch of the iconic Highway 1 in California’s Big Sur area until Tuesday. The scenic coastal route south of the San Francisco Bay Area, frequently experiences damage during wet weather.

A second storm predicted to hit California midweek shortly after the current storm moves on could deliver almost continuous snow in mountainous areas, said Edan Weishahn of the weather service in Reno, which monitors an area straddling the Nevada state line.

More passengers bring anger and loaded guns into airports

CQ-Roll Call

Add to the rising number of unruly passengers prosecuted by the Federal Aviation Administration this year another dubious trend: More passengers being caught trying to bring firearms through TSA checkpoints.

Transportation Security Administrator David Pekoske said Monday that his agency has intercepted more than 5,700 guns this year, an all-time high, “and we aren’t even done with the calendar year just yet.”

The previous high was 4,400 in 2019, he said. Most of the weapons detected, he added, were loaded, and how TSA handles those cases varies according to state and local gun laws.

Pekoske speculated that there were more people carrying firearms in the country, saying, “Generally, what we see in our checkpoints in terms of what people carry into the checkpoints reflects what’s going on in the country.”

On Thursday, for example, TSA officers at Norfolk International Airport caught a Virginia Beach, Va., resident with a 9mm handgun loaded with six bullets.

On Wednesday, they detected

a loaded 9mm firearm in a man’s carry-on at Boston Logan International Airport. And on Dec. 2, TSA officers stopped a passenger from carrying his loaded 9mm handgun onto a flight from Charleston, W.Va.

Those who bring a firearm into a checkpoint face a civil penalty of “thousands of dollars,” Pekoske said, and many of those who try to do so are referred to local law enforcement.

Travelers who need to transport a firearm, he said, must work through air carriers and put it in checked baggage “appropriately safeguarded and declared.”

Pekoske’s figure is yet another data point in a year when a higher number of air passengers behaved badly: As of Dec. 7, airlines had reported 5,553 unruly passengers and 3,998 mask-related incidents; initiated investigations on 1,017 cases; and initiated 292 enforcement cases, according to the FAA.

Pekoske said the TSA tracks behavior both at checkpoints and onboard aircraft and “both are up, way up, compared to what they have been historically.”

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Squirrel packs on pounds before winter

ME DAMARISCOTTA — Humans aren't the only species packing on extra pounds during the pandemic. Some squirrels are letting themselves go, too.

Many squirrels are eating well this fall in New England. But one portly squirrel is so big it earned the nickname, "Fatty McFatterson."

Most squirrels sprint or scoot. This one lumbers and waddles after supplementing nature's bounty this fall by helping himself to seeds that fall to the ground from bird feeders.

"He's clearly the alpha of the yard," said Beth Ditkoff, of Damariscotta, told The Associated Press. "You think of them as scampering around. He's bah-boom, bah-boom."

Student was carrying AK-47 on school bus

NC ELIZABETH CITY — A North Carolina high school student has been taken into custody after he was found to be carrying a rifle with a loaded magazine on a school bus, a sheriff's office said.

Pasquotank County Sheriff Tommy Wooten told a news conference that the student was carrying a pistol-grip AK-47 with a loaded 30-round magazine, The Daily Advance of Elizabeth City reported.

As the River Road Middle School students were getting off the bus, the bus driver called an assistant principal after smelling marijuana on the student, authorities said.

Wooten said the assistant principal told the school re-

source officer, who searched the student and found the rifle and marijuana before taking the student into custody.

Mom charged for telling child to hit opponent

CA LOS ANGELES — A California woman was criminally charged for telling her daughter to "hit her" before the girl punched an opposing player in the head during a basketball game.

The punch was thrown as two club teams played during a tournament in Garden Grove, south of Los Angeles.

Latira Shonty Hunt was caught on cellphone video yelling "you better hit her for that" after her daughter fell to the ground on a previous play involving the victim, Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer said.

The blow crumpled the 15-year-old victim "to the floor like a rag doll," Spitzer said. The girl suffered a concussion, according to her family's lawyer.

The girl who threw the punch is the daughter of former NBA player Corey Benjamin, who issued an apology shortly after seeing the video.

More than \$132,000 in drugs seized from home

WI MILWAUKEE — The Wood County Sheriff's Department seized over \$132,000 worth of illegal drugs, including fentanyl, cocaine and ecstasy, during a search of a home in the Town of Saratoga.

The sheriff's department announced the seizure, saying it was part of a long-term investi-

gation with state law enforcement agencies. Police officers also found marijuana, \$16,000 in cash and high-valued jewelry. A woman who lived at the home was arrested.

"Wood County has seen 12 overdose deaths to date this year," Wood County Sheriff Shawn Becker said in a statement. "The majority of those deaths were connected to fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine. This seizure likely saved many lives in Central Wisconsin."

Civil War museum reopens in new location

IN INDIANAPOLIS — A Civil War museum has reopened in the Indiana War Memorial after having to move from its previous site at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in downtown Indianapolis because water leaks endangered the collection.

All the artifacts were moved from Col. Eli Lilly Civil War Museum in 2018 and stored at the Indiana War Memorial a few blocks north of Monument Circle.

Indiana War Memorials Commission director Stewart Goodwin told the Indianapolis Business Journal that work on redesigning the museum took about two years.

Sheriff charged after trying to break up fight

KY HAZARD — A sheriff has been charged with assaulting a teenage girl while trying to break up a fight at an eastern Kentucky high school, police said.

Owsley County Sheriff Brent

Lynch, 47, is also part of the Owsley County High School coaching staff and intervened in a fight during a girls' basketball game at Perry County Central High School, Kentucky State Police said in a statement.

Trooper Matthew Gayheart told news outlets Lynch is alleged to have rushed the floor during the fight between players and struck a Perry County Central player while breaking up the fight.

State's longest serving prison inmate dies

IA DES MOINES — A man convicted of killing a northeast Iowa police officer nearly 65 years ago who later saw his death sentenced commuted to life in prison has died at the state penitentiary in Fort Madison, Iowa corrections officials said.

Warren John Nutter, 84, was the state's longest serving inmate, Iowa Department of Corrections spokesman Nick Crawford said. He died Wednesday morning in a hospice room of the Iowa State Penitentiary, where he had been housed due to chronic illness.

He was 18 when he was sent to prison after pleading guilty to killing 52-year-old Independence police officer Harold Pearce in January 1956.

The Des Moines Register recounted that Pearce was questioning Nutter and four other teens at a sheriff's office about a gas station robbery when Nutter asked to use the restroom.

Officials said he climbed out an open window, retrieved a shotgun from a car outside and shot Pearce.

— From Associated Press



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Teams wary as big names dot COVID list

Associated Press

Ndamukong Suh, Chris Harris Jr., Aaron Rodgers, Cameron Jordan. Ty Montgomery, Mark Ingram.

Chandler Jones, Keenan Allen, T.J. Watt, Mikah Fitzpatrick, Ben Roethlisberger, Nick Chubb, David Njoku.

No, it's not a Pro Bowl ballot, just a smattering of the big names that have landed on the NFL's ever more crowded reserve/COVID-19 list this season.

De'vondre Campbell, Davonte Adams, Harrison Smith, Amari Cooper, Randy Gregory.

Like any fan setting a fantasy roster, filling out a betting sheet or just cheering on their team, Denver Broncos coach Vic Fangio can't help but raise an eyebrow or two at the relentless stream of stars popping up on the virus list, landing themselves in quarantine and their teams in a conundrum.

"You notice it, obviously, and you know it can happen to you. It's not just, 'Well, that's their problem,'" Fangio said Monday as three dozen players across the league were being added to the reserve/COVID-19 list either because they contracted the virus or were close to someone who did.

Among the 36 fresh additions to the list on Monday were Jalen Ramsey and Tyler Higbee, who missed the Los Angeles Rams' 30-23 win at Arizona that tightened the NFC

race.

"It could end up being our problem just like last year — if you remember — when we were on the wrong side of New England's problem," Fangio said. "We lost our bye and had our game got postponed. I told the team, 'Hey, it could come our way at some point.'

"It did, as you guys know. Yeah, you notice it."

Last year, the league made the Broncos play a game without a quarterback because all four of theirs were quarantined after one of them came down sick with COVID-19 and the rest were deemed close contacts.

NFL owners breathed a huge sigh of relief when they got through the entire 2020 regular and postseason without a cancellation — and the league was thankful Tom Brady didn't get sick until after he'd won his seventh Super Bowl.

Even with vaccinations available this season, there are more than 100 players who have refused to get jabbed, putting themselves and their teams at risk down the stretch and into the playoffs.

If a vaccinated player gets a breakthrough case of COVID-19, he can return to action as soon as he's asymptomatic and has two negative tests 24 hours apart. Unvaccinated players who get sick have to sit out a minimum of 10 days as Rodgers, the

league's reigning MVP, had to do last month. The league says the vaccination rate among players is over 94.3%, which still leaves about 126 of the 2,208 players on 53-man active rosters and 16-man practice squads unvaccinated and therefore subject to stricter protocols such as daily nasal tests and a prohibition from interacting with teammates in the locker room or even on their own time away from work.

Last summer, more than two dozen Pro Football Hall of Famers teamed up as part of a community outreach and education program to help build COVID-19 vaccination confidence in the general public.

They also had a message for NFL players who didn't want to get vaccinated.

"We're very fortunate to play a sport, a game, and get paid extremely well for it. And here in America the one thing we deem very necessary is our freedom of choice," said Rod Woodson, class of 2009. "And they do get to exercise that freedom by not getting vaccinated.

"But the one thing I love that the NFL did this year was to say, OK, you're exercising your freedom not to get it, well we're going to exercise our freedom as a company. If you cause a game to be canceled, first of all you're going to forfeit that and then we're going to fine you. And nobody gets paid on either team on top of that."

Donald has three sacks as Rams surge past Cards

Associated Press

GLENDALE, Ariz. — From the first play to the last, Aaron Donald and the Los Angeles Rams showed they're still a heavyweight in the NFC West.

The six-time All-Pro finished with three sacks — the first on the initial play from scrimmage and the last as time expired — while Matthew Stafford threw for 287 yards and three touchdowns to lead the Rams past the Arizona Cardinals 30-23 on Monday night.

"That's what the best do. They play their best when the best is required," Los Angeles coach Sean McVay said. "We talk about competitive greatness all the time and this guy is the epitome of competitive greatness. Really proud of Aaron. Not at all

surprised."

The Cardinals (10-3) will have to wait at least one more week before clinching their first playoff spot since 2015. Kyler Murray threw two interceptions that led to Rams touchdowns.

Cooper Kupp and Odell Beckham Jr. both caught touchdowns for Los Angeles (9-4), which won its second straight, pulled within one game of Arizona in the division and looks rejuvenated following a three-game losing streak in November.

Kupp had 13 catches for 123 yards, the eighth 100-yard game this season for the NFL's receiving leader.

The Cardinals had a chance to tie the game in the final seconds after recovering an onside kick. But a holding call wiped out

Murray's long run on the first play of the drive and Arizona couldn't produce a last-second miracle. On the final play, Donald charged toward Murray and the quarterback fell to the turf instead of getting run over by the 280-pound defensive lineman.

"We had a game plan, we stuck to it and it was fun," Donald said.

Stafford — who had plenty of protection and time to throw most of the night — hit Van Jefferson on a high-arching pass for a 52-yard touchdown to push the Rams ahead 20-13 early in the third quarter. The veteran quarterback dissected a Cardinals defense that had been among the best against the pass in the NFL this season.

A few plays later, Murray was picked off for the second time. Leonard Floyd tipped the ball into the air, caught it and then tumbled downfield to the Arizona 19. Seven plays later, Stafford hit a diving Kupp for a 4-yard touchdown and the Rams led 27-13.

James Conner sliced through the Los Angeles defense for an 8-yard touchdown early in the fourth quarter to cut the deficit to 27-20.

Murray finished with 383 yards passing as the Cardinals tried to catch up late.

Arizona's Matt Prater made his second 53-yard field goal of the first half — moments after Murray scrambled for 16 yards and got out of bounds with 1 second left — to tie the game 13-all at halftime.

Slumping Memphis faces crucial week

Associated Press

This was supposed to be the week that Memphis, with its star-filled recruiting class led by Emoni Bates and Jalen Duren, was expected to make a national statement with games scheduled against Alabama and Tennessee.

Instead, the Tigers are starting at perhaps one last chance to turn their season around.

After briefly climbing into the top 10, the Tigers have proceeded to lose four straight, lowlighted by a 74-72 home loss to Murray State that left them with their longest losing streak in nearly five years. And now a less-than-confident bunch faces two of the top teams in the SEC in the sixth-ranked Crimson Tide on Tuesday and the No. 18 Volunteers on Saturday.

"You have to keep working. That's all we can do," said an exasperated Memphis coach Penny Hardaway after losing to the Racers. "All I can do as

a coach is to keep working. You've said every speech. You've said everything that needs to be said. As a leader, I just have to keep pushing us in the right direction."

The Tigers (5-4) brought back a team that won 20 games and won the NIT last season, and the arrival of Bates and Duren along with four-star prospect Josh Minott was supposed to push them into the upper echelon of college basketball.

Instead, they were pounded by Iowa State and then lost to Georgia, Ole Miss and Murray State by a combined nine points, and now face the prospect of having to win the American Athletic Conference to have any NCAA tourney hopes.

"It's really straight positivity right now," Memphis guard Tyler Harris said. "When we go on the court, we think we're going to win the game. And right now, when we see every-

body in the locker room, we still think we can win out."

New No. 1

Baylor (9-0) will put its nation-leading 15-game win streak on the line as the nation's fourth No. 1 team in the last four weeks when it faces Oregon on Saturday. The Bears are coming off a 57-36 throttling of then-No. 6 Villanova last weekend that pushed them into the top spot for the first time since a four-week run during the 2019-20 season.

The Bears have done it all despite losing their standout backcourt of Davion Mitchell, Jared Butler and MaCio Teague — perhaps the best trio in school history — along with do-everything forward Mark Vital.

"The coaching staff has done a great job," said Bears guard Adam Flagler, a member of last year's national title-winning team. "James (Akinjo) coming in as well, leading by example,

working hard every day."

Will the '0' go?

Baylor is among seven undefeated teams left in Division I this season, and some of the others have been quite surprising. No. 11 Iowa State won just twice last season but can run its record to 11-0 against Southeastern Louisiana on Sunday, while No. 23 Colorado State can improve on the second 10-0 start in school history against Tulsa on Saturday.

Eighth-ranked Arizona (9-0), led by new coach Tommy Lloyd, plays Northern Colorado on Wednesday and Cal Baptist on Saturday; No. 10 USC (10-0) faces California-Irvine on Wednesday and Georgia Tech on Saturday; and No. 19 LSU (9-0) plays Northwestern State on Tuesday and Louisiana Tech on Saturday.

San Francisco (10-0) is receiving votes in the Top 25. The Dons face Grand Canyon and Arizona State this week.

Stephenson's resiliency peaks during his big night

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Vegas Golden Knights center Chandler Stephenson was without injured linemates Mark Stone and Max Pacioretty for nearly a month.

Stephenson skated with 11 different line combinations, from the first through the third lines to support the injury-ravaged Knights, and tied for the team lead with 10 points with Jonathan Marchessault during the 12 games both Stone and Pacioretty missed.

On Sunday, it was the team supporting Stephenson as he helped lead Vegas to a 6-4 victory over the Minnesota Wild after the 27-year-old missed his first game of the season two days earlier. Considering his resiliency throughout the season, it came as no surprise Stephenson registered a career-high four assists after missing Friday so he could attend his grandmother's funeral.

"What a tribute, if you're a hockey player, to a loved one that's passed," Golden Knights coach Peter DeBoer said. "When you con-

sider the fact he flew to western Canada, attended the funeral, flew back on fumes here to give us a game like that — that's pretty exceptional and a great tribute."

Stephenson has been quite the discovery since being acquired from Washington on Dec. 2, 2019, for a fifth-round pick in the 2021 NHL draft, going from a bottom-six forward with the Capitals to skating between two of Vegas' most dangerous offensive players while emerging as one as well.

Since arriving in Las Vegas, Stephenson is sixth on the team with 52 assists, tied with William Karlsson with 31 goals, and ranks seventh with 83 points.

Against the Wild, the Knights' top line of Stephenson (career-high four assists), Stone (goal, two assists) and Pacioretty (goal, two assists) combined for 10 points.

"Just a special night; I lost my grandma," said an emotional Stephenson, who leads the team with 26 points. "I think she was helping me tonight with that one. I've never had four points, so something needs to be said about

that. It's tough and a sad couple of days, but I've had a lot of support here. Team, staff, players, everyone was there for me. It helps you get through it."

Stephenson was in on the team's first goal, feeding Pacioretty from the high slot to send three Minnesota defenders to the left side of the zone. Zach Whitecloud pinched in unannounced behind the defenders, took the feed from Pacioretty, and promptly gave Vegas a 1-0 lead.

Later, with the game tied in the first, Stephenson skated into the left circle, once again drawing defenders away, and sent the puck down low to Stone. A touch pass from Stone landed on the blade of Evgenii Dadoonov for a one-timer to put the Knights back on top.

With the game tied 3-3 midway through the second, Stone stripped Minnesota star Kirill Kaprizov and nudged the puck to a streaking Stephenson, whose feed through two defenders set Pacioretty up for a breakaway that gave Vegas a one-goal lead.

AP All-America: Tide lead with 3 on 1st team

Associated Press

Heisman Trophy winner Bryce Young and Alabama teammates Will Anderson Jr. and Jameson Williams have been selected All-Americans by The Associated Press, giving the top-ranked Crimson Tide more players on the first team than any other school.

The AP All-America team, selected by a panel of Top 25 college football poll voters, was released Monday.

Young became the fourth Alabama player, and first Tide quarterback, to win the Heisman on Saturday night. Anderson, who leads the nation in sacks with 15.5, was fifth in the Heisman voting.

Alabama (12-1) will face No. 4 Cincinnati (13-0) in the College Football Playoff semifinals Dec. 31.

The Tide will bring five players who received AP All-American honors into their playoff game. Tackle Evan Neal made the second team and safety Jordan Battle was a third-team selection.

Cincinnati is represented on the first team by cornerback Ahmad Gardner, who was a second-team All-American last season. Fellow Bearcats cornerback Coby Bryant made the second team.

The other playoff semifinal on New Year's Eve, No. 2 Michigan (12-1) against No. 3 Georgia (12-1), will feature four more first-team All-Americans.

Defensive end Aidan Hutchinson, the Heisman runner-up, and kicker Jake Moody are

All-Americans for the Wolverines. Georgia's top-ranked defense is represented by defensive tackle Jordan Davis and linebacker Nakobe Dean.

Michigan linebacker David Ojabo was chosen for the second team and running back Hassan Haskins was a third-team selection.

Georgia matched Alabama with five players across the three teams. Defensive tackle Devonte Wyatt and freshman tight end Brock Bowers made the second team and safety Lewis Cine was a third-team choice.

Pittsburgh quarterback Kenny Pickett made the second team and fellow Heisman finalist C.J. Stroud from Ohio State was the third-team QB.

Iowa State running back Breece Hall is the only player to repeat as a first-team AP All-American this season.

Iowa center Tyler Linderbaum and Texas A&M guard Kenyon Green each were first-team selections this season after making the second team in 2020.

Kentucky tackle Darian Kinnard and Oregon edge rusher Kayvon Thibodeaux went from third-team in 2020 to first-team in 2021.

The AP added two players, one on each side of the ball, to the teams this year, the first change to the All-America structure since 2006. To reflect a game that features more passing than ever before — plus more schools playing major college football — the offenses now feature three receivers and the defenses include an extra defensive back.

With more receiver spots to fill, Ohio State became the first school to have three wideouts earn All-America honors in the same season. Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson made the second team and Jaxon Smith-Njigba was a third-team pick.

Add in Alabama's Williams, an Ohio State transfer, and four receivers who played for the Buckeyes in 2020 made the AP All-America teams.

The Buckeyes led all schools, placing eight players on the three teams. Joining the three receivers and Stroud were offensive linemen Thayer Munford and Nichola Petit-Frere, defensive lineman Haskell Garrett and kicker Noah Ruggles, who all made the second team.

Breakdown

First-teamers by school

Alabama — 3.

Georgia, Michigan, Oregon, Texas A&M — 2.

Auburn, Baylor, Boston College, Cincinnati, Colorado State, Houston, Iowa, Iowa State, Kansas State, Kentucky, Michigan State, North Carolina State, Pittsburgh, Purdue, San Diego State, Utah — 1.

First-teamers by conference

SEC — 9.

Big Ten — 5.

Pac-12 — 3.

ACC — 3.

Big 12 — 3.

American — 2.

Mountain West — 2.

Curry closes in on record, Warriors defeat Pacers

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Stephen Curry finished one three-pointer shy of the NBA career record on Monday night, making five three-pointers and scoring 26 points to help the Golden State Warriors rally late for a 102-100 win over the Indiana Pacers.

Curry is closing in on Ray Allen's record of 2,973. The chase resumes Tuesday night on one of the NBA's grandest stages — Madison Square Garden — against the New York Knicks.

Domantas Sabonis led Indiana with 30 points and 11 rebounds and Malcolm Brogdon added 23 points and eight assists, but it wasn't enough to protect a lead

down the stretch.

While Curry finished 5-for-15 from beyond the arc, his final three got the Warriors within 100-98 and he tied the score when he drove for a layup with 48.5 seconds left. Kevin Looney's putback with 13.8 seconds left broke the tie and the Pacers then turned it over.

Clippers 111, Suns 95: Marcus Morris had season highs of 24 points and 11 rebounds, leading host Los Angeles over Phoenix in the teams' first meeting since the Western Conference finals.

Raptors 124, Kings 101: Chris Boucher matched his season high with 17 points, Yuta Watanabe had a season-best 12

points and 10 rebounds, and host Toronto used a 70-point first half to rout Sacramento.

Cavaliers 105, Heat 94: Kevin Love made five three-pointers and scored all 23 of his points in the second half, leading host Cleveland to its fourth straight win.

Celtics 117, Bucks 103: Jayson Tatum scored 16 of his 42 points in the fourth quarter and Boston beat visiting Milwaukee.

Rockets 132, Hawks 126: Eric Gordon scored 32 points, D.J. Augustin added 22 and Houston rallied from 19 points down and handed host Atlanta its fifth straight home loss.

Grizzlies 126, 76ers 91: Dil-

lon Brooks scored 23 points, Jaren Jackson Jr. added 22 and host Memphis shot better than 50% in a dominating win over Philadelphia..

Mavericks 120, Hornets 96: Kristaps Porzingis had 24 points, 13 rebounds and five blocks, and host Dallas hit a season-high 19 three-pointers in a rout of Charlotte to sweep a back-to-back without All-Star guard Luka Doncic.

Nuggets 113, Wizards 107: Nikola Jokic had 28 points, 19 rebounds and nine assists, and host Denver built a big lead before holding off Washington in coach Wes Unseld Jr.'s return to the Mile High City.