

Studies show boosters bring omicron shield

Associated Press

Moderna said Monday that a booster dose of its COVID-19 vaccine should offer protection against the rapidly spreading omicron variant.

Moderna said lab tests showed the half-dose booster shot increased by 37 times the level of so-called neutralizing antibodies able to fight omicron.

And a full-dose booster was even stronger, triggering an 83-fold jump in antibody levels, although with an increase in the usual side effects, the company said. While half-dose shots are being used for most Moderna boosters, a full-dose third shot has been recommended for people with weakened immune systems.

Moderna announced the preliminary laboratory data in a press release and it hasn't yet undergone scientific review. But testing by the U.S. National Institutes of Health, announced last week by Dr. Anthony Fauci, found a similar jump.

Pfizer's testing likewise found its COVID-19 vaccine triggered a similarly big jump in omicron-fighting antibodies. The vaccines made by Pfizer and by Moderna, both made with mRNA technology, are used by many countries around the world to fight the coronavirus.

Together, the available evidence backs health authorities' increasing pleas for people to get their boosters as soon as they're eligible.

Antibody levels predict how well a vaccine may prevent infection with the coronavirus, but they are just one layer of the immune system's defenses. Other research suggests the vaccine should still induce good protection against severe disease if people do experience a breakthrough infection.

Both Moderna and Pfizer are developing shots to better match the omicron variant in case they're needed.

Marines again not allowed to wear fitness attire inside exchanges, commissaries

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Running errands in running shorts is a threat to good order and discipline, the Marine Corps has decided, so it's letting bases bar troops from wearing fitness gear at commissaries and exchanges.

The policy change was instituted a little over a year after former Defense Secretary Mark Esper issued a widely publicized November 2020 memo allowing military and civilian shoppers to wear workout clothing at on-base stores.

Prior to Esper's memo, installation commanders throughout the military could set local dress codes, resulting in rules about athletic attire at the grocery and department stores that sometimes varied across regions or even within services.

The rules were sometimes little-known or poorly enforced, service members have said.

But a few months ago, several Marine commands began issuing rules that contradicted Esper's military-wide policy.

It turns out that Commandant Gen. David Berger had gotten the Navy secretary's approval for an exception to that policy in a September memo that was not widely disseminated.

"Due to this exception, the Marine Corps has not authorized service members to wear athletic attire at commissaries and exchanges aboard Marine Corps installations," Capt. Ryan Bruce, a Marine Corps spokesman, told Stars and Stripes by phone last week.

Esper had given service secretaries permission to grant variances based on mission requirements and the need to maintain military order.

The reason the Corps sought one was that "wear of athletic attire ... detracts from the high standards of personal appearance and personal conduct that contribute to good order and discipline," Berger wrote in his request to the Navy

secretary.

Bruce emailed a copy of that memo Wednesday to Stars and Stripes.

The commandant said the policy exception would authorize local dress codes and allow commanders to update and enforce regulations that require Marines to wear appropriate attire at all times.

The Marine Corps has among the most stringent servicewide rules for its members' civilian attire. For example, it requires them to wear belts if their pants have belt loops, and it limits how much of an undershirt can be exposed.

But the exception Berger received allows for rules that are not limited to just Marines, Bruce said.

On several Marine bases in the southwestern United States, all service members and civilians are prohibited from wearing athletic shirts and shorts, swimwear and "Spandex type gym attire" at stores, says an order that Marine Corps Installations West at Camp Pendleton, Calif., issued in October.

It allows other on-base facilities to set dress standards consistent with that policy.

At Camp Lejeune, N.C., Marine Corps Installations East issued an order a few weeks later that bars Marines and sailors from wearing civilian athletic attire or fitness uniforms to most base facilities.

That goes for the main exchange, the commissary, convenience stores, the base theater, the golf course and the stables. Workout attire is still OK for athletic facilities, pools, beaches and the marina.

New signs posted at the exchange at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point in North Carolina now tell service members that athletic attire is not appropriate there. The fine print cites the commandant's memo.

"We take pride in our appearance," says a banner at the top of the poster.

Pentagon issues rules for targeting extremism within

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Warning that extremism in the ranks is increasing, Pentagon officials are issuing detailed new rules prohibiting service members from actively engaging in extremist activities. The new guidelines come nearly a year after some current and former service members participated in the riot at the U.S. Capitol, triggering a broad department review.

Senior defense officials told The Associated Press that fewer than 100 military members are known to have been involved in substantiated cases of extremist activity in the past year, but they warned that the number may grow given recent spikes in domestic violent extremism, particularly among veterans.

Officials said the new policy doesn't largely change what is prohibited, but is more of an effort to make sure troops are clear on what they can and can't do, while still protecting their First Amendment free speech rights. And for the first time, it is far more specific about social media.

The new policy lays out in detail the banned activities, which range from advocating terrorism or supporting the overthrow of the government to fundraising or rallying on behalf of an extremist group or "liking" or reposting extremist views on social media. The rules also specify that commanders must determine two things in order for someone to be held accountable: that the action was an extremist activity, as defined in the rules, and that the service member "actively participated" in that prohibited activity.

What was wrong yesterday is still wrong today, said one senior defense official. But several officials said that as a study group spoke with service members this year, they found that many wanted clearer definitions of what was not allowed. The officials spoke about the new rules on condition of anonymity because they have not yet been made public.

The rules, said the officials, focus on behavior not ideology. So service members can have whatever political, religious or other beliefs that they want, but their actions and behavior are governed.

US base in Spain seeking EU virus pass for troops

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The Navy aims to get Spanish officials' authorization for U.S. personnel stationed there to be eligible for the European Union's COVID-19 certificate, which is increasingly needed amid a surge brought on by the omicron variant.

On Monday, the Andalusia region began requiring people 12 and older to have the EU pass to enter a variety of leisure establishments, including restaurants, bars and hotels. The region is home to Naval Station Rota.

NS Rota said Monday that it is seeking a solution allowing its community members to register for the pass.

It was unclear Monday if or when service members would be able to get the certification.

"In the meantime, the (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) vaccination card should be accepted at the local establishments requiring the EU pass, and our members' use of those establishments should not be affected," said Lt. Lyndsi Gutierrez, a spokesman for NS Rota.

Valid in EU countries, an EU COVID-19

pass certifies that a person is fully vaccinated, has tested negative for COVID-19 or recovered from the virus. Andalusia will require the certificate until at least Jan. 15, Spanish News Today reported Friday.

Italy passed similar rules in July requiring certification for entry into restaurants, bars, sports arenas and other public venues.

The rules also allowed Americans to show their CDC card in place of the EU pass, and Italy later authorized U.S. military members to obtain an EU certificate.

European countries — including Spain and Italy, where the United States has sizable military presences — are struggling to address rising COVID-19 caseloads.

In hopes of limiting transmission of the virus during the holiday season, many countries are adding restrictions that not only limit the unvaccinated from accessing public venues but also encourage vaccinated people to get booster shots.

The Italian Health Ministry reported 24,259 new COVID-19 cases and 97 deaths Sunday. Seven regions, including Friuli Venezia Giulia, which is home to Aviano Air Base, are in the country's yellow risk zone.

Marines see 180 cases on Okinawa

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND MARI HIGA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The governor of Okinawa called for a genome analysis of Marine Corps coronavirus cases at Camp Hansen after two base employees contracted the omicron variant last week.

At least 180 personnel at Hansen are infected with the coronavirus, Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Matsuno Hirokazu said Monday at a Tokyo news conference. Visiting Kadena Air Base on Sunday, Hirokazu said he would pressure the U.S. military to take more thorough mitigation measures and "ease the concern of local people."

"The Japanese government is working closely with the U.S. military," he said. The Japanese government also requested the U.S.

military limit movement on and off the base.

Marine Corps Installation Pacific on Friday reported "multiple" cases of COVID-19 among a rotational unit of newly arrived Marines. The command did not specify whether the new cases are the omicron variant.

The Marines were quarantined at Hansen after they arrived at Kadena on a non-commercial flight, the public health spokesman said. Kadena is a stop for the Patriot Express, a U.S. government-contracted air service that moves military personnel between the United States and its overseas bases.

After the positive tests came back, the base launched an "aggressive" contact tracing, testing and quarantine program to prevent further spread, Lt. Col. Matthew Hilton, spokesman for the installations command, said in Friday's statement.

Missionaries made bold escape in Haiti

Associated Press

Captive missionaries in Haiti found freedom last week by making a daring overnight escape, eluding their kidnappers and walking for miles over difficult, moonlit terrain with an infant and other children in tow, according to the agency they work for, officials said Monday.

The group of 12 navigated by stars to reach safety after a two-month kidnapping ordeal, officials with the Christian Aid Ministries, the Ohio-based agency that the captive missionaries work for, said Monday at a news conference.

The detailed accounting of their journey to safety comes after news Thursday that the missionaries were free.

A total of 17 people from the missionary group — 12 adults and five minors — were abducted Oct. 16 shortly after visiting an orphanage in Ganthier, in the Croix-des-Bouquets area, where they verified it had received aid from CAM and played with the children, CAM has said. The group included 16 Americans and one Canadian.

Their captors from the 400 Mawozo gang

initially demanded millions of dollars in ransom. Five other captives had earlier reached freedom. It is still unclear if any ransom was paid.

CAM General Director David Troyer did say supporters of CAM raised funds for possible use for a ransom, but he refused to say whether one was paid for any of the releases.

The 12 who fled last week carried the infant and 3-year-old, wrapping the baby to protect her from the briars and brambles, said CAM spokesman Weston Showalter.

“After a number of hours of walking, day began to dawn and they eventually found someone who helped to make a phone call for help,” he said, his voice beginning to choke. “They were finally free.”

The 12 were flown to Florida on a U.S. Coast Guard flight, and later reunited with five hostages who were released earlier. CAM displayed photos at the news conference showing the freed hostages being reunited, along with a video of the group singing a song that had inspired them during their captivity.

The missionaries were taken hostage on their way back from the orphanage on the af-

ternoon of Oct. 16.

“They had no idea what was ahead of them,” Showalter said. Only five or 10 minutes after getting underway, they saw a roadblock up ahead. The group’s driver — the one Canadian in the group — turned around, but a pickup truck pursued them, and “gang members surrounded the van,” CAM spokesman Weston Showalter said. He said reports that the driver was a Haitian national were not accurate.

He said they were initially crowded into a small room in a house, but were moved around several times during their captivity.

They were not physically harmed by the kidnappers, Showalter said. He said the main physical challenges included the heat, mosquitoes and contaminated water for bathing.

Over time, the hostages agreed to try to escape, and chose the night of Dec. 15 to flee.

“When they sensed the timing was right, they found a way to open the door that was closed and blocked, filed silently to the path they had chosen to follow, and quickly left the place they were held, despite the fact that numerous guards were close by,” Showalter said.

Judge: Former Army Ranger charged with 53 counts in Capitol riot will remain jailed

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

PITTSBURGH — A federal judge on Friday ruled that a former teacher and ex-Army Ranger charged with 53 counts related to storming the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 and assaulting police will remain jailed pending trial.

U.S. District Judge Trevor McFadden, presiding in Washington, D.C., denied a motion for release by Robert Morss, 28, of Glenshaw, Pa.

Morss, a former substitute teacher and an Afghanistan combat veteran, is charged with multiple counts, including robbery and assault, related to storming the Capitol and battling with police.

In a motion for release, he and his lawyers maintain that he has been subjected to poor treatment in jail and cited his military service, his lack of criminal record, a pending job in the Washington area and an offer of a place to live with a fellow veteran as reasons to let him go.

The U.S. attorney’s office opposed the request, saying Morss acted as a leader on Jan. 6 and repeatedly assaulted police officers trying to protect the Capitol.

“Every person who was present without authority in the Capitol on January 6 contributed

to the chaos of that day and the danger posed to law enforcement, the United States Vice President, members of Congress, and the peaceful transfer of power,” wrote Assistant U.S. Attorney Melissa Jackson. “However, Morss violently led that effort and thus his specific conduct aggravated that chaos and danger.”

Jackson also said Morss has shown no regrets, citing a speech he wrote that agents found on his iCloud account. The speech is undated, but Morss labeled it “should I have to appeal before a judge what I am gonna say.”

In the speech, he wrote, “You ask if I regret my involvement and what happened on the sixth my answer is (a) resounding no.”

He goes on to denounce Congress, saying, “that capitol building isn’t a temple at all it’s a theater where soothsayers and charlatans strip the American people of their rights. We don’t need Trump anymore. The people across the political spectrum and from sea to shining sea have woken up to the long train of abuses that this twisted body of government has done.”

Morss, 28, grew up in Nevada and joined the Army at 17, serving three tours in Afghanistan as a Ranger. His family said he was honorably discharged after four years.

Warren, Booker, both vaccinated, have COVID-19

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sens. Elizabeth Warren, of Massachusetts, and Cory Booker, of New Jersey, say they have tested positive for COVID-19, as the country deals with another surge in cases and the emergence of the omicron variant.

In separate statements Sunday, the Democrats said they had been fully vaccinated with two doses and a booster and their symptoms were mild. They also encouraged others to get the trio of shots if eligible.

Warren tweeted: “Thankfully, I am only experiencing mild symptoms & am grateful for the protection provided against serious illness that comes from being vaccinated & boosted.”

She didn’t elaborate on where she might have contracted the virus but said she’s regularly tested and turned up negative for COVID-19 earlier this past week.

In a statement from his office, Booker said: “I’m beyond grateful to have received two doses of vaccine and, more recently, a booster — I’m certain that without them I would be doing much worse.”

Death toll rises after typhoon in Philippines

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — The death toll from the strongest typhoon to batter the Philippines this year climbed to 375, with more than 50 others still missing and several central provinces struggling with downed communications and power outages and pleading for food and water, officials said Monday.

At its strongest, Typhoon Rai packed sustained winds of 121 miles per hour with gusts of up

to 168 mph before blowing out into the South China Sea on Friday.

At least 375 people were killed, 56 are missing and 500 were injured, according to the national police. The toll may still increase because several towns and villages remained out of reach due to downed communications and power outages, although massive cleanup and repair efforts were underway.

Many were killed by falling trees and collapsing walls, flash

floods and landslides. A 57-year-old man was found dead hanging from a tree branch, and a woman was blown away and died in Negros Occidental province, police said.

Gov. Arlene Bag-ao of Dinagat Islands, among the southeastern provinces first hit by the typhoon, said Rai's ferocity on her island province of more than 130,000 people was worse than that of Typhoon Haiyan, one of the most powerful and deadliest typhoons on record

that devastated the central Philippines in November 2013 but did not inflict any casualties in Dinagat.

Dinagat and several other typhoon-hit provinces remained without electricity and communications and many residents needed construction materials, food and water. Bag-ao and other provincial officials traveled to nearby regions that had cellphone signals to seek aid and coordinate recovery efforts with the national government.

Woman gave birth in Tesla while it was driving itself

The Washington Post

Yiran Sherry woke up on a September morning to do laundry at her Pennsylvania home and to prepare her 3-year-old son for school. But those plans of going about her daily chores were thwarted when her daughter decided to make her debut to the world in the front-passenger seat of a black model 3 Tesla.

"I was anticipating a nice day at the hospital," her husband, Keating Sherry, 34, said in an interview. "This one, it was a shock."

Their daughter is believed to be the world's first Tesla baby, the Guardian reported.

The electric-vehicle manufacturer did not respond to a request for comment Sunday.

Despite her water breaking that Thursday morning, Yiran, 33, insisted that her husband drop off their young son, Rafa, at preschool before tending to her — a decision she now appreciates.

She had gone from having contractions an hour apart to pangs that sped up in less than 30 minutes.

The couple, with son in tow, headed to Paoli Hospital, where they planned to welcome their baby girl.

But rush-hour traffic slowed

the seven-mile trip, making what should've been a 20-minute ride last much longer.

Yiran crouched in the front passenger seat of the car, coping with the pain and wondering what to do. The pain of contraction was familiar, but her son's Caesarean birth had happened in a hospital.

"I was initially trying to hold it, but halfway through I was thinking: Should I push?" she said. "From TV or movies, I thought maybe I should push. ... I should've realized she would come."

Keating enabled Autopilot, a mode in which the car matches the speed of other vehicles on the road and brakes when needed. The feature is meant to reduce the work of the driver, according to Tesla, which is exactly what Keating needed.

He placed his left hand on the steering wheel and offered his right for Yiran to squeeze in pain as Rafa sat in the back seat, asking whether his mom was OK.

Yiran's focus was on managing her pain and occasionally glancing at the car's map to see how far they were in their journey.

By the time the family reached the hospital, the baby was already out.

NASA releases new photos of Jupiter, Ganymede recording

The Washington Post

As it seeks answers about the cosmos and what they mean for Earth's origins, NASA on Friday announced a slew of discoveries about Jupiter. And scientists brought home an interstellar tune from the road.

The Juno spacecraft is gathering data about the origin of the solar system's biggest planet — in which more than 1,300 Earths could fit. Among its recent findings are photos from inside the planet's ring, a map of its magnetic field, details of its atmosphere and a trippy soundtrack from a spacecraft's travels around one of its moons.

But it's not exactly a song, or even perceptible to the human ear.

The radio emissions Juno recorded are not what a person would hear if they went to Jupiter — space is a vacuum and does not carry soundwaves like air does on Earth. But the probe zooming through space captured the electric and magnetic emissions that scientists later converted into perceptible sound. Turns out, orbiting Ganymede, which is one of Jupiter's moons and the largest satellite in the solar system, kind of sounds like R2-D2.

Juno, which NASA launched in 2011 and began orbiting Jupiter in July 2016, is the eighth spacecraft

to visit Jupiter, and the first to probe below the giant planet's thick gas cover. It fought Jupiter's extreme temperatures and hazardous radiation to survey its north and south poles, chugging along despite a lack of sunshine on its solar panels.

Uncovering the secrets behind Jupiter's workings could shed light on the evolution of other planets and the formation of the solar system itself, said Scott Bolton, the Juno mission's principal investigator.

"We're trying to understand where we came from, how we got here," Bolton told The Washington Post. "And Jupiter is a big part of that story."

To accomplish that objective, the spacecraft has flown across the giant planet, mapping its magnetic field. The mission, which recently completed its 38th orbit, was extended this year to add flybys of Jupiter's moons — such as the one in June that led to the Ganymede audio track. The sound, Bolton said, represents an immersive experience into the mission's travels past the moon for the first time in more than two decades.

"What always impresses me is we wind up discovering all kinds of stuff that we never anticipated," said Jack Connerney, Juno's deputy principal investigator.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Fire kills worker at QVC distribution center

NC ROCKY MOUNT — Authorities have recovered the body of a man who was working at a distribution center in North Carolina for the QVC home-shopping television network when a massive fire erupted, destroying most of the facility, a local official said Sunday.

Edgecombe County Manager Eric Evans said authorities found the man's body Sunday morning at the facility near Rocky Mount.

"Fire had not actually touched that section of the building," where the body was discovered, Evans said. "An autopsy has not been done, but they are assuming it may have been through smoke inhalation."

The Edgecombe County Sheriff's Office said in a Facebook post that 21-year-old Kevin Ricks has been identified as the worker who died.

Teacher arrested after threats made in notes

MI ST. CLAIR SHORES — A suburban Detroit teacher is accused of making threats on notes that were slipped under office doors at her school.

The incident occurred Friday at Jefferson Middle School in St. Clair Shores, police said.

"One of the notes appeared to be an attempt at making a false threat in the hope of closing school. ... There was no need for initiating any lockdown or other safety protocols," Superintendent Karl Paulson said.

Macomb County prosecutor Pete Lucido said the teacher was arrested. Her alleged acts

were caught on video.

3.5 tons of trash pulled from sinkhole cave

MO STE. GENEVIEVE COUNTY — Volunteers have removed 3.5 tons of garbage from a sinkhole cave in southeast Missouri in a single day.

The Missouri Department of Conservation said Friday the focus of the recent project was an area of Ste. Genevieve County where dissolving bedrock has formed sinkholes, springs and caves.

Volunteer cavers along with Boy Scouts and community focused on a 60-foot pit, removing 250 discarded tires and other trash.

Ex-CEO allegedly stole \$15M to fund lifestyle

NC STATESVILLE — A former CEO has been charged with embezzling more than \$15 million from her employer and using stolen money to pay for a lavish lifestyle, including travel, jewelry and family weddings, according to federal prosecutors.

Donna Osowitt Steele, of Taylorsville, N.C., also used stolen money to fund personal businesses run by her family, according to a court filing Friday by U.S. Attorney Dena King's office. Steele is charged with one count of wire fraud.

The company that employed Steele isn't named in the court filing. But prosecutors said it's a subsidiary of a foreign corporation and makes carbide products used in saw blades for the woodworking industry. The company owners live overseas, the filing says.

Prosecutors said Steele used company credit cards, checks and wire transfers to steal company funds. She allegedly charged approximately \$255,000 for stays at the Plaza Hotel in New York City, more than \$500,000 for jewelry, over \$200,000 for family wedding expenses and more than \$100,000 for flowers.

Man left fingerprints on pans in boxes of meth

LA LAFAYETTE — A Louisiana man who left fingerprints on cooking pans packed in boxes with methamphetamine has been sentenced to nearly 16 years in prison.

Derrick Felton, 43, of Alexandria, was sentenced Thursday to 15 years and 8 months on drug trafficking charges, U.S. Attorney Brandon Brown said in a news release.

The statement said a postal delivery worker in Louisiana noticed in November 2017 that a box with a torn bottom appeared to hold bags of drugs.

A drug dog alerted to it and two other packages, all sent from Los Angeles to the same Louisiana address. They held a total of nearly 18 pounds of methamphetamine, which was surrounded by cooking pans, Brown said. He said two of the pans bore Felton's fingerprints.

State military apologizes for sonic boom accident

OR SALEM — Military officials in Oregon said a sonic boom that caused widespread concern on the Oregon coast that an earthquake had happened was caused by an aircraft that "inadvertently

went supersonic."

The 142nd Wing of the Oregon Air National Guard on Wednesday said the sonic boom on Tuesday was caused by aircraft. Master Sgt. Steven Conklin, spokesman for the 142nd Wing, said the military is authorized to fly supersonic 15 miles beyond the coastline, but pilots should not have the nose of the jet pointed toward the coast.

The 142nd Wing in a Facebook post apologized for causing concern among coast residents.

2 deputies suspended, jailed after sailor brawl

FL KEY WEST — Two sheriff's deputies have been suspended after they were arrested for an off-duty brawl with U.S. sailors in Key West early Saturday, leaving one of the sailors injured, officials said.

Monroe County deputies Connor Curry, 23, and Trevor Pike, 25, remained jailed Saturday morning, charged with disorderly conduct, jail records show. Pike faces an additional charge of battery.

The sailors, whose names were not released, were charged with disorderly conduct, Key West police said in a press release.

Police said the deputies and sailors began arguing shortly before 2 a.m. on Duval Street, a popular area that has bars and restaurants. Police officers said they witnessed Pike punch a 27-year-old sailor in the face while Curry pushed him, causing the sailor to fall and strike his head. The sailor was flown by helicopter to a hospital near Miami. His condition was not released.

— From wire reports



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Divisional races coming down to wire

Associated Press

John Harbaugh again went for the win and the AFC North became even more jumbled.

The Ravens (8-6) lost their third straight game Sunday when Tyler Huntley threw incomplete to Mark Andrews on a two-point conversion attempt after Baltimore had rallied for two touchdowns in the final five minutes to get within one point against Green Bay.

The same thing happened in Week 13 at Pittsburgh. That time, Lamar Jackson threw incomplete to Andrews and the Ravens lost to the Steelers 20-19.

Baltimore's latest loss knocked the Ravens out of first place and set up a showdown at Cincinnati (8-6) for the top spot next week.

The Browns (7-6) are right behind those two teams and host Las Vegas on Monday. The Steelers (7-6-1) kept up with an impressive win over AFC South-leading Tennessee.

The division likely will come down to the final week when Baltimore hosts Pittsburgh, and Cleveland hosts Cincinnati.

Perhaps the Ravens would be in a better position if they kicked

the extra point and played for overtime against the Steelers and Packers, though there's no guarantee they would've won either game.

"It goes by situation to situation," Harbaugh said. "Those two situations you want to talk about, if you want to go back and rehash the season, I'm happy to do it. To me, in both of those cases, that gave us the best chance to win. Because we didn't win doesn't make it not true. It's still true now, just as true as it was then. So, it doesn't always work out."

Harbaugh wasn't the only coach whose aggressiveness backfired in Week 15. Chargers coach Brandon Staley passed up three field goals only to see his offense fail to convert on fourth down each time in a 34-28 overtime loss to Kansas City on Thursday night.

He also didn't apologize. "I'm never going to gamble as a coach," Staley said. "These players mean too much to me. Our team means too much to me. I'm not gambling at all. I'm definitely not going to be reckless, ever. I felt like those were advantaged situations for us. I

didn't think any one of those opportunities decreased our chances of winning. I felt like doing that made our chances of winning increase in a big way. What we're trying to establish around here is the mindset that we're going to try and go win the game on our terms, and the team is going to have to beat us."

A victory would've given Los Angeles (8-6) a season sweep over the Chiefs and put the Chargers in first place in the AFC West. Instead, the Chargers, like the Ravens, have a tougher task to reach the postseason.

The close race in the AFC North is a microcosm of the NFL in 2021.

Only the Packers (11-3) have clinched a division title. The Buccaneers (10-4) and Cowboys (10-4) have comfortable leads, but Tampa Bay missed an opportunity to win the NFC South and hurt its chances for a No. 1 seed by losing 9-0 to the Saints.

The NFC West suddenly got tighter with Arizona's stunning loss at Detroit to the previously one-win Lions. The Cardinals have a half-game lead over the Rams (9-4) going into Los An-

geles' game against Seattle on Tuesday night.

The AFC East is up for grabs with New England (9-5) and Buffalo (8-6) separated by one game. Indianapolis (8-6) is one game behind the Titans (9-5) but lost to them twice. The Chiefs (10-4) have a two-game lead over the Chargers.

This is the first time since 2002 that no teams in the AFC have clinched a playoff spot after 15 weeks, although the schedule was extended to 18 weeks this season.

Eight AFC teams are within one game of each other — the Raiders (6-7) could make it nine if they beat the Browns — in the race for three wild-card spots.

The NFC will have at least five teams within one game of each other for the last wild-card spot.

With four games remaining in Week 15, only four teams have been eliminated from playoff contention.

The NFL's first season with 17 games is setting up for a wild finish. With coaches like Harbaugh and Staley making gutsy decisions on a weekly basis, it'll make it even more exciting.

Saints frustrate Brady, Buccaneers once again

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Nobody hounds Tom Brady like the New Orleans Saints.

Cameron Jordan and the New Orleans defense gave Brady fits again, shutting down Tampa Bay's high-powered offense Sunday night as the Saints put the Buccaneers' division-title celebration plans on hold with a 9-0 victory over the reigning Super Bowl champions.

"Just a tough night. Didn't do much of anything right," said Brady, who smashed a tablet on the bench in frustration in the fourth quarter.

"I wish it was just one thing. It was a lot of things," he added.

"We just didn't play well enough. We're not going to win scoring no points."

Despite playing without coach Sean Payton on the sideline, New Orleans (7-7) beat Tampa Bay (10-4) for the seventh straight time during the regular season — fourth since Brady left New England for the Bucs in 2020.

"You can't say enough about what they did to pitch a shutout like that. And against a Brady-led offense, it's incredible," Saints quarterback Taysom Hill said. "Part of our play calling and all that was reflective of how well they were playing."

The victory gave New Orleans

a sweep of the season series between the NFC South rivals and boosted the Saints into playoff position with a hold on the conference's final wild card. It also forced Tampa Bay to wait at least another week to clinch its first division crown since 2007.

The Bucs, who won a playoff game at New Orleans last January en route to winning the Super Bowl, lead the division by three games with three weeks remaining in the regular season.

With defensive coordinator Dennis Allen standing in for Payton, who missed the game after testing positive for COVID-19, the Saints stymied the NFL's No. 1 passing and scoring

offense and ended Brady's streak of 255 consecutive starts (including playoff games) without being shut out.

Former New Orleans star Drew Brees (304) is the only quarterback with a longer run.

"This wasn't in any way a one-man show," Allen said. "This was an organization that came together and won a game."

Jordan had two of the Saints' four sacks, surpassing 100 for his career, and forced a key fumble in the lowest-scoring game of the NFL season. It was the first time Brady lost to an opponent that didn't manage a touchdown.

Lions keep Cards from clinching playoff spot

Associated Press

DETROIT — Kyler Murray had nowhere to run and his passes often missed the mark.

Murray's shaky performance helped the Detroit Lions stun the Arizona Cardinals 30-12 on Sunday.

The Cardinals (10-4) started the day tied for the NFL's best record, undefeated on the road and a win away from ending a six-year post-season drought.

Meanwhile, the Lions (2-11-1) were at the bottom of the league standings before the first snap and somehow looked as if they were the team that had more at stake.

"They were hungrier than us," Murray said. "They played harder than us."

Arizona, coming off a loss on Monday night to the NFC West-rival Los Angeles Rams, missed its chance to get in the playoffs for the first time since 2015 with a win over a team it was favored to beat by nearly two touchdowns.

"We didn't come prepared at all and it showed," Murray said.

The Cardinals can still earn a postseason berth during Week 15, but they'll need some other playoff contenders to lose or tie.

In any scenario, Murray will have to play better.

The third-year quarterback was 23-for-41 for 257 yards with a touchdown and an inter-

ception, adding up to a 72.9 passer rating. The third-year pro has had a slightly lower rating twice this season, and Arizona lost both games to the Rams and Green Bay.

Murray couldn't get away from scrappy Detroit when he tried to run, finishing with 3 yards rushing on four carries, against a scheme set up by defensive coordinator Aaron Glenn.

"We played aggressively against him and we hit him, and I think you saw the result of that," coach Dan Campbell said. "We needed to hit him and bottle him up, and AG put together a great game plan."

By the time Murray threw a touchdown pass, there was 4:40 left in the game and the Cardinals trailed by 15 points.

The Lions kicked a field goal on the ensuing drive, essentially sealing the win, and coach Kliff Kingsbury took Murray out and put backup Colt McCoy in the game.

In one of the many surprises at Ford Field, Jared Goff was the best quarterback on the turf. Goff completed 21 of 26 passes for 216 yards with three touchdowns.

Detroit's Craig Reynolds ran for a career-high 112 yards and rookie receiver Amon-Ra St. Brown had a touchdown and 90 yards receiving, setting a season high for the second straight week.

"You know the game we've talked about

playing all season? This was that game," Goff said. "This is what we knew we could do."

Arizona took its own wide-body jet, complete with 28 lie-down seats, to the game and might've gotten too comfortable on the way to the Motor City.

"They had a better sense of urgency from the start," Kingsbury lamented.

The Lions opened the game with a 15-play, 63-yard drive that took 8:50 off the clock and ended with a field goal.

The Cardinals, who gained 17 yards on their first three possessions, finally started moving the ball late in the second quarter only to have the drive end at the Detroit 3 when Murray's pass fell incomplete on fourth down.

Early in the third, Arizona settled for a field goal instead of going for it on fourth-and-3 at the Lions 11.

Detroit picked up a pair of first downs on the ensuing drive to get into the Cardinals territory before running back Godwin Igwebuike lost a fumble for the second straight week.

Two snaps later, cornerback Amani Oruwariye fully extended to pick off a pass Murray threw to the outside toward A.J. Green, who didn't come back to the ball, and returned it 50 yards. On the next play, Goff threw a 6-yard touchdown pass to Jason Cabinda to put the Lions ahead 24-3.

Steelers hold off mistake-prone Titans

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Joe Haden spent a month watching the Pittsburgh Steelers defense flail without him.

The veteran defensive back's return provided a spark. And all his off-season lifting provided the difference.

Haden stuffed Tennessee wide receiver Nick Westbrook-Ikhine inches short of a first down at the Steelers' 10 in the final seconds, sealing a 19-13 victory that resuscitated — for the time being anyway — Pittsburgh's playoff hopes.

Facing fourth-and-7 at the Steelers 16, Ryan Tannehill found Westbrook-Ikhine at the 10. Haden, who missed four games with a sprained foot, closed immediately and shoved Westbrook-Ih-

kine backward. When the official measurement confirmed what Haden already knew — that the game was over — Pittsburgh's defense celebrated a win that marked another abrupt momentum shift in their topsy-turvy season.

"He's Joe Money," Steelers linebacker T.J. Watt said. "He's just a vet. He makes a lot of those really smart, veteran plays."

Pittsburgh (7-6-1) needed every one of them on an afternoon in which the offense managed all of 168 yards.

It ultimately didn't matter.

The defense forced four turnovers — three on consecutive Titans possessions in the second half — just 10 days after getting mauled in a loss to Minnesota. Chris Boswell drilled four field

goals and Ben Roethlisberger's first rushing touchdown in three years gave the Steelers their second win over a division leader in three weeks.

"When you've got teams like this and environments like this, every game is a playoff," Roethlisberger said. "It had the feel of a playoff game, physically, emotionally."

If not optically.

Tennessee couldn't hold onto the ball. Pittsburgh couldn't move it. The result was three hours of push-pull in which the Titans kept flirting with taking full command only to hand momentum right back to the Steelers with careless turnover after careless turnover.

"We have to hold the ball in much more regard," Tennessee coach Mike Vrabel said. "We ob-

viously can't do that and think you're going to win."

The Titans ran for 202 yards, including 108 by D'Onta Foreman, controlled possession for more than 39 minutes and converted eight of 18 third downs. Yet Tannehill struggled to find any rhythm in the passing game. He needed 23 completions to throw for 153 yards and was sacked four times, including 1½ by T.J. Watt, whose 17½ sacks on the season is a franchise record.

"I feel like if teams want to try and throw the ball, they also know the problems they are going to get from us," Watt said.

Namely pressure from Watt, though he was hardly the only one making the splash plays that have been in short supply for Pittsburgh this season.

NBA-leading Suns roll past Hornets

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Devin Booker had 16 points in his return to Phoenix's lineup and the NBA-leading Suns set a season-scoring high in a 137-106 victory over the Charlotte Hornets on Sunday night.

After missing seven games because of a hamstring injury, Booker played 26 minutes and sat out the fourth quarter with Phoenix well ahead. The Suns improved to 24-5, moving a half-game ahead of Golden State.

Phoenix had nine players score in double figures. Javale McGee had 19 points in 16 minutes off the bench, and Mikal Bridges also scored 16 points. Deandre Ayton had 15 points and 15 rebounds. Landry Shamet also scored 15 points, Jae Crowder and Chris Paul had 14 each, Cam Johnson 12 and Cameron Payne 11.

The Suns were 20 of 41 on three-pointers and shot 56.8% overall.

Miles Bridges had 26 points for Charlotte, and former Sun Kelly Oubre Jr. had 16. LaMelo Ball had nine points, 10 rebounds and seven assists, but was 2 of 12 from the field and 1 of 6 from behind the arc.

Bulls 115, Lakers 110: DeMar DeRozan scored 38 points after missing two weeks in the NBA's health and safety protocols, leading host Chicago past Los Angeles.

Nikola Vucevic had 19 points and 13 re-

bounds, and Lonzo Ball added 19 points. The Bulls played for the first time since Dec. 11 after two games were postponed.

Timberwolves 111, Mavericks 105: Karl-Anthony Towns scored 24 points, D'Angelo Russell added 22 and host Minnesota beat Dallas in a matchup between short-handed teams dealing with recent COVID-19 issues.

The Mavs, already without star guard Luka Doncic, placed two players in the health and safety protocols the past two days. The Timberwolves added Josh Okogie to the protocols and Anthony Edwards and Taurean Prince each missed their second game while in the protocols.

Dallas then lost forward Kristaps Porzingis in the third quarter with right foot soreness. Porzingis finished with 13 points and three rebounds.

Tim Hardaway Jr. had 28 points for the Mavs.

Trail Blazers 105, Grizzlies 100: Damian Lillard scored 32 points, Norman Powell added 28 and Portland won at Memphis to snap the Grizzlies' five-game winning streak.

Dillon Brooks scored a career-high 37 points for Memphis, which lost for the second time in their last 12 games.

Powell scored 20 in the second half to give the Trail Blazers their second straight victo-

ry after they snapped a seven-game losing streak with a home victory over Charlotte on Friday night.

Portland took the lead, 94-91, on a four-point play by Lillard with 4:02 left and reclaimed the advantage, 97-95, on a three-pointer by Powell three minutes later. The Grizzlies had a chance to tie at 103 with 5.3 seconds to go, but Desmond Bane's three-pointer rimmed out.

Pistons 100, Heat 90: Saddiq Bey scored 26 points and host Detroit beat Miami to snap its losing streak at a franchise record-tying 14 games.

Hamidou Diallo had 15 points and seven rebounds for Detroit. The Pistons improved to 5-24, winning for the first time since Nov. 17 against Indiana.

Max Strus led the short-handed Heat with 24 points.

Kings 121, Spurs 114: Buddy Hield scored 18 of his 29 points in the fourth quarter and made seven three-pointers to help host Sacramento beat San Antonio.

Tyrese Haliburton added 27 points and matched his career high with 11 assists, and Damian Jones scored a career-high 23 points. The Kings won for the second time in six games.

Dejounte Murray had 25 points, nine assists and seven rebounds for the Spurs.

Knights win in SO over Islanders for 5th straight

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Shea Theodore scored twice and added another in the shootout, former Islander Robin Lehner made 29 saves and the Vegas Golden Knights beat New York 4-3 on Sunday for their fifth straight victory.

Theodore scored on the Golden Knights' first shootout attempt after his second goal of the game tied it with 48 seconds remaining in regulation. Nicholas Roy also scored for Vegas in the shootout.

Theodore scored his second goal of the game with Lehner pulled for an extra skater. He shot from the top of the high slot just inside the blueline. Jonathan Marchessault also scored in regulation for Vegas.

The tying goal came after Jean-Gabriel Pageau put the Islanders ahead 3-2 with 2:20 left in the third. Kieffer Bellows and Brock Nelson also scored for New York.

The Golden Knights completed a three-game sweep of New York-area teams, having defeated the Devils on Thursday and the Rangers on Friday. Vegas also beat Boston to start the trip. The Knights have won eight of nine overall.

Kings 3, Capitals 2: Adrian Kempe scored the tiebreaking goal midway through the third period to give visiting Los Angeles a win over undermanned Washington.

The Capitals were missing forwards Nicklas Backstrom, Evgeny Kuznetsov, T.J. Oshie

and Michael Sgarbossa, all on the COVID-19 list.

Garret Sparks, recalled from the minors before the game, stopped 33 shots for his first NHL win since March 20, 2019.

Blake Lizotte scored short-handed and Christian Wolanin also had a goal for the Kings, who trailed by two late in the second period.

Connor McMichael and Justin Schultz each had a goal for Washington. Vitek Vanecek made 21 saves.

The Capitals had won their last five games against the Kings.

Penguins 3, Devils 2: Danton Heinen, Teddy Blueger and Mike Matheson scored as visiting Pittsburgh beat New Jersey for its seventh straight win.

Tristan Jarry made 17 saves for the Penguins, who improved to 12-2-1 in their past 15 games. They've allowed just 10 goals in their past seven.

Jets 4, Blues 2: Linemates Nikolaj Ehlers, Mark Scheifele and Paul Stastny accounted for all three of host Winnipeg's goals to give interim coach Dave Lowry his first victory.

Stastny scored twice and added an assist, Ehlers had a goal and three assists, and Scheifele had a goal and an assist to help the Jets end a three-game skid and improve to 14-11-5. Connor Hellebuyck made 26 saves.

It was the second game behind the bench for Lowry. He took over for the rest of the season after Paul Maurice resigned Friday.