

## Navy to name ship for Fallujah battles

By JONATHAN SNYDER  
*Stars and Stripes*

A future America-class amphibious assault ship will bear the name USS Fallujah to commemorate the battles Marines fought in that city during the Iraq War, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro announced Tuesday.

"It is an honor to memorialize the Marines, soldiers and coalition partners that fought valiantly and those that sacrificed their lives during both battles of Fallujah," Del Toro said at a press briefing. "This namesake deserves to be in the pantheon of iconic Marine Corps battles and the [amphibious assault ship's] unique capabilities will serve as a stark reminder to everyone around the world of the bravery, courage, and commitment to freedom displayed by those who fought in the battle."

America-class warships are the largest amphibious assault vessels in the Navy's fleet. They carry Marines to the scene of conflict or disaster, where their aircraft move them from ship to shore.

They are also small aircraft carriers designed to carry the F-35B Lightning II, a fighter capable of vertical takeoffs and short landings, and the MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft.

The two ships of its class in service — the America and Tripoli — were built with enlarged hangar decks, enhanced aviation maintenance facilities, increased aviation fuel capacity and additional aviation store-rooms, according to the Navy.

America-class ships also provide a broader, more flexible command-and-control capability.

A third ship in the class, the USS Bougainville, is under construction at Huntington Ingalls Industries in Pascagoula, Miss., and is expected to join the fleet in 2024, according to a Navy factsheet.

The two battles fought in Fallujah, Iraq, in 2004, first in April and again in November and December, are considered the bloodiest fighting of the Iraq War and the fiercest urban combat involving Marines since the Battle of Hue City in 1968.

More than 100 coalition troops were killed and more than 600 wounded, according to the Navy.

Amphibious assault ships are traditionally named after U.S. Marine Corps battles, early U.S. sailing ships or legacy names of earlier carriers from World War II, according to the Navy.

## House GOP to seek DOD records on gender identity

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Republicans on the House Armed Services Committee will push the Defense Department next year to produce all records that include terms related to gender identity.

The committee, led by Democrats until Republicans take control of the House next month, voted along party lines and agreed Tuesday to recommend against the passage of a resolution requiring the records. But Republicans said they will pursue the records in the next Congress as they focus on examining Pentagon policies that they contend advance "woke" ideology at the expense of top national security concerns.

"Our troops should not be the vanguard for the left's social agenda," said Rep. Mike Rogers of Alabama, the committee's top Republican and incoming chairman. "Next year, the new majority will be conducting robust oversight of these issues and we will demand accountability from this administration."

Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., the committee's chairman now, called the records request "the mother of all fishing expeditions."

The resolution seeks copies of all Penta-

gon material that mentions words such as "transgender," "gender transition," "gender reassignment," "gender affirming," "gender neutral," "gender dysphoria," "nonbinary" or "non-binary," "safe space" and "inclusive language."

"This is not a simple request for one thing," Smith said. "This will take an enormous amount of time towards no particular purpose."

Republicans said Tuesday that new policies on gender, including a decision last year by the military's insurance provider Tricare to cover hormone replacement therapy, undermined readiness and hurt recruiting and retention.

"I have family members that have gotten out of the military because of the wokeness, you cannot disagree with that," said Rep. Jerry Carl, R-Ala.

Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., said a "culture war with radical race ideology and radical gender ideology" has permeated the Defense Department and "even bled" into the Department of Veterans Affairs when the agency announced it would offer gender confirmation surgery to transgender veterans.

Gaetz defended the resolution as a necessity to get "straight answers" out of mil-

itary leaders.

He frequently sparred with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin during hearings on the defense budget this year that veered into debates on diversity and other social issues.

"I think to when the secretary said directly 'there is no wokeness, there is no woke generals, there is no woke military' and he took all offense and got blustered," Gaetz said.

"When you get blatant evidence that contradicts the statements these people make, it necessitates this type of inquiry."

Smith countered that such inquiries denigrated the military and damaged recruitment efforts.

He criticized Republicans on the far right for demonizing diversity initiatives to score political points and raise money.

"If you have a group of people dedicating their time to going out there and trashing the military for not doing their job and not being capable, it does make it more likely that people won't want to join," Smith said. "I hope that as we go forward into the next year and deal with this oversight that we do it in an intelligent and thoughtful way that advances the cause of the military and doesn't simply play into a political agenda."

# App helps military spouses create friendships

BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL  
*Stars and Stripes*

A 33-year-old Army spouse at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, N.Y., has set his sights on solving the age-old problem for service members of how to make friends after a switch to a new duty station.

Matthew Shanks founded MilitarySocialNetwork.org, a website and free mobile app that allows military spouses and service members to search for and connect with new acquaintances.

According to the app, its mission is “facilitating meaningful social interaction with a focus on individual connections.” Users create personal profiles featuring images and an 84-character introduction, and then they select hobbies and interests. Since the launch of the app early this summer, more than 2,000 profiles have been created, 1,400 of which are active, Shanks said. Most users are female military spouses.

“Looking ahead and finding people to connect with at your new station is a big plus,” said Sharon Martin, 23, an early adopter of the platform. “Connecting with other military spouses really helps find resources that are already out there. I hope the app grows a lot because it can really add value to people’s lives.”

Once verified by site adminis-

trators, users set search restrictions based on location, age and gender preferences and search for others’ profiles.

As with dating apps, they select the ones that interest them by swiping right and are then invited to send a message and start a conversation.

While a good match of interests and background seems important, Shanks said his experiments with friendship groups online taught him that the quick matches don’t always lead to lasting friendships.

“You need more than matching interests to keep a connection going,” he said. “That’s what we’re trying to provide — continued interaction to guide people long enough in the process to continue on their own.”

To help grow potential friendships, Military Social Network encourages users to participate in virtual “speed friending” events and prompted chat groups that facilitate quick connections.

The quick succession of engagements overcomes the anxiety of first meetings, said Kayla Ortiz, 30, a Marine spouse and mother of three at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

“Without friends, military life can be pretty tough at times because we all need a support system,” Ortiz said. “We move all the time so even if you find a great friend, they eventually are

going to move. So you constantly have to re-create your community. The app helps make that a lot faster.”

The inspiration for the site came from Shanks’ own transition to military life. Like many looking for love, he had turned to Tinder.

“I was on the app for about a week when I met my wife,” he said.

For three years after marrying his wife, an Army nurse, Shanks continued his civilian career as a Navy engineer in the Washington, D.C., area. Then came their first change of duty station, to Fort Irwin, Calif.

“We prioritized her career, moved to the middle of nowhere, and had a baby,” Shanks wrote on his website.

An introvert by nature, Shanks mostly stayed at home, cared for their child and continued triathlon training. As an experienced endurance athlete, he also started coaching others virtually and traveling to races.

During the 2020 pandemic lockdown, however, Shanks said he spent even more time alone at home and realized just how challenging it is to have meaningful, personal relationships.

He remembered his dating app experience and figured that he could use online tools to help others find platonic friendships and support. For two years,

Shanks immersed himself in what he calls “friendship sociology.”

By September 2021, Shanks and a few volunteers were trying to organize and maintain 70 group chats with about 450 people attending.

Trying to manage sign-ups quickly proved unsustainable, he said. The early experiments eventually turned into Military Social Network.

It’s not found in a phone’s app store, however; it’s web-based and designed to be viewed on a phone browser. Creating the app on his own with little coding experience, Shanks said the format made the process easier, faster and cheaper.

While the app is still new and may have a few growing pains, Shanks said he is already planning an improved version that he hopes will be available in app stores and feature a better messaging experience.

Shanks emphasized that he is not looking to reinvent or disrupt existing spouse groups and command activities. His aim is to help people make the first connections that encourage them to use and find available resources wherever they go next.

“Friendships are hard to start, and frequent military moves just make this problem more obvious,” he said. “It takes some work. But friends are worth it.”

## Storm at Naval Station Rota affects USAF planes, facilities

BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL  
*Stars and Stripes*

An unexpectedly severe storm packing high winds at Naval Station Rota in Spain impacted three U.S. Air Force cargo planes and damaged the roof at the base gym, military officials said Wednesday.

Two C-5M Super Galaxy and one C-17 Globemaster III air-

craft, operated by the U.S. Air Force’s 521st Air Mobility Operations Wing, “were affected by the high winds while parked on the ramp,” Air Force Capt. Emma Quirk, a wing spokeswoman, said in an email statement.

The severity of Storm Efrain’s impact on the planes was unclear Wednesday.

No injuries were reported,

wing officials said.

Hundreds across the country were evacuated from homes as Efrain brought hurricane-force winds and torrential downpours to Spain’s southern regions of Extremadura, Castilla-La Mancha and Andalusia.

Storm winds also rerouted traffic near the gym, aquatic center, post office and other

community facilities, Naval Station Rota said Wednesday on its Facebook page.

Damage estimates on base were not immediately available.

“The 725th Air Mobility Squadron is working diligently with home stations and host installation entities to assess the damage and coordinate recovery operations,” Quirk said.

# Ukraine: Russian drone strikes on Kyiv thwarted

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian authorities said they thwarted a Russian attack on Kyiv and the surrounding region Wednesday as their air defense system intercepted and destroyed 13 explosive-laden drones, although wreckage from some of them damaged five buildings. No casualties were reported.

The attempted strikes underlined how vulnerable Ukraine's capital remains to the regular Russian attacks that have devastated infrastructure and population centers in recent weeks, mostly in the country's east and south. But they also highlighted Ukraine's claims of increasing efficiency in intercepting weapons — something that Patriot missiles from the United States may soon help boost.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in a brief video statement, said the "terrorists" fired 13 Iranian-made drones, and all were intercepted. Such drones have been part of the firepower, along with rockets, missiles, shelling mortars and artillery, as Russia has targeted power stations, water facilities and other public utility sites.

The snow-covered capital remained largely calm after the attack, which occurred around daybreak. As the working day began, authorities sounded the all-clear.

The head of the Kyiv city administration,

Serhii Popko, wrote on Telegram that the attempted strikes came in two waves. Wreckage from the intercepted drones damaged an administrative building and four residential buildings, he said. A blast left the three-story tax office building in the central Shevchenkyvskyi district with a gaping hole in the roof and blew out windows in parked cars as well as in a neighboring building.

Clean-up crews were on site quickly to shovel away the rubble and roll out plastic sheeting to cover the blown-out windows in freezing temperatures. One man, unfazed, pushed his son on a swingset on a nearby playground as the crews did their work.

Anton Rudikov's family was sleeping when they heard the sounds of an explosion nearby and smashing windows. "The children were frightened; the windows flew out," said Rudikov, who has daughters ages 13 and 18. "What else can I say?"

Local residents told Associated Press reporters they saw fragments from a drone that contained the words "For Ryazan." The Kremlin claimed Ukraine was responsible for an attack last week on a military base in the Ryazan region of western Russia.

Ukrainian authorities have trumpeted their ability to down Russian weapons, but strikes in some areas continue to cause deaths and havoc.

## FBI hate crime report lacks data from large cities

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Hate crimes in the United States remained relatively high last year after a surge not seen in nearly two decades, according to a new FBI report. But experts have said it is actually an undercount because thousands of police departments, including some of the country's largest, didn't report their data.

Major cities like New York and Los Angeles, as well as large swaths of states including Florida and California, didn't send crime information to the FBI for 2021 due largely to changes in reporting requirements. The agency normally puts out the most comprehensive picture of hate crime in the nation, so this year's report is concerning for advocates trying to address spikes in hate crimes that have heightened fears among marginalized groups and sparked calls to address the issue head on.

The troubling trend continued this year with a series of brutal, high-profile hate crimes, including a mass shooting at an LGBTQ nightclub in Colorado Springs and another that targeted Black people at a grocery store in Buffalo.

The nearly 7,300 hate crimes that were documented in the report are the third-highest total in the last decade. The majority of victims were targeted due to their race, followed by sexual orientation and religion. But while the FBI report pointed to a small decrease from 2020 to 2021, other research has found that last year actually saw a troubling increase in hate crimes.

The Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism at California State University-San Bernardino found a 21% increase from 2020 to 2021 in an analysis of 20 states, drawing from police data.

In cities with more than 1 million people, meanwhile, hate crimes surged 39%, research has found, with especially steep spikes in anti-Asian hate crime. Large cities are key to hate-crime data because they tend to be more diverse and have more ways for people to tell authorities about hate crimes, which are historically underreported.

"The Justice Department is committed to prioritizing prevention, investigation and prosecution of hate crimes," she said. "The FBI's 2021 Hate Crimes Statistics are a reminder of the need to continue our vigorous efforts to address this pervasive issue in America."

## Biden signs gay marriage law

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — A celebratory crowd of thousands bundled up on a chilly Tuesday afternoon to watch President Joe Biden sign gay marriage legislation into law, a joyful ceremony that was tempered by the backdrop of an ongoing conservative backlash over gender issues.

"This law and the love it defends strike a blow against hate in all its forms," Biden said on the South Lawn of the White House. "And that's why this law matters to every single American."

Singers Sam Smith and Cyndi Lauper performed. Vice President Kamala Harris recalled officiating at a lesbian wedding in San Francisco. And the White House played a recording of Biden's television interview from a decade ago, when he caused a politi-

cal furor by unexpectedly disclosing his support for gay marriage. Biden was vice president at the time, and President Barack Obama had not yet endorsed the idea.

"I got in trouble," Biden joked of that moment. Three days later, Obama himself publicly endorsed gay marriage.

Despite Tuesday's excitement, there was concern about the nationwide proliferation of conservative policies on gender issues at the state level.

Biden criticized the "callous, cynical laws introduced in the states targeting transgender children, terrifying families and criminalizing doctors who give children the care they need."

"Racism, antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia, they're all connected," Biden said. "But the antidote to hate is love."



# Death, destruction as storm ravages South

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — A destructive storm ripping across the U.S. spawned tornadoes that killed a young boy and his mother in Louisiana and threatened the South with more severe weather Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the huge storm system delivered blizzardlike conditions to the Great Plains and was expected to push more snow and ice into Appalachia and New England. The wintry blast dumped more than 2 feet of snow in parts of South Dakota.

In northern Louisiana, it took hours for authorities to find the bodies of a mother and child reported missing after a tornado struck the rural Keithville community near Shreveport on Tuesday afternoon. The Caddo Parish Coroner's Office said the body of 8-year-old Nikolus

Little was found around 11 p.m. Tuesday in a wooded area. His mother, Yoshiko A. Smith, 30, was found dead under storm debris around 2:30 a.m. Wednesday.

Sheriff Steve Prator said their home was destroyed and the boy ended up a half-mile away, while his mother's body was discovered one street over from where their house stood.

"We couldn't even find the house that he was describing with the address. Everything was gone," Prator told Shreveport TV station KSLA.

In Farmerville, La., about 90 miles to the east of Keithville, about 20 people were taken to a hospital, some with critical injuries, after a tornado caused major damage to mobile homes and an apartment complex, the Union Parish Sheriff's Office told Monroe TV station KNOE.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Ed-

wards declared a state of emergency Wednesday morning, saying initial reports indicated six possible tornadoes had hit the state in Caddo, Union, Rapides, Madison, East Carroll and Franklin parishes.

The forecast Wednesday called for more severe storms with a moderate threat of additional tornadoes across an area of the Gulf Coast region populated by nearly 3 million people from New Orleans to Mobile, Ala. More damaging weather was possible in the Florida Panhandle.

Tornado warnings were issued Wednesday morning for parts of Louisiana and Mississippi, where mobile homes at a park in Sharkey County were reduced to piles of shredded debris. Resident Leslie Jackson told WLBT-TV her home at the Mason Trailer Park was one of only a couple left standing.

A line of thunderstorms sweeping through Texas spawned tornadoes Tuesday and damaged dozens of homes and businesses. At least five people were injured in the Dallas suburb of Grapevine, police spokesperson Amanda McNew said.

A possible tornado blew the roof off the city's municipal service center and left pieces of the roof hanging from powerlines, said Trent Kelley, deputy director of Grapevine Parks and Recreation.

It was also trash day, so the storm picked up and scattered garbage all over, he said.

Icy weather from the huge storm was expected to affect the U.S. from coast to coast. It began by dumping heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada and was predicted to bring ice and snow to the eastern U.S. in the coming days.

## China says it will stop reporting asymptomatic COVID-19 cases

Associated Press

BEIJING — China said Wednesday it would stop reporting asymptomatic COVID-19 cases since they've become "impossible" to track with mass testing no longer required, another step in the country's uncertain exit from some of the world's strictest antivirus policies.

China last week announced its most significant easing yet of antivirus measures and has begun to see what appears to be a rapid increase in new infections, raising concerns that its health system could become overwhelmed as those in other countries did during early COVID waves.

So far, though, many of those newly sick are staying home and there has been little evidence of a surge in patient numbers. But it's difficult to get a clear picture of the virus's

spread, and the new reporting rules could make that even harder.

Some hospitals have reportedly struggled to remain staffed because of rising infections among their employees.

A notice on the National Health Commission's website on Wednesday said it stopped publishing daily figures on COVID-19 cases where no symptoms are detected since it was "impossible to accurately grasp the actual number of asymptomatic infected persons," which have generally accounted for the vast majority of new infections.

The only numbers the commission is reporting are confirmed cases detected in public testing facilities where symptoms are displayed. Many people also test at home — and any positive results there would also not be captured.

## Lawmakers OK 'framework' to avoid government shutdown

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers leading the negotiations on a bill to fund the federal government for the current fiscal year announced late Tuesday they've reached agreement on a "framework" that should allow them to complete work on the bill over the next week and avoid a government shutdown.

Congress faces a midnight Friday deadline to pass a spending bill to prevent a partial government shutdown. The two chambers are expected to pass another short-term measure before then to keep the government running through Dec. 23, which will allow negotiators time to complete work on the full-year bill.

"Now, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees will work around the clock to negotiate the details of final 2023 spending bills that can be

supported by the House and Senate and receive President [Joe] Biden's signature," said Rep. Rosa DeLauro, of Connecticut, the Democratic chair of the House Appropriations Committee.

Earlier in the day, Senate leaders said lawmakers from the two parties were nearing an agreement, but Republicans warned Democrats that lawmakers would need to complete their work by Dec. 22 or they would only support a short-term extension into early next year.

"We intend to be on the road going home on the 23rd. We intend not to be back here between Christmas and New Year's, and if we can't meet that deadline, we would be happy to pass a short-term [resolution] into early next year," said Sen. Mitch McConnell, of Kentucky, the Republican leader in the Senate.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Crash kills Army vet delivering free bikes

**MI** KINGSFORD — An Army veteran who turned his life around with a bike shop died in a crash while delivering free bikes to children in Florida affected by Hurricane Ian, his family said.

Steven Pringle, 57, was killed in Punta Gorda, Fla., on Nov. 23, a few weeks after a profile in the Detroit Free Press described how his passion for fixing bikes had touched many people in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Pringle was driving a pickup with a trailer of bikes when he drove through an intersection that was missing a stop sign due to the hurricane, the Free Press reported.

Pringle earlier this year told the newspaper that he had been in despair, eating poorly and living in a camper when he had an awakening while praying the Catholic rosary. It eventually turned into Build a Bicycle — Bicycle Therapy, a shop in Kingsford where he fixed bikes, sold new ones and gave many away.

### Man gets 10 years for \$25M cellphone scheme

**CA** LOS ANGELES — A Los Angeles cellphone store owner who stole some \$25 million from wireless carriers by illegally unlocking phones was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison.

Argishti Khudaverdyan, 44, of Burbank, was also ordered to pay nearly \$28.5 million in restitution, according to a statement from the U.S. attorney's office.

In a yearslong scheme, Khudaverdyan, who owned a T-Mobile retail store, unlocked hun-

dreds of thousands of cellphones on T-Mobile, Sprint, AT&T and other phone networks, prosecutors said. Unlocking phones allowed the phones to be switched to another carrier or be sold on the black market, authorities said.

To unlock the phones, Khudaverdyan used phishing emails and other methods to trick T-Mobile employees into providing their information.

### Man charged with hate crimes for swastikas

**IL** WHEATON — A suburban Chicago man was charged with hate crimes after allegedly placing swastika stickers on a county board candidate's campaign signs, a prosecutor said.

Keith Klingeman, 49, of Naperville, was charged with two counts of hate crime and one count of criminal damage to property, DuPage County State's Attorney Robert Berlin said. Between Oct. 2 and Oct. 16, Klingeman allegedly placed homemade swastika stickers on two campaign signs belonging to Patricia Gustin, a candidate for the DuPage County Board, Berlin said.

Klingeman surrendered Friday at the Naperville Police Station and was released on bond from custody, Berlin said.

### Officer on leave amid alleged stalking probe

**WA** MONROE — A Seattle police officer is under investigation for using police equipment to stalk a woman he dated, and has been placed on administrative leave, according to police.

Records filed in Snohomish County Superior Court show detectives believe there is probable cause that Andrew Swartz committed felony stalking over a two-month period while working as an officer in 2021, The Daily Herald reported. In September 2021, a Monroe woman filed for a restraining order against Swartz. In sworn statements, she said she caught Swartz underneath her car, apparently placing a tracking device, and said Swartz had repeatedly followed her while she drove.

She said there were "several prior incidents of stalking since we broke up in mid July."

A police department spokesperson confirmed to the newspaper that Swartz is on administrative leave and that the Office of Public Accountability is investigating.

### Fake psychic, partner sentenced for fraud

**FL** MIAMI — A South Florida woman claiming to be a psychic was sentenced to federal prison along with her partner for conning a woman out of more than \$3 million.

The fraud ran for several years and only ended after the victim could no longer afford to pay for money-cleansing rituals, prosecutors said.

Samantha Stevens, a self-professed spiritual consultant, was sentenced to two years and six months in prison in October. Michael Paul Guzman was sentenced last month to three years and two months, according to court records. Stevens, 51, and Guzman, 42, also agreed to pay nearly \$3.2 million in restitution.

According to court documents, Stevens in 2012 gained the victim's trust and convinced her that a curse had been placed on her and her family.

### Company contractor killed in landslide

**ID** BOISE — A 39-year-old Oregon man was killed in a landslide while doing contract work for Idaho Power to secure a rock shelf above a road on the Idaho-Oregon border, authorities said.

The Adams County Sheriff's Office said deputies from Adams County in Idaho and Baker County in Oregon responded to a 911 call about an industrial accident in Hells Canyon, The Idaho Statesman reported. According to the call, a landslide between the community of Oxbow in Oregon and Hells Canyon Dam along the Snake River sent rocks and debris onto the workers below.

Deputies found Stacy Keen of Tillamook, Ore., suspended in a boom-and-bucket truck, where he was working when the slide occurred. Authorities said Keen was killed by rocks and debris.

Idaho Power safety director Bryan Brandel told the newspaper the utility is working closely with the teams involved and local authorities to understand the facts of the situation.

Deputies used boats to rescue and transport stranded workers, while Idaho Power geologists and Occupational Safety and Health Administration officials assessed the area for additional potential landslides. Once the area was deemed safe, first responders recovered Keen's body.

— From wire reports

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# Ovechkin hits 800 goals with hat trick

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Soaked with beer and still wearing his No. 8 jersey, Alex Ovechkin held three pucks in his right hand as he posed for a picture with the rest of the jubilant Washington Capitals in the visiting locker room at the United Center.

Three pucks that added up to 800.

Ovechkin became the third NHL player to reach 800 career goals when he scored three times Tuesday night, touching off a wild celebration for his team and an appreciative Chicago crowd.

“Soon as it happened, kind of relief,” Ovechkin said after Washington’s 7-3 victory over the Blackhawks. “Kind of happiness in general.”

Ovechkin scored on his first two shots, beating Blackhawks goaltender Petr Mrazek 24 seconds into the game before stuffing one home on a power play with 11:46 left in the first period. The 37-year-old winger then completed his 29th career hat trick when he knocked Anthony Mantha’s pass over a sprawled Mrazek 6:34 into the third.

“When he got the first goal today, I was like, ‘This is the night,’” teammate Evgeny

Kuznetsov said.

The rest of the Capitals jumped off the bench to celebrate after the milestone goal, and hats rained down on the ice from the crowd of 16,181. Fans in Chicago then chanted “Ovi! Ovi!” — drawing a wave from Ovechkin.

The star forward moved within one goal of Gordie Howe for second all-time. Wayne Gretzky holds the record with 894 goals.

“It’s a big number,” Ovechkin said. “It’s the best company (you can) ever imagine since you started playing hockey.”

Ovechkin also praised the crowd for its response.

“Even in the warmup, I was feeling that energy right away,” he said. “The fans watch me and the fans want to see that historical moment.”

When it was over, Ovechkin jumped onto the ice one last time to salute the cheering fans. He then gave his stick to a boy wearing a Capitals jersey above the tunnel to the visiting locker room.

Shortly after he got to the back, he was showered with beer by his chanting teammates. Goaded into making a speech,

Ovechkin said it was special to accomplish the feat with the team.

“It was awesome,” Washington coach Peter Laviolette said. “It was just awesome to be on the bench and be a part of it, a part of history.”

Ovechkin has seven goals in his last four games and a team-high 20 this season.

“I think once he’s going to be No. 1 he can have a sense of relief,” Mantha said. “Until then, I think he’s on the hunt, and that’s what we love about him.”

Ovechkin has been one of the NHL’s most dangerous scorers practically since he got two goals in his debut with Washington on Oct. 5, 2005, against Columbus.

The 12-time All-Star has nine seasons with at least 50 goals, including a career-high 65 during the 2007-08 season. The three-time MVP, who won the Stanley Cup in 2018, had 50 goals and 40 assists in 77 games last season.

“It’s mind blowing,” Chicago captain Jonathan Toews said. “How many guys can score goals at his rate in the season, let alone year after year after year? He’s one of a kind, for sure.”

## Panthers’ Bobrovsky blanks former teammates

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 22 shots against his former team as the Florida Panthers beat the Columbus Blue Jackets 4-0 on Tuesday night.

It was the first shutout of the season for Bobrovsky, who played with Columbus from 2013-19.

The Panthers got goals from Brandon Montour, Matthew Tkachuk, Aleksander Barkov and Sam Reinhart as they halted a two-game skid.

Bobrovsky had struggled in November and lost his starting job to Spencer Knight late last month in a loss to the Blue Jackets. But with Knight out with illness, Bobrovsky has played well in his past four starts, allowing one goal or fewer in two of them.

“I don’t think that way,” Bobrovsky said when asked if it was special getting a shutout against the Jackets. “You prepare for the game, prepare for the next shot and see what happens. I approach every game one shot at a time and see what happens. Sometimes you win and sometimes you get a loss. But it definitely feels good to get a win.”

Bobrovsky, who is now 9-2-1 against Co-

lumbus since leaving for Florida, was solid from the start as the Blue Jackets were shut out for the second time this season.

Florida took the initial lead at 9:04 of the first on a slapshot from Brandon Montour. The Panthers extended their lead on a goal from Tkachuk at 3:47 in the second period and Barkov scored with 43.3 seconds remaining in the second.

**Sabres 6, Kings 0:** Tage Thompson scored two third-period power-play goals, and Craig Anderson stopped 40 shots as Buffalo beat visiting Los Angeles.

**Hurricanes 1, Red Wings 0:** Brady Skjei scored the only goal and Pyotr Kochetkov made 27 saves in Carolina’s victory over host Detroit.

**Bruins 4, Islanders 3 (SO):** Jake DeBrusk and David Pastrnak each scored in a shootout to give Boston the victory over visiting New York.

**Stars 4, Devils 1:** Roope Hintz scored the go-ahead goal with three seconds left in the second period and backup Scott Wedgewood made 35 saves against his former team as visiting Dallas sent New Jersey to its third consecutive loss.

**Lightning 6, Kraken 2:** Corey Perry, Brayden Point and Ross Colton scored 3:23 apart in the second period, Nikita Kucherov had three assists to lead host Tampa Bay over Seattle.

**Maple Leafs 7, Ducks 0:** Mitch Marner had two assists to extend his point streak to 23 games and Ilya Samsonov made 28 saves for his second straight shutout as host Toronto thumped last-place Anaheim.

**Oilers 6, Predators 3:** Zach Hyman had a hat trick, Leon Draisaitl scored twice and added three assists and Connor McDavid had a goal and three assists to lift Edmonton to a road victory over Nashville.

**Golden Knights 6, Jets 5:** Jonathan Marchessault’s second power-play goal late in the third period broke a tie and helped lift Vegas to a win over host Winnipeg.

**Avalanche 3, Flyers 2:** Artturi Lehkonen had a short-handed goal and an assist, Pavel Francouz stopped 26 shots and a banged-up Colorado held off visiting Philadelphia.

**Sharks 3, Coyotes 2:** Nick Bonino scored for the fourth straight game, James Reimer won in his return from injury and San Jose defeated visiting Arizona.



# Messi, Argentina reach World Cup final

Associated Press

LUSAIL, Qatar — Lionel Messi bent over, clutched his left hamstring and appeared to grimace, immediately spreading panic through the soccer world but especially among all Argentines.

Was their superstar — their idol — injured? Was he going to have to come off early in the World Cup semifinals?

No such luck for Croatia.

Before long, Messi was producing perhaps the best performance of his record-tying 25 appearances at the World Cup, leading Argentina to a 3-0 victory over Croatia on Tuesday that set up a meeting with either France or Morocco in Sunday's final.

Messi is back in soccer's biggest match on his mission to win the game's greatest prize for the first time. At 35, he could hardly be playing any better.

Messi converted a penalty and played a part in the other two goals by Julián Álvarez — one with an outrageous piece of skill that brought roars of approval from Argentina's huge following

— to turn an initially tense occasion into a procession.

"A lot is going through my head—it's very emotional seeing all of this," Messi said in a post-match interview on the field as he looked up at Argentina's celebrating, scarf-waving supporters. "To see the fans — 'the family' — during the whole tournament was so incredible. We're going to the final, which is what we wanted."

It will be Messi's second World Cup final — Argentina lost the other one to Germany in 2014 — in what might be his last appearance at the tournament.

The stage is set for a player widely regarded as one of the game's best, if not the absolute best, to go out on the ultimate high.

He is thrilling his legion of fans along the way.

His swivel and driving run to set up the third goal for Álvarez in the 69th minute left Josko Gvardiol — one of the best defenders at the World Cup — grasping at thin air and epitomized Messi's confidence and swagger.

He has been embracing the responsibility of leading Argentina to its third World Cup title, scoring in five of his six games in Qatar.

He even had a penalty saved in the one game in which he didn't score.

"I am honored to train him and see him play," said Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni, who was in tears in the post-match celebrations. "Every time you see him play, it's a huge source of motivation for his teammates, fans and the whole world."

Croatia failed in its bid to reach a second straight World Cup final after conceding two goals in a five-minute span from the 34th, just when the team was looking comfortable at Lusail Stadium and Messi was raising concerns by rubbing his hamstring.

Maybe it was a ruse. Messi was soon toying with his opponents in a way only he can and put Argentina ahead by lifting his penalty into the top corner after Álvarez was taken out by Dominik Livakovic after clipping the ball past the Croatia goalkeeper.

Álvarez scored in the 39th after a surging run from halfway, which started after he collected Messi's short pass. Then came the crowning moment, Álvarez's second goal, after Messi took Gvardiol for a ride in the right corner.

It was one game too far for Croatia, which had beaten Japan and Brazil on penalties in the knockout stage, and star midfielder Luka Modric, who — at 37 — has likely played his final World Cup match.

Argentina maintained its record of never having lost in the World Cup semifinals and has reached the final for the sixth time.

Those dark days after losing to Saudi Arabia in its opening group match seem so long ago now for Argentina, which will be hard to stop in the final with Messi playing this well.

"Even though we lost our first match, we were confident that this group was going to push forward," Messi said. "We know what we are, and we called on the fans to believe in us."

# Correa, Giants agree to \$350M deal for 13 years

Associated Press

Star shortstop Carlos Correa and the San Francisco Giants have agreed to a \$350 million, 13-year contract, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on the condition of anonymity Tuesday night because the agreement was subject to a successful physical.

Correa was also a free agent one year ago after leaving the Houston Astros, and he reached a \$105.3 million deal with the Minnesota Twins. That agreement gave him the right to opt out after one year and \$35.1 million to hit the market again.

And the 28-year-old Correa indeed moved once more, this time to a Giants team that recently missed out in its bid to sign free agent Aaron Judge.

Correa's guarantee will be the fourth-largest in baseball history. Mike Trout got a \$426.5 million, 12-year contract with the Los Angeles Angels, Mookie Betts has a \$365 million, 12-year agreement with the Los An-

geles Dodgers and Judge, the new AL home run champ and MVP, is getting \$360 million for nine years to remain with the New York Yankees pending a physical.

Correa was one of the headliners in a stellar group of free agent shortstops that also included Trea Turner, Xander Bogaerts and Dansby Swanson — Swanson is the only one in that group still available.

Philadelphia signed Turner for \$300 million over 11 years, San Diego got Bogaerts for \$280 million over 11 years, Texas signed pitcher Jacob deGrom for \$185 million over five years and the New York Mets retained outfielder Brandon Nimmo for \$162 million for eight years.

Correa hit .291 with 22 home runs and 64 RBIs in his one season with Minnesota.

Brandon Crawford, a three-time All-Star, has been the Giants' shortstop since 2011. Crawford, who turns 36 next month, slumped to a .231 average with nine homers and 52 RBIs last season, down from a .298

average with 24 homers and 90 RBIs in 2021.

Crawford has a \$16 million salary in 2023, then can become a free agent. He has dealt with injuries in recent seasons and might consider retirement at the conclusion of his deal, so the Giants were searching for a shortstop of the future.

The Giants went 81-81 last season, a year after posting a franchise-record 107 wins.

Correa was selected by Houston with the No. 1 overall pick in the 2012 amateur draft, and he played a key role in the Astros' rise from the bottom of the AL West to the franchise's first World Series title in 2017.

Correa, the 2015 AL Rookie of the Year, has a .279 career average with 155 homers and 553 RBIs in eight big league seasons. He has also been a stellar postseason performer with 18 homers and 59 RBIs in 79 games.

The Astros' 2017 championship was tainted by a sign-stealing scheme, and Correa has been loudly booed in some cities since the scandal surfaced.

# Celtics blow big lead, rally, top Lakers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Jayson Tatum scored 44 points, Jaylen Brown added five of his 25 in overtime, and the Boston Celtics blew a 20-point lead in the second half before rallying from a late 13-point deficit for a thrilling 122-118 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers on Tuesday night.

Marcus Smart hit four three-pointers and scored 18 points for the NBA-leading Celtics, who wrapped up their six-game trip by avoiding their first three-game losing streak of the season.

The old rivals played a wild second half in which the Lakers rallied from an 81-61 deficit midway through the third quarter with a 45-12 surge. Boston then erased Los Angeles' 106-93 lead in the final 3:40 with a 17-4 run capped by Tatum's tying jumper with 17.8 seconds left.

"That game just says a lot about our experience and men-

tal toughness," said Brown, who also had 15 rebounds. "That's a tough and perfect way to close out our road trip."

Anthony Davis had 37 points and 12 rebounds, but he also missed two free throws with 28 seconds left, creating an opportunity for Tatum to send it to overtime.

LeBron James scored 33 points in a memorable chapter of the famed rivalry between the 17-time champion teams dubbed "the two pillars of our league" by new Lakers coach Darvin Ham.

"Everybody can talk about free throws, this and that, but the thing we can't do is spot teams 15-, 17-, 20-point leads, give up 30-plus points per quarter in the first half," Ham said. "We have to do a better job of coming out from the tipoff and pressing our will on our opponent."

**Bucks 128, Warriors 111:**

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 30 points while Bobby Portis finished with 25 points and 11 rebounds to lead host Milwaukee past Golden State in a matchup of the NBA's last two champions.

Stephen Curry scored 20 points despite missing seven of 10 three-point attempts. Jordan Poole added 18 points and Klay Thompson 14 for Golden State.

The Warriors dropped their third straight road game and fell to 2-12 away from home this season. The defending NBA champions have allowed at least 114 points in every road game.

**Jazz 121, Pelicans 100:** Malik Beasley made five three-pointers and scored 21 points, and host Utah cooled off Zion Williamson and New Orleans.

Williamson scored 26 points in 26 minutes and Jonas Valanciunas scored 15, but the Pelicans' seven-game winning streak was snapped. Only one of

those wins came on the road.

After missing three games with an illness, Utah's Lauri Markkanen showed little rust in scoring 19 points.

**76ers 123, Kings 103:** Joel Embiid scored 31 points, James Harden had 21 points and 15 assists, and host Philadelphia scored 80 points in the first half and cruised past Sacramento.

Tobias Harris also scored 21 points for the Sixers, who have won three straight to start a seven-game homestand.

**Rockets 111, Suns 97:** Jalen Green had 26 points and Kevin Porter Jr. added 18 as host Houston never trailed against slumping Phoenix.

The Rockets led by as many as 23 and held a comfortable lead for most of the night in the return of coach Stephen Silas, who was back after missing the previous game following the death of his father, longtime NBA player and coach Paul Silas.

## Miller scores 24, No. 4 Alabama overpowers Memphis

Associated Press

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — Alabama didn't let Memphis ruin the team's good mood again.

Brandon Miller scored 24 points, including 21 in the second half, to lead No. 4 Alabama to a 91-88 win over the Tigers on Tuesday night.

Miller hit a three-pointer and then dunked after rebounding his own miss on the next possession in the final two minutes for the Crimson Tide (9-1), sporting the program's highest ranking in 15 years.

Most of that nine-point cushion evaporated over the last 70 seconds.

"I thought we should have pulled away and just couldn't get the stops we needed to," Alabama coach Nate Oats said. "You've got to give Memphis a ton of credit for hanging in there. Shoot, they could have gone away."

But Memphis never backed down, even when it seemed hopeless.

Led by Kendrick Davis' 30 points, the Tigers (8-3) stayed alive most of the way for a second upset of a Top 10 Alabama team in as many years and closed the gap in the final seconds. Memphis beat No. 6 Alabama 92-78

last season.

"We owed them one," said Alabama's Marc Sears, who was playing for Ohio back then. "They kind of embarrassed them last year, so we've got to return the favor at home."

Alabama had just climbed into the Top 5 after becoming the first team to beat two No. 1 teams — North Carolina and Houston — before January since Duke in the 1965-66 season.

Miller had eight rebounds, five assists and four threes to help the Tide fight off the challenge this time. Sears scored 12 of his 18 points in the first half and was 9 of 13 from the free throw line.

The game featured 47 fouls, 28 from Memphis.

"Definitely one of our scrappier games," said Miller, who's leading the nation's freshmen in scoring. "I feel like I'm pretty beat up. I've got blood all over me. Memphis is always going to be a scrappy team."

**No. 5 Houston 74, North Carolina A&T 46:** Ja'Vier Francis had career highs of 17 points and 15 rebounds, Marcus Sasser

scored 17 points and host Houston rebounded from its first loss.

Sasser, a preseason All-American, was 6-for-10 from the field after shooting 2-for-11 and scoring nine points in Houston's 71-65 loss to Alabama on Saturday. Francis was 7-for-10 as Houston (10-1) shot 50% on the night.

Kam Woods scored 26 points to lead the Aggies (4-5). Woods scored 17 of North Carolina A&T's 21 first-half points and finished 10-for-18 from the field.

**No. 9 Arizona 99, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi 61:** Azuolas Tubelis had 20 points and 13 rebounds and the host Wildcats hit a season-high 15 threes to beat Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.

Tubelis, a 6-foot-11 junior from Lithuania, early in the game became the 53rd player in school history to reach 1,000 career points. He shot 9-for-16 and also had four assists.

Henri Veesaar scored a career-high 16 points off the bench, Oumar Ballo had 13 points and eight rebounds, and Cedric Henderson Jr. had 11 points for the Wildcats (9-1).