

Barriers block women from special ops

By DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — There are several possible reasons why less than 10% of the military's special operations forces are women — including discrimination, sexual assault and conflicting military policies, a government watchdog concluded in a study released last week.

In 2021, fewer than one in 10 special operations forces troops were women, according to Special Operations Command, or SOCOM, the military's unified command that oversees the special operations components of the Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.

"Women make up less than 10% of SOCOM service members, compared with about 19% DOD-wide," according to the report. "SOCOM leaders have acknowledged existing issues of gender discrimination, sexual harassment and assault, and career impediments, and the need to do more."

The disproportionately low percentage of women serving in special operations forces

sparked the Government Accountability Office study, which concluded several factors are probably responsible — including gender bias, sexual assault and harassment and conflicting policies across the Defense Department.

Another possible reason for fewer women serving in special operations roles is SOCOM is not getting important data that could help prevent and respond to the barriers faced by women, according to the study.

"While SOCOM has taken some steps to address its data access limitations, the [Pentagon] has not established a collaborative process to ensure SOCOM has access. Without such a process to facilitate SOCOM's access to needed data, SOCOM leadership will not be positioned to identify trends or address urgent concerns," the 169-page GAO study states.

The report identified several other likely barriers to women serving in the special forces. They include demanding physical standards, pregnancy and child care issues, social support and isolation and reduced ac-

cess to women's health care.

Further, the GAO found conflicting policies across the military. It said some of the branches have policies within special operations environments that do not align with the Pentagon policies.

For example, under Defense Department policy, complaints about gender discrimination or sexual assault in joint environments must be handled by the accuser's service branch. The Army, Marines and Air Force have policies, however, that state such complaints must be handled by the offender's branch.

"Without the military services revising their policies ... to help ensure alignment with DOD policies, such cases could be processed inconsistently across [the department]," the study states.

The GAO said the study is based on policy reviews, interviews with various Pentagon and SOCOM officials, conversations with officials at five special operations installations and interviews with 51 women who serve or formerly served in special ops forces.

Ex-military leaders urge support for Afghan aides

The Washington Post

Some of the best-known retired military officers in the United States have joined a grass-roots effort to pass legislation to bolster support for Afghans who assisted the American war effort, calling for Congress to act immediately and include it in a spending bill that lawmakers are expected to approve within days.

"We are convinced that the Afghan Adjustment Act furthers the national security interests of the United States," the officers wrote in a letter to senior lawmakers on Saturday. "It is also a moral imperative."

The signatories include more than 30 retired officers, including Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., a former chairman of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff and top commander in Afghanistan; former Joint Chiefs chairmen Adm. Mike Mullen and Gen. Richard Myers; and Adm. James Stavridis, a former supreme allied commander of NATO. The list also includes Gen. Austin "Scott" Miller, who commanded coalition forces until weeks before the fall of Kabul; Gens. Stanley McChrystal and David McKiernan, who had stints leading all coalition forces earlier in the war; and Adm. William McRaven, a former chief of U.S. Special Operations Command.

The letter was addressed to the top Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate and organized by #AfghanEvac, a coalition of more than 180

nonprofits and other organizations that are supporting Afghan resettlement efforts. The senior officers called for Congress to attach the legislation to the upcoming omnibus, which will provide funding for federal agency budgets through Sept. 30 and also carry several critical pieces of legislation ranging from money to defend Ukraine to changes in presidential election laws.

"If Congress fails to enact the AAA, the United States will be less secure," the officers said in the letter. "As military professionals, it was and remains our duty to prepare for future conflicts. We assure you that in any such conflict, potential allies will remember what happens now with our Afghan allies."

Mullen said in an interview on Sunday that he joined the effort because helping people who assisted the U.S. government resonates with him. Like others, he said, he scrambled to assist Afghans leave the country during the fall of Kabul. He is concerned that if legislation is not approved it would upend life for Afghans who already have been evacuated to the United States but do not have permanent approval to stay.

"To me, it's a sacred commitment that we have, and I don't just mean former military types. I mean the United States of America," Mullen said. "If anything should be above politics, this should be it. We should make sure that we take care of these people."

US strikes kill 15 militants from al-Shabab in Somalia

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — More than a dozen al-Qaida linked militants were killed in separate airstrikes in Somalia, U.S. Africa Command said.

The strikes, which came at the request of Somalia's government, hit on Dec. 14 and 17.

The attacks killed 15 al-Shabab fighters who were battling government forces at two locations roughly 125 miles northeast of Mogadishu, AFRICOM said Sunday in a statement. The initial assessment was no civilians were injured or killed in either strike.

American actions are undertaken to support Somalia's ongoing campaign to disrupt terrorism, AFRICOM said in the statement.

Al-Shabab, with about 5,000 to 7,000 fighters, is the largest terrorist group operating in Africa.

For nearly 20 years it has sought to overthrow the country's weak federal government and impose an extreme form of Sharia

law on the country.

For the past several years, AFRICOM has focused on training Somali military forces to be more effective in their battle against the militant group.

The U.S. has also carried out airstrikes in the country on a somewhat routine basis over the years, although the pace of the strikes has slowed significantly in 2021 and 2022.

So far, about a dozen strikes against Shabab targets have been conducted this year, according to the Long War Journal, which tracks such attacks. By comparison, the U.S. launched 63 strikes in Somalia in 2020.

In 2021, President Donald Trump ordered all U.S. forces out of the country during the last days of his administration. Military officials later said the move hindered their ability to support Somalia's military training needs.

In May, President Joe Biden ordered American trainers back into the country.

Fighter pilot ejects after bizarre crash

The Washington Post

A U.S. pilot ejected from a fighter jet after a bizarre slow-moving crash in Texas on Thursday, video shows.

The aircraft, an F-35B, descended toward the ground at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth. The landing gear touched the ground, then bounced back into the air before the aircraft crashed nose-first and entered a spin, which appeared driven by the system that provides its vertical thrust.

The pilot, who officials have not publicly identified, then ejected into the air for a seven-second descent to the ground. The pilot was taken to a hospital as a precaution, with no initial reports of serious injuries, said Matthew Montgomery, a spokesperson for the Defense Department's Contract Management Agency said late Thursday.

Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder, a Pentagon spokesman, said the jet is owned by Lockheed Martin but flown by a "U.S. government pilot," without specifying whether the individual is military or civilian personnel.

Lockheed Martin said in a statement that the company is aware of the crash and that the pilot "ejected successfully."

"Safety is our priority, and we will follow appropriate investigation protocol," Lockheed Martin said.

It is also unclear how the crash occurred. Other videos of similar aircraft show small bounces that occur once their landing gear hits the ground, though those are absorbed by shock struts. In the incident Thursday, the aircraft bounced as if it were landing on the moon.

The F-35B is the Marine Corps variant of the advanced fighter jet capable of short takeoff and vertical landing. That capability helps aircraft fly in and out of places where space is limited, such as assault ships.

Candateshia Pafford, a spokesperson for the naval air station, said Lockheed is a tenant there and shares a runway. The company builds the jet in a neighboring facility, according to NBC DFW.

Russia, China to hold naval drills

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian warships set off Monday to take part in joint naval drills with China, an exercise that showcases increasingly close defense ties between the two countries as they face tensions with the United States.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the Varyag missile cruiser, the Marshal Shaposhnikov destroyer and two corvettes of Russia's Pacific Fleet would take part in maneuvers in the East China Sea starting Wednesday.

The ministry said the Chinese navy planned to deploy several surface warships and a submarine for the exercise. Russian and Chinese aircraft will also take part in the drills, according to the ministry.

Moscow and Beijing have displayed their growing military cooperation in recent months.

In November, Tu-95 bombers of the Russian air force and Chinese H-6K bombers flew joint patrols over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. As part of the drills, the

Russian bombers landed in China for the first time, and the Chinese bombers flew to an air base in Russia.

In September, China sent more than 2,000 troops along with more than 300 military vehicles, 21 combat aircraft and three warships to take part in a sweeping joint exercise with Russia. The maneuvers marked the first time that China sent forces from three branches of its military to take part in a single Russian drill, in what was described as a show of the breadth and depth of China-Russia mutual trust.

Defense cooperation between Moscow and Beijing has grown stronger since Russian President Vladimir Putin sent his troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24.

China, which has declared a "no limits" friendship with Russia, has pointedly refused to criticize Moscow's actions, blaming the U.S. and NATO for provoking the Kremlin, and has blasted the punishing sanctions imposed on Russia.

Russia, in turn, has strongly backed China amid the tensions with the U.S. over Taiwan.

In Twitter poll, users ask Musk to step down

Associated Press

Millions of Twitter users asked Elon Musk to step down as head of Twitter in a poll on the platform that the billionaire had created and promised to abide by.

When the poll closed Monday, however, it wasn't clear if there would be a new leader for the social media platform, which has grown more chaotic and confusing under Musk's leadership with rapidly changing policies that are issued, then withdrawn or altered.

The billionaire Tesla CEO Musk had attended the World Cup final Sunday in Qatar, where he opened the poll. After it closed 12 hours later, there was no immediate announcement from Twitter or Musk, who may be midflight on his way back to the U.S. early Monday.

More than half of the 17.5 million respon-

dents voted "yes" in answer to Musk's Twitter poll asking whether he should step down as head of the company.

Musk has taken a number of unscientific polls on substantial issues facing the social media platform.

The polls have only added to a growing sense of tumult on Twitter since Musk bought the company for \$44 billion at the end of October, potentially leaving the future direction of the company in the hands of its users.

Among those users are people recently reinstated on the platform under Musk, people who had been banned for racist and toxic posts, or who had spread misinformation.

Since buying Twitter, Musk has presided over a dizzying series of changes that have unnerved advertisers and turned off users.

He's laid off half of the workforce, axed contract content moderators and disbanded a council of trust and safety advisers. He has dropped enforcement of COVID-19 misinformation rules and called for criminal charges against Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease expert helping lead the country's COVID response.

Musk has clashed with some users on multiple fronts and on Sunday, he asked Twitter users to decide if he should remain in charge of the social media platform after acknowledging he made a mistake in launching new restrictions that banned the mention of rival social media websites on Twitter.

The results of the unscientific online survey, which lasted 12 hours, showed that 57.5% of those who voted wanted him to leave, while 42.5% wanted him to stay.

Injuries as turbulence hits flight to Hawaii

Associated Press

HONOLULU — A flight from Phoenix to Honolulu carrying many people traveling for the holidays encountered severe turbulence shortly before landing, sending some unrestrained people and objects flying about the cabin and seriously injuring 11, officials and passengers said.

In all, 36 people received medical treatment following Sunday's Hawaiian Airlines flight for bumps, bruises, cuts and nausea, said Jim Ireland, director of Honolulu Emergency Medical Services. Twenty people were taken to hospitals, including 11 in serious condition.

"We are also very happy, and we feel fortunate that there were not any deaths or other critical injuries. And we're also very hopeful that all will recover and make a full recovery," Ireland said.

The full flight had nearly 300 people aboard and carried many passengers traveling to Hawaii for the holidays, like Jacie Hayata Ano, who was heading home.

"It was just rocky," she told

KHON-TV. "And then, it quickly just escalated to the point where we're shaking so much that we were pretty much like floating off of our chairs."

Passenger Jodette Neely told NBC's "Today" show that she saw people hitting their heads on the aircraft's ceiling.

"I was grabbing the seat in front of me, the top of it, to hang on, even though I had my seat belt on," she said.

Hawaiian Airlines Chief Operating Officer Jon Snook said such turbulence is unusual, noting that the airline hadn't experienced anything like it in recent history.

Three flight attendants were among the injured, and there was some internal damage to the aircraft, he said.

Passenger Kaylee Reyes told Hawaii News Now that her mother had just sat down when the turbulence hit and had not had a chance to buckle her safety belt.

"She flew up and hit the ceiling," Reyes said.

Jazmin Bitanga, who was also traveling home for the holidays, said there were two drops

in altitude, including one that was so strong it sent her boyfriend's water bottle into the plane's ceiling.

"I turned around and there was a couple of people bleeding and just bracing themselves," she told Hawaii News Now.

The fasten-seat belts sign was on at the time, though some of those injured weren't wearing them, Snook said.

Thomas Vaughan, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Honolulu, said there had been a weather advisory for thunderstorms that included Oahu and areas that would have included the flight path at the time of the turbulence.

The airline was aware of the weather forecast and the unstable air and weather conditions, but had no warning that the particular patch of air where the turbulence occurred "was in any way dangerous," Snook said.

The Airbus A330-200 began its descent immediately after the turbulence, the crew declared an emergency and air traffic controllers gave the flight priority to land.

Arctic air will blast much of US

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Forecasters are warning of treacherous holiday travel and life-threatening cold for much of the nation as an arctic air mass blows into the already-frigid southern United States.

"We're looking at much-below normal temperatures, potentially record-low temperatures leading up to the Christmas holiday," said Zack Taylor, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

The polar air arrives as an earlier storm system gradually winds down in the northeastern U.S. after burying parts of the region under two feet of snow.

The arctic front brings "extreme and prolonged freezing conditions for southern Mississippi and southeast Louisiana," said the National Weather Service Sunday. By Thursday night, temperatures will plunge as low as 13 degrees in Jackson, Miss.; and around 5 degrees in Nashville, Tenn.

Thai navy searches for sailors after ship sinks

Associated Press

BANGKOK — Thai navy ships and helicopters searched Monday for more than 30 sailors still missing more than 17 hours after their warship sank in rough seas in the Gulf of Thailand.

As of Monday afternoon, 75 sailors from the HTMS Sukhothai corvette had been rescued and 31 were still missing, the navy said. The high waves that caused the accident had lessened since Sunday night's sinking, but were still high enough to endanger small boats, the navy said.

A rescued crew member interviewed by Thai PBS television said he had to float in the sea for three hours before he was rescued.

He said the ship was buffeted by waves 10 feet high as it was sinking Sunday night, complicating rescue efforts.

"The waves are still high and we cannot search for them from the horizontal line. We have to fly the helicopters and search for them from a bird's eye view instead," navy spokesman Adm. Pokkrong Monthathphalin

told Thai PBS.

Eleven of the rescued sailors were being treated in a hospital.

The navy denied a local media report that one death had been confirmed, saying the fatality was from an accident involving another boat.

Strong winds blew seawater onto the HTMS Sukhothai and knocked out its electrical system Sunday evening, making control of the ship difficult.

The navy dispatched three frigates and two helicopters with mobile pumping machines to try to assist the disabled ship by removing the seawater, but couldn't do so because of the strong winds.

The loss of power allowed more seawater to flow into the vessel, causing it to list and sink.

Thailand's Meteorological Department has issued a weather advisory for the general area just a few hours before the accident, saying that waves in the Gulf of Thailand were expected to be 7-14 feet high with thundershowers.

It suggested all ships "proceed with caution" and warned small craft not to go to sea until Tuesday.

The Sukhothai was built in Tacoma, Wash., and commissioned in 1987. With a maximum displacement of 959 tons and a length of 252 feet, it is about midsize for a corvette, a type of armed vessel that typically is used for patrolling close offshore waters.

The warship had been on patrol 20 miles from the pier at Bangsaphan district in Prachuap Khiri Khan province.

Pokkrong said the ship had been on a regular patrol to assist any fishing boats needing help.

"Our top priority now is to rescue all the sailors. We will plan to have the ship salvaged later," he said. The search was being conducted in a 6.2-square mile area around the site of the sinking.

While northern and central Thailand are seeing their coldest temperatures of the year, far southern Thailand has been experiencing storms and flooding in recent days.

Drones hit Kyiv as Putin makes trip to Belarus

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Multiple explosive drones attacked Ukraine's capital before dawn Monday as Moscow pursues its campaign to torment the invaded country from the air amid a broad battlefield stalemate.

In a sign that Russia might be seeking ways to bolster depleted forces, President Vladimir Putin traveled to Belarus, which provided the Kremlin's troops with a launch pad for the invasion of Ukraine almost 10

months ago.

The drone attack came three days after what Ukrainian officials described as one of Russia's biggest assaults on Kyiv since the war started. Moscow has targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure since October as part of a strategy to try to leave the country without heat and light during the bitterly cold winter.

Russia launched 23 exploding drones over Kyiv while the city slept, but Ukrainian forces shot

down 18 of them, the Kyiv city administration said on Telegram. No major casualties were reported from the attack, although the Ukrainian president's office said the war killed at least three civilians and wounded 11 elsewhere in the country between Sunday and Monday.

The drone barrage caused emergency power outages in 11 central and eastern regions of the country, including the capital region, authorities said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described the unrelenting daily barrages as "terror" and once again pleaded for Western countries to send sophisticated air defense systems as winter tightens its grip.

"A 100% air defense shield for Ukraine will be one of the most successful steps against Russian aggression," Zelenskyy said by video link at a northern European regional threat conference in Latvia. "This step is needed right now."

Ex-soldier says harassment was rampant in her Japanese unit

Associated Press

TOKYO — A former Japanese soldier who came forward with her sexual misconduct case said Monday that harassment was as rampant in her army unit as if "part of daily communication."

Rina Gonoï filed the case last year with the Defense Ministry, but it was dropped. She demanded it be reinvestigated earlier this year, saying she had suffered multiple assaults by a number of male colleagues,

causing her to give up her military career.

In response, Japan's army in September acknowledged part of the misconduct and apologized, and last week fired five servicemen and punished four others. The Defense Ministry also announced interim results of an investigation that found over 100 similar complaints and other forms of misconduct totaling more than 1,400.

In announcing the punishments last Thursday, army chief Yoshihide Yoshida

repeated his apology to Gonoï and said he felt a strong sense of responsibility over her sorrow and pain.

"At a unit I belonged to, sexual harassment was so rampant it was carried out as if a part of communication and there was a loss of sensitivity," Gonoï told reporters Monday. She said the punishments in her case were "appropriate," but added that other soldiers who looked the other way should have been also held accountable.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man suspected of holding woman captive

GA WAYNESBORO — A man remains jailed in Georgia after police said he kidnapped a woman from South Carolina and held her captive for months in a motel while he raped her, beat her and forced her to perform work.

Burke County jail records show Ismael Patricio Aguirre, 22, was arrested by Waynesboro police and charged with rape, kidnapping, aggravated assault, battery and false imprisonment.

Investigators said Aguirre took the woman from her home in Charleston, S.C., more than four months ago and held her in a motel room in Waynesboro, southeast of Augusta.

The woman escaped, investigators tell local news outlets, by faking pregnancy so she could go to a hospital. The woman told hospital employees she wasn't pregnant but needed help in escaping Aguirre.

Officials: Firm's alfalfa cubes may kill horses

LA BATON ROUGE — State and federal officials are warning horse owners not to feed their animals Top of the Rockies brand alfalfa cubes after nearly 100 horses developed neurologic illnesses — 45 of which have died or been euthanized.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued the warning Saturday. The agency said it's working with state agriculture departments in Colorado, Louisiana, New Mexico and Texas to investigate the horse deaths.

Manzanola Feeds of Manzanola, Colo., recalled the cubes

Friday. The company warned certain batches may contain bacteria that cause botulism, a fatal paralytic disease.

The company directly distributed products to stores in 10 states including Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas and Wisconsin.

Probation for teacher who gave teen vaccine

NY MINEOLA — A former Long Island high school teacher accused of injecting a teen with a COVID-19 vaccine at her home without his parents' knowledge pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor and was sentenced to community service and probation, avoiding a felony charge that could have sent her to prison.

Laura Parker Russo, 55, pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor count of attempting the unauthorized practice of medicine when she appeared in a courtroom in Mineola, N.Y., on Friday. She also pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct.

Russo was arrested at the beginning of January, and authorities accused her of giving the 17-year-old, the son of someone she knew, a vaccine dose. Newsday reported that Russo later testified in a hearing over her job that she got the dose when a pharmacist gave her expiring doses after she asked for an empty vial to use as a Christmas ornament.

Deadly plane crash happened on test flight

WA SEATTLE — A federal safety agency said Saturday that four people

who died when a small plane crashed north of Seattle last month were conducting test flights to gather baseline information before the Cessna 208B was modified with a new aerodynamic drag reduction system.

The National Transportation Safety Board released its preliminary report Saturday on the Nov. 18 crash in Snohomish, Wash.

Raisbeck Engineering of Seattle was having the Cessna 208B test flown before modifying the aircraft, according to a statement from Raisbeck President Hal Chrisman.

He said the aircraft had not yet been modified. The flight crew included two "highly-experienced" test pilots, a flight test director and an instrumentation engineer who were collecting "baseline aircraft performance data," Chrisman said.

2 men missing after attempted ice rescue

WY MOORCROFT — Two men who drove their all-terrain vehicle onto a frozen reservoir in northeastern Wyoming to rescue another man who fell through the ice are missing, authorities said.

The men drove onto Keyhole Reservoir, north of Moorcroft, on Thursday night to try to help the man, who was able to pull himself out and was later rescued by firefighters, the Crook County Sheriff's Office said.

First responders also found a third man who was on the ATV but discovered open water in the area where the would-be rescuers were last seen, as well as evidence that the vehicle had entered the water. Witnesses

lost sight of the vehicle before authorities arrived on the scene.

Winds that reached speeds of 50 mph, poor visibility and frigid temperatures forced rescuers to call off the search at 11 p.m.

They resumed looking Friday, but the men were not found by midday.

Cannabis-impaired driver's ed to be offered

MA BOSTON — Beginning next month, Massachusetts will adopt a curriculum designed to educate teens on the risks of driving while under the influence of cannabis.

As of Jan. 1, Massachusetts will become the first state that has legalized the recreational use of marijuana to adopt the curriculum designed by AAA Northeast, according to the state Registry of Motor Vehicles.

The current driver education curriculum addressing impaired driving will be updated to include information on cannabis, such as how tetrahydrocannabinol — the active chemical in marijuana — affects cognition, vision, reaction time and perception of time and distance.

The new curriculum is targeted at the first generation of driver education students to be licensed since recreational cannabis became legal in Massachusetts.

The curriculum is taught in part through a 25-minute video that was developed by AAA Northeast. It will be taught to approximately 50,000 young drivers each year in more than 460 driving school locations.

— From Associated Press

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Giants top Commanders to end winless streak

Associated Press

LANDOVER, Md. — Prime time finally likes the New York Giants, and now they're a huge step closer to making the playoffs.

Kayvon Thibodeaux thrived on the national stage just like he promised, Daniel Jones shined under the lights to end his career-long skid in night games and New York held on to beat the Washington Commanders 20-12 on Sunday after a goal-line stand that ended with a questionable non-call.

After declaring, "Prime time likes me," Thibodeaux was a force rushing the passer and busting into the backfield early and often. The talented rookie stripped Taylor Heinicke of the ball, recovered it to score a touchdown and finished with three tackles for loss among his game-high 12 before getting poked in the left eye and getting helped off with 48 seconds left.

Thibodeaux got hit in the eye on the final meaningful play, a pass breakup by Darnay Holmes defending Curtis Samuel, which arguably could have been pass interference. While coach Ron Rivera said not to ask him about the officiating because he "can't answer the question," players were more confident about it being a penalty.

Raiders 30, Patriots 24: De-

fensive end Chandler Jones grabbed a bizarre, unnecessary lateral by New England's Jakobi Meyers out of the air on the final play and returned it 48 yards for a touchdown, giving host Las Vegas a victory over New England.

With the game tied at 24-all, the Patriots decided to run a series of pitches in a last-ditch attempt to avoid overtime. Rhamondre Stevenson pitched the ball to Meyers, who heaved it across the field and into the arms of Jones, who stiff-armed Patriots quarterback Mac Jones and then had nothing but open field in front of him.

The wild finish bailed out the Raiders (6-8), who led 17-3 at halftime before allowing the Patriots (7-7) to score 21 straight points. Las Vegas scored two touchdowns in the final 32 seconds and seriously damaged New England's playoff hopes.

Bengals 34, Buccaneers 23: Joe Burrow threw for four second-half touchdowns and surging Cincinnati rallied from a 17-point deficit to beat Tom Brady and host Tampa Bay.

The Bengals (10-4) won their sixth straight and retained sole possession of first place in the AFC North. Trey Flowers intercepted Brady to set up one touchdown and Logan Wilson sacked the seven-time Super Bowl champion to force a fum-

ble that led to another TD.

The first-place Bucs (6-8) wasted an opportunity to take a two-game lead over Carolina, Atlanta and New Orleans in the woeful NFC South.

Jaguars 40, Cowboys 34 (OT): Rayshawn Jenkins intercepted Dak Prescott's bobbled pass and returned it 52 yards for a touchdown that gave host Jacksonville the overtime victory over Dallas.

Noah Brown failed to secure Prescott's low throw, and Jenkins made a shoelace grab and went untouched the other way to end Jacksonville's NFL-record 20-game skid against NFC teams.

The Cowboys (10-4) ended a four-game winning streak but later secured a playoff spot when the NFC East rival New York Giants won at Washington. The Jaguars (6-8), meanwhile, could gain ground on Tennessee in the topsy-turvy AFC South.

Chiefs 30, Texans 24 (OT): Jerick McKinnon ran for a 26-yard touchdown in overtime and visiting Kansas City beat Houston to clinch its seventh straight AFC West title.

Patrick Mahomes threw for 336 yards and two touchdowns and ran for a score as Kansas City overcame two turnovers and a season-high 102 penalty yards to win for the seventh

time in eight games overall.

Eagles 25, Bears 20: Jalen Hurts tied a career high by running for three touchdowns and visiting Philadelphia outlasted Chicago.

The Eagles (13-1), with the best record in the NFL, made just enough plays to come away with a tighter-than-anticipated win.

Lions 20, Jets 17: Jared Goff threw a go-ahead 51-yard touchdown pass to Brock Wright on fourth-and-1 with 1:49 remaining, and visiting Detroit held on to beat Zach Wilson and New York.

Chargers 17, Titans 14: Cameron Dicker connected on a 43-yard field goal with 4 seconds remaining and host Los Angeles beat Tennessee.

Steelers 24, Panthers 16: Mitch Trubisky threw for 179 yards and engineered three long touchdown drives as visiting Pittsburgh beat Carolina.

Saints 21, Falcons 18: Andy Dalton and Taysom Hill combined to throw three touchdown passes, and host New Orleans beat Atlanta in rookie quarterback Desmond Ridder's debut for the Falcons.

Broncos 24, Cardinals 15: Backup quarterback Brett Rypley overcame relentless pressure, Justin Simmons had two interceptions and host Denver held off Arizona.

Long-suffering Argentines erupt in joy after World Cup win

Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — Argentines let loose on Sunday and streets across the country became places of celebration after an epic World Cup final in which the national team beat France on penalties.

It was the country's third World Cup title, and the first since 1986.

"I'm very happy, we really deserved this. The team suffered quite a bit, but it recovered as time went on," said Josefina Villalba, a 55-year-old nanny who joined hundreds of fans at one of the many public plazas where giant screens were set up to watch the long-awaited match.

Millions of Argentines cried, yelled and hugged as they followed the game, which was a roller coaster of emotions.

Throughout the match, many watching in a public square in Buenos Aires chanted the name of captain Lionel Messi, often considered the world's greatest soccer player who had long talked about how he yearned for a World Cup victory.

"I feel an immense happiness in my heart because this is the first World Cup I truly enjoy," Hector Quinteros, a 34-year-old security guard, said as his eyes welled up with tears. "This always happens. They always make us suffer."

After 36 years, Argentina finally won a World Cup title, erasing years of doubts and questions about whether a country known for having some of the world's greatest soccer players could perform on an international stage. The country won its first title in 1978, but lost finals in 1930, 1990 and 2014.

In Rosario, Messi's hometown, a sea of people flooded the streets to celebrate their local hero finally winning a World Cup title.

"It's madness. It surpassed my expectations with so many people on the same wavelength, everyone celebrating. That's what's most beautiful about today," said Jeremías Regolo, 26.

Knicks beat Pacers for 7th straight win

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Jalen Brunson scored 30 points, Julius Randle made six free throws in the final minute and the New York Knicks beat the Indiana Pacers 109-106 on Sunday for their NBA-best seventh consecutive victory.

The 19th and final lead change came in the final minute, when Randle made two foul shots with 45.6 seconds remaining for a 105-104 lead. After the teams exchanged turnovers, Randle hit four more free throws in the final two possessions. The Pacers missed a shot from just inside half-court at the buzzer.

"Right now, New York is as good as any team in the NBA," Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said.

Randle finished with 25 points and 14 rebounds. RJ Barrett added 24 points.

"To win on the road and like this, it was tough," Randle said.

"It was a hard game, but we got it done."

Brunson, who was 11-for-22 from the field with three three-pointers, started a fourth-quarter comeback from a 104-98 hole with a three-pointer, then a steal and a layup in a span of 24 seconds.

"We just kept fighting," Brunson said. "We're confident, but we know we've still got a lot of work to do. We've just got to stay focused. We can't relax. We can't have bad days. We've got to stay focused."

Timberwolves 150, Bulls 126: Anthony Edwards had season highs with 37 points and 11 assists and host Minnesota broke the franchise record for points in a game.

D'Angelo Russell added 28 points after missing two games and the Timberwolves made a season-high 23 three-pointers to roll past Chicago despite missing four regulars.

Rudy Gobert missed his sec-

ond straight game because of a sprained left ankle. Karl-Anthony Towns (right calf strain) and top reserves Jordan McLaughlin (left calf strain) and Taurean Prince (right shoulder) also sat out.

Magic 95, Celtics 92: Paolo Banchero scored 31 points and Admiral Schofield had 11 of his 13 in the fourth quarter to help visiting Orlando complete a sweep of consecutive games in Boston.

Franz Wagner added 12 points and Bol Bol had 11 with eight rebounds for the Magic, who were 1-11 on the road before the two straight wins over the Celtics.

Warriors 126, Raptors 110: Jordan Poole scored a career-high 43 points, Klay Thompson had 17 and visiting Golden State won for the first time in five tries this season without the injured Stephen Curry.

Draymond Green returned after sitting out Friday's loss at Phi-

ladelphia because of a sore right quadriceps and finished with 17 points and nine rebounds in 37 minutes as the Warriors snapped a three-game losing streak and improved to 3-14 on the road. Kevon Looney added 11 points and 11 rebounds for the Warriors, whose last road win came Nov. 27 at Minnesota.

Nets 124, Pistons 121: Kevin Durant scored 26 of his 43 points in the third quarter, helping visiting Brooklyn overcome a 17-point halftime deficit.

Nuggets 119, Hornets 115: Nikola Jokic had 40 points, a career-high 27 rebounds and 10 assists in yet another triple-double to help host Denver beat Charlotte.

Lakers 119, Wizards 117: LeBron James had 33 points and nine assists, Lonnie Walker scored 21 points and host Los Angeles overcame the absence of Anthony Davis.

USC tops No. 19 Auburn for 5th consecutive victory

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — After a couple of close losses in the Bahamas last month, Southern California was looking for a signature win and a boost of confidence.

The Trojans got a big one Sunday, holding off 19th-ranked Auburn 74-71 for their fifth straight victory.

USC (9-3) lost in overtime to Tennessee and by five points to Wisconsin at the Bahamas event over Thanksgiving. With just one game left before resuming Pac-12 play, the Trojans wanted to make a statement.

"Our team has improved dramatically since the Bahamas," USC coach Andy Enfield said. "This is our biggest win of the year by far. We've got a young team developing and this showed we can compete."

Boogie Ellis scored a career-high 28 points and the Trojans forced 14 of Auburn's season-high 23 turnovers in the second half of the teams' first meeting since 1977. USC scored 23 points off the Tigers' miscues.

"He was physical, he was quick," Enfield said of Ellis. "He played his best game of the year."

The Trojans were up 71-65 with 13 seconds remaining when Auburn made a run. Chris

Moore and K.D. Johnson combined to make four straight free throws that cut the Tigers' deficit to two points.

Ellis got fouled after catching an inbound pass. He sank the first free throw but missed the second, leaving USC clinging to a 72-69 lead.

Johnson got fouled and made both to leave the Tigers trailing 72-71.

Ellis got fouled again with two seconds left, and this time he made both. Johnson missed a potential tying three-pointer at the buzzer.

"I'm at my best when I'm aggressive getting to the paint and looking for my teammates," Ellis said. "We're at our best when our guards are flying around, taking charges. We attacked them."

No. 7 Texas 72, Stanford 62: Marcus Carr had 17 points and five assists as the seventh-ranked Longhorns, playing again without suspended coach Chris Beard, beat the visiting Cardinal.

Carr sparked an eight-point frenzy in a 48-second span early in the second half that put Texas ahead to stay. Timmy Allen and Si'Jabari Rice each had 15 points for the Longhorns (9-1).

Michael Jones scored 17 points total for

Stanford (4-7).

It was the second game the Longhorns played without Beard, who was arrested and spent nearly 11 hours in jail Monday on a felony domestic violence charge. The woman who called police to his home said he choked, bit and hit her during an argument. Beard's attorney has said the coach is innocent. Texas officials suspended Beard indefinitely without pay and elevated assistant Rodney Terry to acting head coach.

No. 11 Baylor 65, Washington State 59: Keyonte George scored five straight points that gave his team the lead for good and finished with 19 as the Bears won the final game of the Pac-12 Coast-to-Coast Challenge in Dallas.

George, a freshman guard who has started every game for Baylor, converted two free throws that put the Bears ahead 44-43 with 10:32 left in the second half. Following a steal by Dale Bonner on Washington State's next possession, George hit a fade-away three-pointer for a 47-43 lead with 9:46 to go.

No. 21 TCU 88, Mississippi Valley State 43: Mike Miles scored 11 of his 15 points in the first half and the host Horned Frogs rolled to an easy win.

Rangers get seventh consecutive victory

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Artemi Panarin had a goal and two assists, Igor Shesterkin stopped 29 shots and the New York Rangers beat the Chicago Blackhawks 7-1 on Sunday night for their seventh straight win.

Vincent Trocheck, Filip Chytil and Kap- po Kakko each had a goal and an assist, and Vitali Kravtsov, Braden Schneider and Ja- cob Trouba also scored for the Rangers. Adam Fox had three assists, and Alexis La- freniere and Mika Zibanejad each had two.

The Rangers have outscored opponents 33-14 during their winning streak.

“We had trouble scoring the first part of the season, and now we’re getting more goals, but obviously the defense has been really good, and goaltending has been excellent,” Rangers coach Gerard Gallant said.

Philipp Kurashev scored for Chicago and Arvid Soderblom finished with 19 saves.

“I think we have to find a way to have more fight and more pushback and not like, feel exhausted, look exhausted,” Chi- cago coach Luke Richardson said. “Whether it’s mentally or physically, you know we just have to find a way to get out of it.”

The Rangers have not lost since a 5-2 de-

feat at home to the Blackhawks on Dec. 3. Chicago has lost seven straight since then and is 1-14-1 since mid-November.

“It’s a completely different two games,” Panarin said of the Chicago contests. “They were a different team when they played against us, and we didn’t play with the confidence we have now. I don’t want to say we’re pretty good right now, because that’s when things go bad.”

Chytil, Panarin and Kakko scored on consecutive shots in a 5:59 span to make it 3-0 late in the first period. Chytil scored his eighth with 6:56 left, Panarin got his eighth with 3:05 remaining and Kakko added his eighth with 57 seconds to go.

Wild 4, Senators 2: Kirill Kaprizov had a goal and two assists as host Minnesota held on for its fifth straight win.

Mats Zuccarello had a goal and an assist, and Jared Spurgeon and Frederick Gau- dreau also scored for the Wild. Sam Steel had two assists and Filip Gustavsson stopped 25 shots against his former team.

Mark Kastelic and Claude Giroux scored for the Senators, who snapped a four-game winning streak. Anton Fors- berg had 19 saves.

Hurricanes 3, Penguins 2: Jordan Staal scored with 6:27 remaining as host Caroli- na snapped Pittsburgh’s seven-game win-

ning streak.

Derek Stepan and Brady Skjei both had a goal and an assist for the Hurricanes, who stretched their points streak to 11 games. Goalie Pyotr Kochetkov, a rookie appear- ing for the eighth time in nine games, stopped 24 shots. Rickard Rakell and Brock McGinn scored for the Penguins. Casey DeSmith made 26 saves.

Kraken 3, Jets 2: Jared McCann scored late to lift host Seattle over Winnipeg.

Jordan Eberle and Ryan Donato also scored for the Kraken, and Philipp Gru- bauer stopped 15 shots. Mark Scheifele and Pierre-Luc Dubois scored power-play goals for the Jets, who had won a franchise record-tying five straight on the road. Da- vid Rittich finished with 32 saves.

Flames 5, Sharks 2: Elias Lindholm scored two goals 19 seconds apart in the first minute of the third period, and visit- ing Calgary beat San Jose.

Tyler Toffoli had a goal and an assist, and Milan Lucic and Dillon Dube also scored for the Flames, who had lost five straight. Jacob Markstrom had 23 saves for his ninth win. Tomas Hertl had a goal and an assist, and Timo Meier also scored for the Sharks, who lost their second straight and fell to 3-6-3 in their last 12. Kaapo Kahkonen finished with 20 saves.

Olympic champion Odermatt wins Alta Badia giant slalom

Associated Press

LA VILLA, Italy — There was no stopping Marco Odermatt this time.

A day after an uncharacteris- tic third-place finish on the same course, the Olympic champion won another giant slalom in Alta Badia on Monday for his 15th career World Cup victory.

Odermatt, the reigning over- all World Cup champion and current leader, maintained his first-run advantage during a wild second run down the Gran Risa, making a series of recov- eries after getting bounced off the racing line several times.

The Swiss skier finished 0.20 seconds ahead of Norwegian veteran Henrik Kristoffersen and 0.92 ahead of Olympic sil- ver medalist Zan Kranjec.

Lucas Braathen, the Norwe- gian who won Sunday’s race, lost control on the upper section during his opening run, got twisted around and ended up careening through a gate back- ward.

Navy promotes Newberry to head coach

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Navy promoted defensive coordina- tor Brian Newberry to head coach on Monday, replacing Ken Niumatalolo, the winn- ingest coach in school history who was fired a week ago.

Newberry, 51, has been lead- ing the Midshipmen defense since 2019. His college coaching career dates back to 2000, but this will be his first head coach- ing job.

“It is a great honor and privi-

lege to lead this program,” New- berry said in a statement. “It is a great responsibility that I fully accept and embrace. I could not be more excited and optimistic about the future of Navy foot- ball. The Naval Academy is a special place and we have great young men in our program.”

Navy lost to Army in overtime on Dec. 10 to finish its season with a 4-8 record.

Newberry, who played for Baylor, led a defense that fin- ished sixth in the nation in run defense this season. He was previously defensive coordina- tor at Kennesaw State, Northern Michigan, the University of the South and Washington & Lee.

In other college football news: ■ TCU quarterback and Heisman Trophy runner-up Max Duggan will skip his avail-

able extra season with the third- ranked Horned Frogs and make himself eligible for the NFL Draft after the College Football Playoff.

Duggan has started 41 games during his four seasons at TCU, though the senior could have re- turned for another season be- cause all players were granted an extra year of eligibility after the 2020 season was altered.

■ Texas running back Bijan Robinson is skipping his final two seasons of eligibility to en- ter the NFL Draft and won’t play in the Alamo Bowl.

Robinson earned All-Ameri- ca honors after rushing for 1,580 yards with 18 touchdowns as the Longhorns (8-4) finished third in the Big 12. No. 21 Texas plays 12th-ranked Washington in the Alamo Bowl on Dec. 29.