

Japan concerned over venturing vessel

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND KEISHI KOJA

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Tokyo lodged diplomatic complaints with Beijing on Monday over alleged intrusions into Japanese territorial waters by a Chinese naval vessel, according to Japanese government statements.

The alleged intrusion capped several days of Chinese military exercises in the waters surrounding the southern island prefecture of Okinawa, according to Japan's Ministry of Defense. A Chinese navy Shupang-class survey vessel around 6:50 a.m. Monday entered Japan's territorial waters south of Yakushima, an island about 40 miles south of Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, according to statement posted Monday on the Defense Ministry website. The survey vessel steamed west past Kuchinoerabu Island and exited territorial waters around 10:30 a.m., according to the ministry.

Japan's Foreign Affairs Ministry protested the action with the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo and with the Chinese government in Beijing, a foreign ministry spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone on Tuesday.

Some government officials in Japan are required to speak to the media on condition of anonymity.

"We expressed our strong concern on the moves of the Chinese naval ships around our country through diplomatic channels," Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary, Hirokazu Matsuno, said Monday during a regularly scheduled press conference at Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's office in Tokyo.

Even warships of one country are permitted "innocent passage" through another country's territorial waters under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea. The convention spells out exceptions to the rule.

Matsuno declined to comment on the vessel's purpose but said China had been raising tensions

in the region through increased activity.

The intrusion follows several days of Chinese exercises that took place between Okinawa and Miyako Island, 175 miles to the southwest, according to a statement by Japan's Joint Staff on its website Sunday. A flotilla of six Chinese warships, including the aircraft carrier Liaoning, a frigate, three destroyers and a fast combat support ship were spotted in the region between Thursday and Saturday. They traversed the Miyako Strait on Friday and practiced carrier landings the following day, according to the Joint Staff.

The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force launched the JS Kirisame from Sasebo Naval Base, a P-1 patrol plane from Atsugi Naval Air Facility and a P-3C surveillance plane from Naha, Okinawa, as well as fighters, to gather information, the statement said.

China routinely sends warships and aircraft through the straits between Japanese islands,

even as it objects to foreign naval vessels transiting the Taiwan Strait. All are considered international waters.

Japan Air Self-Defense Force fighters from Naha scrambled Monday afternoon to intercept a pair of Chinese H-6 bombers that passed between Okinawa and Miyako, according to a statement on the Joint Staff website. The bombers flew from the East China Sea to the Pacific and back again but did not enter Japan's airspace.

The intrusion into Japan's territorial waters was the ninth this year and the first since November, according to a post on the Defense Ministry's official Twitter account Monday.

The survey vessel was first spotted westbound about 30 miles southeast of Tanegashima by the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force around 3:20 a.m. Monday, according to the ministry. It entered Japan's contiguous zone south of Tanegashima and then Japan's territorial waters south of Yakushima.

Navy finds no link in series of suicides by carrier crew

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Three suicides by sailors assigned to a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier, which set off alarms about conditions on and around the ship, were not connected, but the poor quality of life onboard was a "contributing factor" in one of the deaths, according to a Navy report released Monday.

The suicides, which happened while the USS George Washington was docked at the shipyard in Newport News, Va., between April 9-15, triggered questions about whether the sailors knew each other or if something similar, associated with their jobs or

the ship, had caused them.

The report concludes that while all three were assigned to the ship, which was undergoing extensive maintenance, they had no social or working relationships with each other.

It did find, however, that the shipyard environment may have added to the stress of one sailor, but was not a "root cause" of the suicides.

Instead, the report lays out an array of deeply personal and unique factors, including alcohol use, that apparently led to the sailors taking their own lives.

"Based on my review, I conclude these three suicides were

independent events and that there was no direct correlation between these three deaths," said Adm. Daryl Caudle, commander of the Navy's Fleet Forces Command.

Rear Adm. John F. Meier, commander of Naval Air Force Atlantic, conducted the investigation and concluded that two of the three deaths "appear unrelated to life onboard the ship," but one sailor was affected by the conditions on the ship and "lack of shipboard amenities."

He also suggested that Navy leaders should have done more.

The report said leaders failed to properly document and ad-

dress problems with one sailor that could have led to suspending his ability to carry a gun. Meier noted that Navy enlisted leaders knew that the sailor was sleeping in his car due to noise on the ship and they counseled him on the matter, but "there is no evidence of any follow through to understand the root cause for his decision making."

The report was limited to determining if the three suicides were connected. A second investigation into broader Navy issues, including command climate, available resources, training and other factors, is ongoing and expected to be completed next spring.

US, S. Korea host drills after North's launch

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — U.S. bombers and fighter jets drilled in the air with South Korea's air force Tuesday, two days after North Korea fired its first ballistic missile in a month.

U.S. Air Force B-52 Stratofortress bombers and F-22 Raptors flew with South Korean F-35A Lightning IIs and F-15K Slam Eagles in and around the Korea Air Defense Identification Zone to improve "capabilities to respond to North Korea's nuclear and missile threats," according to a Min-

istry of National Defense news release Tuesday.

An Air Defense Identification Zone, or ADIZ, is airspace in which foreign aircraft are required to identify themselves in the interest of national security.

Air Force F-22s flew to Kunsan Air Base in South Korea from Kadena Air Base on Okinawa, Japan, for the drill, according to the Ministry of National Defense.

U.S. bombers have appeared in the Korean Peninsula as recently as Nov. 19, when B-1B Lancers drilled in the Korea ADIZ with F-16 Fighting Falcons and South

Korean F-35As. The previous day, North Korea had fired an intercontinental ballistic missile that landed less than 150 miles from Japanese territory.

The Tuesday exercise comes after North Korea on Sunday fired two medium-range ballistic missiles toward the East Sea, or Sea of Japan. Those missiles, the first such launch since Nov. 18, were fired at a high angle and flew 310 miles before coming down in the sea, according to South Korea's military.

North Korea has fired roughly 70 missiles in 34 rounds of testing

so far this year, a record.

The drills are another example of the U.S. and South Korean "combined defense posture" against North Korea by using their "strategic assets," according to the ministry on Tuesday.

Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup in a news conference with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin at the Pentagon last month said the two pledged to respond to North Korea's provocations using "U.S. strategic assets to the level equivalent to [the] constant deployment through increasing the frequency and intensity."

\$4B deal set to keep Greenland base up

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

A nearly \$4 billion U.S. Air Force contract has been awarded to ensure the ongoing operation of a strategic base in Greenland, the Defense Department said in a statement.

The \$3.95 billion deal, awarded to Nuuk, Greenland-based contractor Inuksuk A/S, provides for an array of operation and maintenance requirements at Thule Air Base — the military's northernmost site.

The main mission there involves monitoring polar-orbiting satellites and staying on the lookout for ballistic missile launches, as well as supporting any additional needs north of the Arctic Circle.

The new Air Force contract isn't focused on an expansion of the base, but rather keeping things going in an austere environment.

The U.S. Embassy in Copenhagen said the contract provides for services such as airfield operations, civil engineering and envi-

ronmental management. Also included are food and health services, fuel logistics and other day-to-day requirements. Work under the contract is expected to be completed by 2034.

Thule Air Base has taken on added significance for the United States in recent years given concerns about a growing Russian military presence in the Arctic. China has also signaled an intent to play a larger role in the region, declaring itself in 2018 a "near-Arctic country" with vested interests.

The U.S. strategy for the Arctic, updated in October, emphasizes deepening cooperation with Greenland and other allied stakeholders in the High North.

"We will deter threats to the U.S. homeland and our allies by enhancing the capabilities required to defend our interests in the Arctic, while coordinating shared approaches to security with allies and partners and mitigating risks of unintended escalation," the White House's Arctic strategy states.

Destroyer USS Shoup arrives at Japan base

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The guided-missile destroyer USS Shoup steamed into Yokosuka Naval Base on Tokyo Bay on Monday, where it became the ninth warship in Destroyer Squadron 15.

Formerly homeported at Naval Station Everett, Wash., the Shoup linked up with the USS Nimitz Carrier Strike Group on Nov. 28 and deployed out of San Diego on Dec. 3 before making the trip to Yokosuka Naval Base.

A Flight IIA variant of the Arleigh-Burke class of destroyers equipped with the Aegis missile defense system, the Shoup has an onboard hangar that accommodates two MH-60 Seahawk helicopters, which sets it apart from the Flight I and Flight II variants.

Along with the USS Dewey, USS Howard, USS Rafael and USS Ralph Johnson, the Shoup is the fifth Flight IIA destroyer to join Destroyer Squadron 15, according to Lt. Cmdr. Joseph Keiley, spokesman for Task Force 71.

"Shoup is a valuable addition to [Task Force 71] and DESRON 15 that ensures our forward-deployed surface force is ready to face any maritime challenge thanks to the destroyer's capabilities and the dedicated sailors onboard," he told Stars and Stripes in a Tuesday email.

The Shoup is a new addition to the fleet but does not replace any other destroyer, Keiley said, although another destroyer is slated to leave in the future. He declined to identify that destroyer or say when it will depart.

The 508.5-foot, 9,200-ton warship with a crew of approximately 270 sailors is under the command of Cmdr. Dale Tourtelotte, according to a Monday news release from 7th Fleet. Tourtelotte, a Texas native and 2005 graduate of Texas A&M University, previously served aboard the destroyers USS Forrest Sherman and USS Sterett and the littoral combat ships USS Independence and USS Gabrielle Giffords, according to his official Navy biography.

Panel recommends prosecution of Trump

Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — In an unprecedented step in American history, the House panel investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol unanimously recommended Monday that former President Donald Trump be criminally prosecuted for insurrection, obstruction of an official proceeding of Congress, knowingly and willfully making materially false statements to the federal government and conspiracy to defraud the United States.

The referrals for Trump and others in his orbit are nonbinding recommendations and cannot compel the Justice Department to act.

But they show that the committee believes it has gathered sufficient evidence to prove

Trump provided “aid and comfort” to a mob that ransacked the Capitol and actively tried to prevent the peaceful transition of power to a new president selected by voters, Joe Biden.

“Every president in our history has defended this orderly transfer of authority, except one,” said Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., the panel’s vice chair. “January 6, 2021, was the first time one American president refused his constitutional duty to transfer power peacefully to the next. In our work over the last 18 months, the select committee has recognized our obligation to do everything we can to ensure this never happens again.”

The committee laid out its rationale and evidence for the

referrals in an introductory document released after the hearing. The document hinted that more information will be available when the full report is released later this week.

“This committee will lay out a number of recommendations in this final report,” committee Chairman Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., said. “But beyond any specific details and recommendations we present, there’s one factor I believe is most important in preventing another Jan. 6 — accountability ... accountability that can only be found in the criminal justice system.”

The committee’s 18-month investigation and nine public hearings this year placed Trump at the center of the effort to overturn the 2020 presi-

dential election and to assemble a mob he directed to Capitol Hill to interfere with the peaceful transfer of power.

“Ours is not a system of justice where foot soldiers go to jail and the masterminds and ringleaders get a free pass,” committee member Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., said while announcing the referrals. “The evidence clearly suggests that President Trump conspired with others to submit slates of fake electors to Congress and the National Archives.”

Raskin said after the hearing that the referrals will go to the Justice Department this week.

The White House declined to say whether it supports the committee’s criminal referrals or the Justice Department pursuing charges against Trump.

New bill hikes DOD funds, relief to Ukraine

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders unveiled a \$1.7 trillion federal spending package Tuesday that will provide \$858 billion next year for national defense and \$45 billion for Ukraine to battle Russia’s invading armed forces.

The bill calls for a 10% funding increase for defense compared to last year and exceeds President Joe Biden’s request for Ukraine aid by about \$7 billion.

It also includes a 22% spending boost for veterans’ medical care in fiscal 2023, which began Oct. 1. The appropriations legislation, called an omnibus, funds the priorities and programs outlined in the recently passed 2023 National Defense Authorization Act.

“Fulfilling our patriotic duty, the omnibus includes a huge increase in veterans’ health care — including for the implementation of our landmark PACT Act. The bill will also increase pay for our heroic troops and meet the basic needs of our military families,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said in a statement. “Significantly, this legislation delivers another consequential round of aid to Ukraine, further supporting their fight for democracy.”

Troops will see a 4.6% salary hike under the bill and an 11% increase in housing and good allowances.

Funding for public school construction on mil-

itary bases will more than double, according to the legislation.

The spending package also includes \$5 billion in mandatory funding for the Cost of War Toxic Exposures Fund, a program created this year by the PACT Act to treat veterans exposed to burn pits and other environmental hazards.

“The combination of these funds and those made available through the discretionary appropriations in this act and other sources will fully support the administration’s request to begin implementing the PACT Act, including meeting increased health care needs and providing support for claims processing to ensure veterans are getting the care and benefits they deserve,” according to the House Committee on Appropriations.

Total spending on veterans’ medical care will reach a record \$119 billion next year.

Congressional appropriators are also doling out the largest ever aid package to Ukraine as Russia’s war in that country nears the 10-month mark. The \$45 billion in emergency assistance would bring security, economic and humanitarian aid to Ukraine to more than \$110 billion. The White House had requested \$37.7 billion for the latest package.

The legislation includes \$11.9 billion to replenish U.S. stocks of equipment sent to Ukraine and \$126.3 million to prepare for and respond to potential nuclear and radiological incidents in the country.

Quake shakes northern Calif.

Associated Press

FERNDALE, Calif. — A strong earthquake shook parts of Northern California early Tuesday, jolting residents awake, cutting off power to thousands, and causing some damage to buildings and roads, officials said. Two injuries were reported.

The magnitude 6.4 earthquake occurred at 2:34 a.m. near Ferndale, a small community about 210 miles northwest of San Francisco and close to the Pacific coast.

The epicenter was just offshore at a depth of about 10 miles. Numerous aftershocks followed.

The Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services initially tweeted that there were reports of “widespread damages to roads and homes,” but authorities subsequently indicated that damage was less than what might be expected from the size of the temblor.

Zelenskyy visits combat zone; Putin hails forces

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Tuesday visited an eastern city that is a focus of some of the most intense combat of Russia's nearly 10-month war, while Russian President Vladimir Putin praised the "courage and self-denial" of his front-line forces in Ukraine.

Zelenskyy met with military personnel in Bakhmut, the scene of "fierce battles" between Ukraine's defenders and Russia's invading forces, the president's office said. The city, located about 380 miles east of Kyiv, has remained in Ukrainian hands, thwarting Moscow's goal of capturing Ukraine's entire Donbas region.

It was not clear how Zelenskyy got to Bakhmut, but his unannounced trip to the combat zone appeared designed to shore up the morale of Ukrainians and to dishearten the Russians trying to encircle the city. The president saluted people's "courage, resilience and strength shown in repelling the enemy attacks."

"Bakhmut Fortress. Our people. Uncon-

quered by the enemy. Who with their bravery prove that we will endure and will not give up what's ours," he wrote on his Telegram channel.

While the Kremlin tries to advance its stalled invasion and Ukrainians burned their furniture to try to stay warm, Putin hailed his country's military and security agencies during a Kremlin ceremony. Among others, he presented awards to the Moscow-appointed heads of four regions of Ukraine that Russia illegally annexed in September.

"Our country has often faced challenges and defended its sovereignty," Putin said. "Now Russia is again facing such challenge. Soldiers, officers and volunteers are showing outstanding examples of courage and self-denial on the front line."

The Kremlin released a video address by Putin before Tuesday's award ceremony. In it, he singled out for praise the security staff deployed to the illegally annexed regions of Ukraine, saying that "people living there, Russian citizens, count on being protected by you."

Black Sea gives US closer view of Ukraine war

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

MIHAIL KOGALNICEANU, Romania — The 101st Airborne Division soldiers here are positioned close enough to Ukraine that their artillery is in easy range of the war-torn country and intelligence gatherers can monitor fighters buzzing around the Black Sea.

The 2nd Brigade Combat Team, deployed on the division's first operational mission in Europe since World War II, functions as the most forward-based American unit in proximity to the fighting in Ukraine, military leaders say.

There are now about 5,000 soldiers along NATO's southeastern flank, the majority of whom are anchored at strategic locations near Romania's coastline.

"You are ready if the call comes," brigade commander Col. Ed Matthaides said Monday.

Ordered overseas in June, the unit is part of a U.S. push to reinforce NATO terrain and be prepared to respond if the war spills over into allied territory.

In the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Romania has emerged as the centerpiece of U.S. efforts to deter Russian aggression in southern Europe, while Poland has emerged as the Army's center of gravity in the north.

"We are ready for whatever comes our way, and I'm very confident that we will accomplish any mission that's given to us," Maj. Gen. JP McGee, 101st Airborne Division commander said.

Last week, Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville visited the base to obtain security briefings and meet with 101st Airborne soldiers, many of whom are on their first deployments.

In a meeting with a rifle company of about 120 soldiers, McGee said he asked for a show of hands of how many have been involved in a firefight.

"There are about two soldiers maybe," he said.

While it's not combat in Romania, being in the thick of things in Europe is what many infantrymen sign up for, McGee said.

"Our soldiers join the Army to do all sorts of things," he said. "A bunch of them are eager. I'd say most of them are here to deploy. It's not Iraq or Afghanistan, but they're operating forward. They're doing something meaningful."

Congress saves visa program for war interpreters in Afghanistan

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

A program that resettles Afghan interpreters who worked with U.S. forces is no longer on the chopping block, congressional lawmakers said Tuesday.

A last-minute deal led to the Senate adding provisions extending the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program through 2024 into the omnibus spending bill that funds the federal government, Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., said in an email.

"I appreciate the round-the-clock work of numerous lawmakers to see this through, which will protect the path to safety that we promised our Afghan allies who served beside U.S. troops and diplomats in Afghanistan," Shaheen said Tuesday.

The program's end date has been changed to Dec. 31, 2024, and an additional 4,000 visas have been allotted, according to

the omnibus bill text released Tuesday.

The number of allotments is in line with previous reauthorizations, which has typically averaged about 4,000 a year since 2017.

Language extending the SIV program had been removed from the separate National Defense Authorization Act, a statement accompanying that bill in December said.

The move led to sharp criticism by Democrats and advocacy groups directed at Republican lawmakers said to be against the program, specifically Sen. Charles Grassley.

The Iowa Republican has long raised objections over what he has said were lax criteria for SIV program eligibility. Grassley's office declined comment Tuesday, but in an interview in August a spokesman said other Republicans in the Senate and House had voiced similar concerns.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

National Guardsman dies in snowboard fall at mall

NJ EAST RUTHERFORD — A man who was serving in the Air National Guard died after he fell while snowboarding at an indoor ski park inside a New Jersey mall, officials and family members said.

Peter Mathews, 24, of Bay Shore on New York's Long Island, fell as he snowboarded at the Big Snow American Dream, which is within the American Dream Mall in East Rutherford, his family told Newsday.

Mathews fell backward, hit his head, became unconscious and had trouble breathing, his sister, Sarah Mathews, told the newspaper.

After CPR was performed at the mall, Mathews was taken to Hackensack University Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead, his sister said.

Mathews was an airman first class in the Maryland Air National Guard, which he joined in 2020. He had hoped to become a commercial airline pilot, Sarah Mathews said.

Faculty wants chancellor to quit for racist remark

IN HAMMOND — The faculty senate of Purdue University Northwest is demanding the resignation of Chancellor Thomas Keon after an off-the-cuff commencement comment that mocked Asian languages.

The open letter signed by eight members of the senate's executive committee called for Keon to step down because the remark insulted Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and

the "inexcusable behavior caused national and international outrage."

"His behavior does not reflect the diversity and inclusiveness that Purdue faculty, staff and students value," said the letter released Friday.

Keon publicly apologized for the ad lib at a commencement ceremony.

Keon's gaffe came after keynote speaker James Dedelow referenced a made-up language he sometimes uses on a radio show he hosts or with family. Keon responded with a line of gibberish mocking an Asian language. He said the impression was "sort of my Asian version" of Dedelow's offering.

Fishing boat runs aground on island

CA LOS ANGELES — Six people were rescued from a fishing boat that ran aground on one of the Channel Islands off Southern California and spilled diesel fuel early Thursday, the U.S. Coast Guard said.

A vessel assistance service reported that the Speranza Marie ran aground at Chinese Harbor on Santa Cruz Island around 2 a.m. and those aboard were safely transferred to another fishing boat and taken to Ventura on the mainland, according to the Coast Guard, which sent a cutter to the scene.

The 60-foot Speranza Marie carried about 1,000 gallons of diesel fuel.

How much spilled was not known, but the Coast Guard said cleanup crews were containing and recovering fuel.

The cause of the grounding was under investigation.

Police chief killed in roadside collision

VA BROADNAX — A Virginia police chief died after a pickup truck struck him on the side of a highway, according to police.

Broadnax Police Chief Joe Carey, 66, was hit by the vehicle after he pulled over to recover the remains of a dead animal on the road, a Virginia State Police news release said.

Carey died at a hospital. The man driving the pickup truck wasn't injured.

Alcohol was not a factor in the crash, police said.

The lights on Carey's police vehicle were on while parked on the side of the highway, according to police.

Broadnax Mayor Don Dugger said Carey was "a genuine friend to so many of us."

"He truly loved his job and worked hard to make a difference while protecting and serving our town," the mayor said.

City to resume water shutoffs for overdue bills

GA ATLANTA — The city of Atlanta plans to begin shutting off water to residential customers with overdue bills for the first time in 12 years.

Watershed Commissioner Mikita Browning told the Atlanta City Council's City Utilities Committee that the shutoffs will begin Jan. 2 and could affect as many as 27,000 customers.

The city said it will send out notices with January bills warning people to get bills caught up. The city will also call customers and leave notices on

doors.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported Browning said the city had \$121 million in overdue bills as of September, including single family residences, multifamily buildings and businesses.

The city hasn't shut off homes for nonpayment since sometime in 2010, which city officials said has led some people to stop making regular payments.

Water stations to be put up for bighorn sheep

CA DESERT CENTER — In response to years of drought, Southern California conservationists are planning to install water stations in inland desert regions that are home to bighorn sheep.

The Southern California News Group reported that the nonprofit Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep will install up to 90 stations throughout the Mojave Desert, Chuckwalla Valley area and elsewhere. The proposal was approved last week by California's State Lands Commission.

The move comes as desert watering holes have dried up and less vegetation is growing due to drought, said James Cornett, an ecologist who has taught a course on bighorn sheep at University of California, Riverside.

"When we put in artificial watering holes, we're kind of playing God of course," Cornett said. "But because the populations are so small, anything we can do to help that doesn't cause secondary problems is a good thing."

— From wire reports

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Packers win, keep playoff hopes alive

Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Aaron Rodgers and the Green Bay Packers aren't giving up hope they can still reach the playoffs, even as they remain multiple games below .500.

AJ Dillon ran for two scores, Rodgers threw a touchdown pass to Aaron Jones and the Packers kept their playoff hopes afloat with a 24-12 victory over the Los Angeles Rams on Monday night amid freezing conditions. The temperature was 15 degrees with a wind chill of 7 just before the opening kickoff.

"We've just been practicing a little bit better," Rodgers said. "The energy's been a little bit better. It's hard to put your finger on it. We've played a couple of teams we should have beat, so that being said, it's still tough to win in the league. And I've said it earlier, I think we can beat anybody. We can also lose to anybody. But when you win a couple in a row, it starts to give you some confidence."

The Packers (6-8) likely must win out and get plenty of help to earn a fourth straight postseason berth. They visit Miami (8-6) on Sunday before hosting the Minnesota Vikings (11-3) and Detroit Lions (7-7) in their final two games.

"We know that we're in a one-game sea-

son from here on out, from here until the end of the year," Packers coach Matt LaFleur said.

Dillon put Green Bay ahead for good with a tiebreaking 8-yard touchdown run in the second quarter and also scored from 1 yard out in the third period. He ran for 36 yards on 11 carries before leaving the game midway through the second half to be evaluated for a concussion.

Rodgers went 22-for-30 for 229 yards with a touchdown and interception to win his ninth straight "Monday Night Football" start, even though the four-time MVP acknowledged he's at the stage of his career when these late kickoffs aren't so much fun. The longest "Monday Night Football" winning streak by any starting quarterback is owned by Kenny Stabler, who won 11 straight from 1975-80.

"When you're a young player, you dream about playing on Monday nights," said Rodgers, who turned 39 earlier this month. "When you're an older player, you want those noon games. So, it's past my bedtime. I'm ready to go home and go to sleep."

Rodgers' lone touchdown pass was a 7-yarder to Jones, who rushed for 90 yards and had four catches for 36 yards.

The Rams (4-10) have matched the high-

est loss total by any defending Super Bowl champion. When John Elway retired after leading Denver to consecutive Super Bowl titles in the 1997 and 1998 seasons, the Broncos finished 6-10 in 1999.

Mayfield had rallied the Rams to a 17-16 victory over the Las Vegas Raiders on Dec. 8, less than 48 hours after they had claimed him off waivers from Carolina. Mayfield wasn't as effective Monday, going 12-for-21 for 111 yards with a touchdown and interception.

His touchdown was an 8-yarder to Tyler Higbee, the first touchdown by a Rams tight end this season.

Mayfield was sacked five times while working behind an offensive line missing center Brian Allen, who injured a calf on the game's first play from scrimmage. Preston Smith recorded two sacks for Green Bay.

The Rams also got field goals of 33 and 55 yards from Matt Gay, who also sent an extra-point attempt wide right. Gay's 55-yarder matched the third-longest field goal anyone has ever made at Lambeau Field.

Mason Crosby had a 34-yard field goal for Green Bay while playing his 255th consecutive regular-season game to tie Hall of Fame quarterback Brett Favre for the longest streak in franchise history.

TCU's Dykes named AP Coach of the Year in football

Associated Press

TCU's Sonny Dykes was named The Associated Press Coach of the Year on Monday after leading the No. 3 Horned Frogs to the College Football Playoff in his first season with the school.

Dykes received 37 of 46 first-place votes and 120 points from AP Top 25 voters to become the second TCU coach to win the award. The first two were won by Gary Patterson (2009, 2014), the coach Dykes replaced after last season.

"It's the ultimate team award," Dykes told AP. "It's indicative of literally everybody in our office, coaches, players, everybody, because more so than ever in college football, it is truly a team effort."

TCU (12-1) faces No. 2 Michigan (13-0) on Dec. 31 in the Fiesta Bowl for a berth in the national championship game.

Tulane coach Willie Fritz was second with 40 points and two first-place votes, followed by Tennessee's Josh Heupel (38 points, one) and last year's winner, Jim Harbaugh of

Michigan (28 points, five). Georgia's Kirby Smart (15 points) also received a first-place vote.

Dykes, 53, is in his fourth stop after stints with Louisiana Tech, California and SMU. The Texan and son of longtime Texas Tech coach Spike Dykes, Sonny Dykes is 83-64 in 13 seasons as a head coach.

"It's not always like this and I've been on both ends, and so something like this probably means more to me than it might somebody else," Dykes said. "I've been 1-11 and I've been fired. I've been kind of on top and then on bottom, too. I'm always thankful for those bad times because it really truly does make you appreciate the good times more."

Dykes' path to AP coach of the year is unique. The award was established in 1998 and no coach had ever won his first coach of the year on his fourth stop as a Bowl Subdivision head coach.

Dykes moved across town to take over at TCU after being with rival SMU for five years. Playing against the Horned Frogs an-

nually, he had a good idea of what kind of team he was getting.

Instead of a major roster overhaul of last season's 5-7 TCU team, Dykes dipped into the transfer portal to fill some holes, but mostly took what he inherited and turned it into one of the best teams in the country.

"Sometimes it's more about the chemistry of things and trying to get the chemistry of those rooms right as opposed to necessarily adding talent," Dykes said. "That part of it, I think, is really overlooked. Just the chemistry and creating competition and all that."

The Horned Frogs started the season unranked and didn't lose until dropping the Big 12 championship in overtime to Kansas State.

"We really had no expectations whatsoever when the year started," Dykes said. "We thought we had a chance to be pretty good, but we just gained confidence every week and we had some kids that really were tough and like to compete, and that made everything so much better."

Marshall holds off UConn in Myrtle Beach Bowl

Associated Press

CONWAY, S.C. — Marshall coach Charles Huff watched his team overcome adversity all season long. So having to do it once more in the Myrtle Beach Bowl wasn't a problem.

The Thundering Herd won their fifth straight game to close the season, holding off UConn 28-14 on Monday after leading by four touchdowns.

Marshall's defense held the Huskies (6-7) without points on two fourth-quarter drives into Herd territory to end the program's three-game bowl losing streak.

"They battled back," Huff said. "But the boys in green battled, too."

Cam Fancher threw for two touchdowns and Rasheen Ali ran for 92 yards and a score for the Thundering Herd.

The game was seemingly well in hand for Marshall, ahead 28-0 after Ali's 2-yard touch-

down run midway through the third quarter.

But the Huskies rallied with 14- and 24-yard TD runs by Victor Rosa and, after an interception, drove into Marshall territory with 10 minutes to play.

That was as close as UConn (6-7) got in its first postseason appearance since 2015.

Fancher finished 10-for-20 passing for 93 yards, including a 9-yard scoring pass to Corey Gammage and a 10-yard TD toss to Devin Miller, as Marshall led 21-0 at the half.

Khalan Laborn added 90 on the ground as Marshall put up 210 yards rushing.

Marshall had one of the season's most surprising victories, winning at No. 19 Notre Dame, 26-21, in September. It ended the regular season as one of college football's hottest teams and posted its most victories in a season since winning nine games in 2018.

Not that UConn didn't make it interesting.

Down 28-14, the Huskies got to Marshall's 42, and when receiver Keelon Marion was bumped on a long pass by defensive back Steven Gilmore without a penalty flag, first-year coach Jim Mora Jr. argued loudly and drew his own 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct flag that stalled the drive.

Mora said he hadn't seen that called before in over three decades of coaching. "It was terrible, terrible, terrible," he said.

Two series later, UConn drove to Marshall's 8, but Turner was picked off in the end zone by Micah Abraham with 5:09 to go.

Turner was 9-for-27 passing for 166 yards with three interceptions and a fumble.

Damion Babers Jr. had a 34-yard pick six off Turner's interception for a 14-0 lead. Gammage, Marshall's receiver, also collected an interception on the final play of the first half on UConn's Hail Mary attempt.

Athlete money throws wrinkle into recruiting landscape

Associated Press

Ohio State has produced the most first-round draft picks of any school and is about to make its fifth College Football Playoff appearance.

Those facts would seem to provide quite the recruiting pitch to any college prospect. Yet athletic director Gene Smith still felt the need to issue a public call this month for fans to support one of three collectives assisting Ohio State athletes in name, image and likeness compensation opportunities.

Smith's statement underscored just how much the NIL era, still just 18 months old, has impacted the recruiting landscape.

"I think it was never part of the conversation, then it became part of the conversation," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. "It's trending toward being the conversation for a lot of folks. As time has gone on, it's become more and more of a priority for folks."

One year ago, there was still some lingering uncertainty over how the new rule changes allowing athletes to profit off of their celebrity would impact the

recruiting landscape.

Now there's no question what kind of difference it has made.

Prospects aren't shy about discovering what kind of financial benefits they could earn at each school they consider. Programs are quick to trumpet how much their athletes have already made.

"I think last year, no one really knew what it was going to be like," North Carolina State coach Dave Doeren said. "And now it's kind of commonplace communication, as far as the questions. So it's a lot different."

The same schools are still getting most of the elite prospects.

As of Monday afternoon, 13 schools in the top 15 schools when it comes to the best classes according to composite rankings of recruiting sites compiled by 247Sports also ranked in the top 15 in 2021, the last class to sign before NIL's arrival.

But it would be naïve to assume that means NIL hasn't changed things drastically. NIL has dominated just about every major recruiting story that has unfolded over the last year or so.

There was an offseason war of words between Texas A&M

coach Jimbo Fisher and Alabama's Nick Saban, who said the Aggies had essentially "bought" the nation's top-ranked recruiting class last year. At Ohio State, Smith's appeal for fans to support collectives came six months after he gave a speech to Columbus business members in which he stated it would take \$13 million to keep the Buckeyes' roster together.

Pay-for-play situations or improper inducements are still banned, but there is nothing stopping colleges from letting recruits know how athletes on campus are already profiting through NIL deals.

"There are a handful of kids whose decisions are completely based on NIL and so that's the only factor, but I wouldn't say many," said Steve Wiltfong, director of football recruiting for 247Sports. "Obviously it's an element for everybody now because people want to know what kind of value they can earn, whether that's seeing what college players are making on current rosters or even hearing what you're pitching me as a high school target."

Los Alamitos (Calif.) High

School coach Ray Fenton said his conversations with college staffs suggest programs are following one of three different philosophies in how they deal with NIL.

"What's happening is some kids are just going to the highest bidder and some programs are playing that game," Fenton said. "They're bidding the highest. The problem that they are running into is that a kid or a family will come in and say, 'Hey, we're getting this much money from this school,' and it's not true. They're just almost like at a swap meet, haggling on prices."

He said other programs will not recruit an athlete "because he's just looking for a payday, he's not looking to put in the grind that (they) want him to grind to get to the NFL level."

"Some programs are just going with a flat fee. You come here and this is what you get. Nobody gets more. Nobody gets less," he said of the third approach. "That's what they're building their program around, and they feel that if they get that kid in who doesn't care what he's making compared to everybody else, then that kid's less likely to go to the transfer portal."

Murray's late free throws lift Hawks over Magic

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Dejounte Murray hit two decisive free throws with 1.3 seconds left, Trae Young had 37 points and 13 assists, and the Atlanta Hawks held off the Orlando Magic 126-125 Monday night to snap their six-game winning streak.

Orlando went on a 12-0 run over 2:17 late in the fourth quarter to wipe out a 13-point deficit and take a 125-124 lead on Markelle Fultz's layup with 3.8 seconds remaining. Young inbounded from the sideline, and Murray drew a foul from Paolo Banchero. Murray hit both free throws, and Banchero missed a three-pointer at the buzzer.

"Like I was preaching after the game, we've got to grow up, starting with me," Murray said. "Just what we're playing for, these type of games show we're not playing to win and get to the playoffs and try to make noise. We've got to stop being comfortable. We almost lost the game."

The Magic were trying for their first seven-game winning streak since January 2011. Before the surge, Orlando had lost nine in a row and 11 of 12.

"The results do matter, but the process is way more, so I think we're a little encouraged with that fourth quarter, with the fight that we showed, and that's kind of the mentality we need to have," Magic center Moritz Wagner said. "If you're a good team, you come back from losses, too, and you keep fighting no matter what happens, so I think that's what the mood is."

Cavaliers 122, Jazz 99: Donovan Mitchell scored 23 points in his first game against his former team and Jarrett Allen added 20, as host Cleveland won its fourth straight.

Darius Garland added 17 and Cedi Osman had 22 for Cleveland, which pushed an 18-point halftime lead to 23 in the third and coasted past Utah.

Timberwolves 116, Mavericks

icks 106: Anthony Edwards had 27 points, 13 rebounds and nine assists to lead host Minnesota over unglued Dallas, which lost star Luca Dončić and coach Jason Kidd to successive ejections late in the third quarter.

Naz Reid pitched in 27 points and 13 rebounds for the Timberwolves, who kept up their energy from a franchise-record 150-point performance to beat Chicago a night earlier.

Bucks 128, Pelicans 119: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 42 points and 10 rebounds in his return from a one-game absence and visiting Milwaukee held off a late New Orleans surge.

Brook Lopez mixed in four three-pointers with opportunistic play in the paint to score 30 points for the Bucks, who led by as many as 18 points in the fourth quarter before the Pelicans pulled to 117-114 on CJ McCollum's fadeaway.

76ers 104, Raptors 101 (OT): Tobias Harris hit a three-

pointer in overtime that put his team ahead to stay, and Joel Embiid had 28 points, 11 rebounds and four assists as host Philadelphia extended its winning streak to a season-best five games.

Spurs 124, Rockets 105: Devin Vassell had 26 points and visiting San Antonio rolled over Houston to snap a two-game skid.

Thunder 123, Trail Blazers 121: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander hit a baseline jumper as time expired, and host Oklahoma City defeated Portland to ruin Damian Lillard's record-setting night.

Suns 130, Lakers 104: Chris Paul scored a season-high 28 points, DeAndre Ayton added 21 points and 11 rebounds and host Phoenix rolled past Los Angeles.

Hornets 125, Kings 119: LaMelo Ball scored 16 of his 23 points in the fourth quarter and visiting Charlotte stopped an eight-game losing streak by holding off Sacramento.

Bergeron helps Bruins beat Panthers for 17th home win

Associated Press

BOSTON — Bruins coach Jim Montgomery watched his team let a four-goal lead turn into a 4-3 edge and wondered whether he needed to call a timeout to settle things down.

"They're saying the right things on the bench. It's not like I can call timeout and say anything better," he said after Boston recovered from some mid-game sloppiness and beat the Florida Panthers 7-3 on Monday night.

"There wasn't a sense of panic," Montgomery said, "but there wasn't a sense of urgency with our play, either."

Patrice Bergeron scored a pair of third-period insurance goals after Boston almost blew a 4-0 lead, and the Bruins improved to 17-0-2 at home. Bergeron also had a pair of assists, and Linus Ullmark stopped 36 shots to earn his 10th consecutive win.

The Bruins opened a 4-0 lead early in the second period before the Panthers scored three times in five minutes to make it a one-goal game.

Montgomery said if he had a younger team, he would have called a timeout.

Instead, he let his veteran leaders do the talking.

"It's easy to squeeze and panic," Bergeron said. "I think when you take a breath you realize that we're still up, but we've got to be better."

Capitals 4, Red Wings 3 (OT): Nic Dowd scored twice in 11 seconds and Dmitry Orlov had the winner with 21.3 seconds left in overtime as host Washington won its second straight.

Erik Gustafsson also scored for the Capitals and Charlie Lindgren stopped 16 shots in his eighth consecutive start.

Predators 4, Oilers 3 (OT): Alexandre Carrier scored at 2:12 of overtime to lift host Nashville over Edmonton.

Matt Duchene, Mattias Ekholm and Jordan Gross also scored as the Predators snapped a six-game losing streak. Juuse Saros made 31 saves to help Nashville end an eight-game skid against Edmonton.

Canadiens 3, Coyotes 2 (OT): Mike Hoffman scored at 3:52 of overtime, Sam Montembeault stopped 37 shots and visiting Montreal ended a three-game losing streak.

Montembeault made some tough saves in the third period and the Canadiens controlled the puck for most of the overtime. Hoffman won it by skating up the middle of the ice and beating Karel Vejmelka.

Stars 2, Blue Jackets 1: Wyatt Johnston scored 55 seconds into the second period and visiting Dallas remained atop the Central Division.

Jason Robertson also scored for the Stars and Jake Oettinger stopped 27 shots in his 100th NHL game. Oettinger lost his shutout bid when Ken Johnson beat him with a backhand with 15 seconds remaining. The Stars have won seven of their last nine games, including a 3-1-1 road trip.

Avalanche 1, Islanders 0 (SO): Alexandar Georgiev had 26 saves through overtime and stopped two more in the shootout to lift host Colorado.

Sabres 3, Golden Knights 2: Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 41 saves and visiting Buffalo got its first win at Vegas.

Blues 5, Canucks 1: Jordan Kyrou had three goals for his first career hat trick and had an assist to lead visiting St. Louis.