

## Israeli troops round up Palestinian men

*Associated Press*

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Israel said Friday that the military was rounding up Palestinian men in northern Gaza for interrogation, searching for Hamas militants, while desperate Palestinians in the south crowded into an ever-shrinking area, and the U.N. warned that its aid operation is “in tatters.”

The detentions pointed to Israeli efforts to secure the military’s hold on northern Gaza as the war entered its third month. Furious urban fighting has continued in the north, underscoring Hamas’ heavy resistance, and tens of thousands of residents are believed to remain in the area six weeks after troops and tanks rolled in.

The first images of mass detentions emerged Thursday from the northern town of Beit Lahiya, showing dozens of men kneeling or sitting in the streets, stripped down to their underwear, their hands bound behind their backs and some with their heads bowed. U.N. monitors said Israeli troops reportedly detained men and boys from the

age of 15 in a school-turned-shelter.

Israel has vowed to crush the military capabilities of Hamas, which rules Gaza, and remove it from power following the group’s Oct. 7 attack that sparked the war.

Israel’s air and ground campaign initially focused on the northern half of Gaza, leading hundreds of thousands of residents to flee south. A week ago, Israel expanded its ground assault into central and south Gaza, where nearly the territory’s entire population of 2.3 million Palestinians are crowded, many of them cut off from humanitarian supplies.

In central Gaza, Israeli planes on Friday dropped leaflets on the refugee camps of Nuseirat and Maghazi with a message for Hamas officials.

“To Hamas leaders: A life for a life, an eye for an eye and whoever started is to blame. If you punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith you were afflicted,” the leaflet read, cobbling together verses from the Muslim holy book, the Qu-

ran, that are similar to a warning in the Old Testament.

The leaflet left out the rest of the Quranic verse, which says it is better to patiently endure afflictions without retaliating.

Hours later, a strike shattered a residential building in Nuseirat camp, killing at least 21 people, according to officials at the nearby hospital. Following the blast, residents were seen digging beneath the rubble, looking for survivors and belongings that could be unearthed.

Eylon Levy, an Israeli government spokesman, said Friday that those detained in northern Gaza were “military-aged men who were discovered in areas that civilians were supposed to have evacuated weeks ago.”

Authorities were questioning the detainees to determine whether they were members of the militant group, Levy said, indicating there would be more such sweeps going forward as troops move from north to south.

The Israeli assault has obliterated much of Gaza City and

surrounding areas in the north. Still, tens of thousands of residents are believed to remain there, though the U.N. says it cannot confirm exact numbers. Some are unable to move, others refuse to leave their homes, saying the overcrowded south is no safer or fearing they will not be allowed to return.

Heavy fighting has been underway for days in Jabaliya refugee camp and the Gaza City district of Shujaiya. The U.N. said Jabaliya’s Al Awda Hospital — one of two hospitals still operating in the north — was surrounded by Israeli forces and sustained damage due to Israeli shelling. It said Israeli sniper fire into the hospital has also been reported.

The military says it makes every effort to spare civilians and accuses Hamas of using them as human shields as the militants fight in dense residential areas.

There has also been a dramatic surge in deadly military raids and an increase in restrictions on Palestinian residents in the occupied West Bank since the start of the war.

## Rocket hits US Embassy in Baghdad; no casualties

*Associated Press*

BAGHDAD — A rocket attack on the sprawling U.S. Embassy in Baghdad caused minor damage but no casualties Friday morning, U.S. and Iraqi officials said.

The attack is the first on the embassy located in the heavily fortified Green Zone of Iraq’s capital to be confirmed since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war. The Green Zone houses Iraqi government buildings and embassies on the west bank

of the Tigris River.

Iran-backed militias in Iraq have claimed responsibility for dozens of attacks that targeted bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria since Israel declared war on Hamas two months ago.

The U.S. military says 78 attacks have been carried out against U.S. facilities over the past weeks, of which 37 were in Iraq and 41 in Syria.

An Iraqi security official said 14 Katyusha rockets were fired

Friday, of which some struck near one of the U.S. Embassy’s gates while others fell in the river.

The official said the rocket attack caused material damage but no casualties.

A U.S. military official said a multi-rocket attack was launched at American and coalition forces in the vicinity of the embassy complex and the Union III base, which houses offices of the U.S.-led coalition. The official added that no casu-

alties and no damage to infrastructure were reported.

An embassy spokesperson said the U.S. Embassy was attacked by two salvos of rockets at approximately 4:15 a.m.

“Assessments are ongoing, but there are no reported casualties on the embassy compound,” the official said, adding that no specific group had claimed responsibility for firing the rockets as of Friday morning but early indications pointed to Iran-aligned militias.

# US won't rule out strikes against Houthis

*Bloomberg News*

WASHINGTON — A top White House official said the U.S. won't rule out the possibility of strikes against Houthi rebels in Yemen, who have been blamed for targeting commercial ships, while it focuses now on sanctions and security at sea.

"We have certainly not ruled out the possibility of taking military action — we reserve that right," Deputy National Security Adviser Jon Finer told the Aspen Security Forum in Washington on Thursday.

For the time being, the U.S. will focus on "a maritime coal-

ition to provide reassurance and security for commercial sea lanes," he said.

"And if there is a decision to escalate against us, we will look at other options," Finer said.

Finer was speaking in response to questions about increased tension in the Red Sea, where a U.S. warship, the USS Carney, responded to distress calls from three ships that had allegedly been targeted by the Houthis. The U.S. says the Houthis have been enabled by Iran and pose a threat to international commerce and security at sea.

"The Houthis would not be able to do this without the support of Iran," Finer said. "Would not be able to do it. Would not have the weaponry, would not have the intelligence, would not have the motivation to do this were it not for the role of the IRGC," he said, using the acronym for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

"We are quite clear that the Houthis are ultimately responsible, but there is significant role for Iran in these attacks," he said.

The attacks are the latest in a series against vessels since the

rebels in Yemen issued a threat against ships with ties to Israel last month, calling them "legitimate targets."

The USS Carney has shot down some drones as part of what it calls its defense of Israel in the wake of Hamas's Oct. 7 attack on Israeli territory.

"The president has authorized ships to shoot down munitions that pass in the vicinity of our destroyers," Finer said.

Targeting U.S. civilian or military assets "would be a much more severe escalation, but we have not made that calculation."

## Conservative priorities dropped from defense bill

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The final version of a must-pass defense policy bill will not include a Republican proposal to rescind a Pentagon abortion access policy and will scrap other controversial measures pushed by conservatives.

A bipartisan group of lawmakers unveiled the compromise \$886 billion National Defense Authorization Act this week after months of debate over the starkly different versions of the legislation passed by the Republican-led House and the Democrat-led Senate earlier this year.

The result removes the most divisive social issues targeted by House Republicans in a bill that sets annual policy for the Pentagon, including a ban on the coverage of transition surgeries and hormone treatments for transgender troops and a severe curtailing of diversity programs.

"Through months of hard-fought and productive negotiations, we have crafted a biparti-

san and bicameral conference report that strengthens our national security and supports our service members," the leaders of the Senate and House Armed Services committees said in a statement Thursday.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., one of the members of the negotiating group, lashed out against the bill on X, formerly Twitter, and said House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., had caved to Democrats.

"This was a total sell-out of conservative principles and a huge win for Democrats," she wrote. "Congratulations to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, you should all be excited to vote for this! I'm a HELL NO!"

She also blasted Democrats for removing a provision that would have given basic pay increases to junior enlisted members. The White House opposed providing the raises until a quadrennial review of military compensation is completed.

Troops are set to receive a 5.2% pay raise in January, their largest in 22 years, under the fi-

nal legislation.

Republicans did score some victories in the compromise bill, retaining their ban on the endorsement of critical race theory in the military as well as a salary cap and hiring freeze for Pentagon employees working on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

They also successfully included language encouraging the service branches to allow the reenlistment of troops who had been booted from the military solely for refusing the coronavirus vaccine.

But a priority for conservatives — the end of a Pentagon policy giving service members time off and travel reimbursement for reproductive health care — failed to make the cut. Democrats called it a red line, with the Senate sidestepping the issue of abortion in its version of the defense bill.

The policy became a major source of tension on Capitol Hill this year after Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., said he would protest it by blocking senior military promotions. He ended his

10-month hold on more than 400 officer nominees this week amid mounting criticism from defense officials and pressure from his own party.

The hold remains in place for about a dozen four-star generals and admirals. A handful of nominees are also being held by Sen. Eric Schmitt, R-Mo., who said he had concerns about their stances on diversity initiatives.

"Sen. Schmitt has long been an advocate for eradicating these DEI programs and hopes to resolve these issues to ensure that these divisive DEI programs don't continue to drive a wedge between military members and deepen the already existing recruiting crisis," said Will O'Grady, Schmitt's press secretary.

The affected nominees include Air Force Lt. Gen. Kevin B. Schneider, who is already being held by Tuberville, as well as Rear Adm. Shoshana S. Chatfield, Air Force Brig. Gen. Paul D. Moga, Air Force Brig. Gen. Scott A. Cain, Air Force Col. Benjamin R. Jonsson and Army Col. Andrew O. Saslav.

# Hunter Biden indicted on 9 tax charges

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hunter Biden was indicted on nine tax charges in California as a special counsel investigation into the business dealings of President Joe Biden's son intensifies against the backdrop of the 2024 election.

The new charges filed Thursday — three felonies and six misdemeanors — are in addition to federal firearms charges in Delaware alleging Hunter Biden broke laws against drug users having guns in 2018. They come after the implosion of a plea deal over the summer that would have spared him jail time, putting the case on track

to a possible trial as his father campaigns for reelection.

Hunter Biden “spent millions of dollars on an extravagant lifestyle rather than paying his tax bills,” special counsel David Weiss said in a statement. The charges are centered on at least \$1.4 million in taxes Hunter Biden owed during between 2016 and 2019, a period where he has acknowledged struggling with addiction. The back taxes have since been paid.

If convicted, Hunter Biden, 53, could a maximum of 17 years in prison. The special counsel probe remains open, Weiss said.

In a fiery response, defense

attorney Abbe Lowell accused Weiss of “bowing to Republican pressure” in the case.

“Based on the facts and the law, if Hunter’s last name was anything other than Biden, the charges in Delaware, and now California, would not have been brought,” Lowell said in a statement.

The White House declined to comment on Thursday’s indictment, referring questions to the Justice Department or Hunter Biden’s personal representatives.

The charging documents filed in California, where he lives, detail spending on drugs, strippers, luxury hotels and ex-

otic cars, “in short, everything but his taxes,” prosecutor Leo Wise wrote.

The indictment comes as congressional Republicans pursue an impeachment inquiry into President Biden, claiming he was engaged in an influence-peddling scheme with his son. The House is expected to vote next week on formally authorizing the inquiry.

No evidence has emerged so far to prove that Joe Biden, in his current or previous office, abused his role or accepted bribes, though questions have arisen about the ethics surrounding the Biden family’s international business.

## Trump returns to court, lauds his defense expert

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Former President Donald Trump returned to his civil fraud trial Thursday to spotlight his defense, renewing his complaints that the case is baseless and heaping praise on an accounting professor’s testimony that backed him up.

With testimony winding down after more than two months, the Republican 2024 presidential front-runner showed up to watch New York University accounting professor Eli Bartov.

The academic disputed the crux of New York State Attorney General Letitia James’ lawsuit: that Trump’s financial statements were filled with fraudulently inflated asset values for such signature assets as his Trump Tower penthouse and his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida.

“My main finding is that there is no evidence whatsoever of any accounting fraud,” said Bartov, whom Trump’s lawyers hired to give expert perspective. Trump’s financial statements, he said, “were not materially misstated.”

He suggested that anything problematic — like a huge year-to-year leap in the estimated value of the Trump Tower triplex — was simply an error.

Even while campaigning to reclaim the presidency and fighting four criminal cases, Trump is devoting a lot of attention to the New York trial. He’s been a frustrated onlooker, a confrontational witness and a heated commentator outside the courtroom door.

Earlier in the trial, Trump attended several days and spent one on the witness stand while the state was presenting its case. But Thursday marked his first appearance since the defense began calling its own witnesses. He’s due to testify again Monday.

He watched keenly Thursday, pointing out documents to his lawyers and at points slapping the defense table or shaking his head over objections to some of Bartov’s testimony. During breaks, Trump lauded the witness and assailed the lawsuit, which is putting his net worth on trial.

## Trump appealing ruling rejecting immunity claim

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former President Donald Trump is appealing a ruling that found he is not immune from criminal prosecution as he runs out of opportunities to delay or even derail an upcoming trial on charges that he plotted to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

Lawyers for the 2024 Republican presidential primary front-runner filed a notice of appeal Thursday indicating that they will challenge U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan’s decision rejecting Trump’s bid to dismiss the case headed to trial in Washington, D.C., in March.

The one-page filing, the first step in a process that could potentially reach the Supreme Court in the months ahead, was accompanied by a request from the Trump team to freeze deadlines in the case while the appeals court considers the matter.

“The filing of President Trump’s notice of appeal has deprived this Court of jurisdiction over this case in its entirety pending resolution of the ap-

peal,” Trump’s lawyers wrote. “Therefore, a stay of all further proceedings is mandatory and automatic.”

In a separate statement, Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung said one of Trump’s “most sacred obligations and responsibilities as President was to ensure that the election process was conducted in a way that complied with the law, including investigating and challenging election fraud and irregularities.”

He added that Trump “has absolute immunity from prosecution, and litigation, for carrying out his sworn and solemn duties as President.”

The appeal had been expected given that Trump’s lawyers had earlier signaled their plans to pursue all the way to the Supreme Court, if necessary, what they say is a legally untested question of a former president’s immunity from prosecution. It’s part of a broader strategy by him and his lawyers to try to postpone the criminal cases against him until after next year’s presidential election.

# US unemployment rate falls; 199K jobs added in November

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. businesses and other employers added a healthy 199,000 jobs last month and the unemployment rate fell, fresh signs that the economy could achieve an elusive “soft landing,” in which inflation would return to the Federal Reserve’s 2% target without causing a steep recession.

Friday’s report from the Labor Department showed that the unemployment rate dropped from 3.9% to 3.7%, not far above a five-decade low of 3.4% in April. The jobless rate has now remained below 4% for nearly two years, the longest such streak since the late 1960s.

Last month’s increase was inflated by the return of about 40,000 formerly striking auto workers and actors, who were not at work in October but were back on the job in November.

The jobs report and other re-

cent data portray an economy and a labor market that, while still sturdy, are downshifting back to pre-pandemic norms. Businesses are hiring but are less desperate to fill huge numbers of jobs. More Americans have come off the sidelines to look for work, and immigration has jumped this year.

As a result, employers are finding it easier to hire, with fewer complaints of worker shortages and less pressure to aggressively raise pay, which can fuel inflation.

“What we wanted was a strong but moderating labor market, and that’s what we saw in the November report,” said Robert Frick, an economist at the Navy Federal Credit Union.

A cooling job market is just what the Fed was hoping to achieve as it sought to slow the economy and inflation with its rapid interest rate hikes earlier

this year. Hiring has averaged just over 200,000 a month in the past three months, down from an average of about 320,000 in the same period last year.

And most of last month’s job gains were concentrated in just a few sectors. The health care industry — doctors’ offices and hospitals — added 93,000 jobs in November. Hotels and restaurants added 40,000, and governments 49,000, accounting for nearly all the job growth.

By contrast, retailers, shipping and warehousing companies and temporary help agencies all cut jobs.

Wages are growing at a slower but still-healthy pace. In November, average hourly pay rose 4% from that of 12 months earlier, the slowest pace in more than two years. Still, average pay is now growing faster than inflation, which should support consumer spending.

## Gunman at UNLV was unemployed professor

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — A 67-year-old college professor who was denied jobs at various Nevada colleges and universities stuffed loaded handgun magazines into his waistband before walking into a University of Nevada, Las Vegas, campus building and killing three faculty members, police said.

After police killed him in a shootout, Anthony Polito was found to be carrying nine magazines for a 9mm handgun he’d legally purchased last year and also a list of targets at the school — although none of those shot were on that list, police said Thursday.

He was killed in a shootout with police about 10 minutes after the first reports of shots fired in Beam Hall, a business school building.

Police still had no motive for Wednesday’s attack, which also left a 38-year-old visiting professor in life-threatening condition at a hospital.

The university was to remain closed Friday but was tentatively scheduled to reopen next week for finals.

Polito arrived at UNLV at 11:28 a.m., about 15 minutes before the shooting, in a 2007 Lexus that he parked in a lot south of the business school, Clark County Sheriff Kevin McMahill said.

Polito got out of the car, placed items in his waistband and then entered Beam Hall at 11:33 a.m. The first reports of gunfire came at 11:45 a.m., McMahill said.

Terrified students and professors cowered in classrooms and offices as the gunman roamed the top three floors of UNLV’s five-story Lee Business School.

University and city police swarmed into and outside the building.

## Texas judge grants pregnant woman permission to get abortion despite ban

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — A Texas judge on Thursday gave a pregnant woman whose fetus has a fatal diagnosis permission to get an abortion in an unprecedented challenge over bans that more than a dozen states have enacted since Roe v. Wade was overturned.

The lawsuit by Kate Cox, a 31-year-old mother of two from the Dallas area, is believed to be the first time since the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision last year that a woman has asked a court to approve an abortion. The order only applies to Cox and her attorneys afterward spoke cautiously about any wider impacts, calling it unfeasible that scores of other women seek-

ing abortions would also now turn to courts.

“This can’t be the new normal,” said Marc Hearron, an attorney for the Center for Reproductive Rights. “I don’t think you can expect to see now hundreds of cases being filed on behalf of patients. It’s just not realistic.”

State District Judge Maya Guerra Gamble, an elected Democrat, granted a temporary restraining order allowing Cox to have an abortion under what are narrow exceptions to Texas’ ban. Her attorneys said they would not disclose what Cox was planning to do next, citing safety concerns.

Republican Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, whose of-

fice argued that Cox does not meet the criteria for a medical exception, issued a statement that did not say whether the state would appeal. But in a letter to three Houston hospitals, Paxton warned that legal consequences were still possible if Cox’s physician provided the abortion.

Cox, who is 20 weeks pregnant, attended the hearing via Zoom along with her husband but did not address the court. Doctors have told Cox that if the baby’s heartbeat were to stop, inducing labor would carry a risk of a uterine rupture because of her prior cesareans sections, and that another C-section at full term would endanger her ability to carry another child.

# Putin to seek another presidential term

Associated Press

Vladimir Putin on Friday moved to prolong his repressive and unyielding grip on Russia for at least another six years, announcing his candidacy in the presidential election next March that he is all but certain to win.

Putin still commands wide support after nearly a quarter-century in power, despite starting an immensely costly war in Ukraine that has taken thousands of his countrymen's lives, provoked repeated attacks inside Russia — including one on the Kremlin itself — and corroded its aura of invincibility.

A short-lived rebellion in June by mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin raised widespread speculation that Putin could be losing his grip, but he emerged with no permanent scars. Prigozhin's death in a mysterious plane crash two months later reinforced the view that Putin was in absolute control.

Putin announced his decision to run in the March 17 presidential election after a Kremlin award ceremony, when war veterans and others pleaded with him to seek re-election in what Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described as “spontaneous” remarks.

“I won't hide it from you — I had various thoughts about it over time, but now, you're right, it's necessary to make a decision,” Putin said in a video released by the Kremlin after the event. “I will run for president of the Russian Federation.”

Tatiana Stanovaya of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center noted that the announcement was made in a low-key way instead of a live televised speech, probably reflecting the Kremlin's spin effort to emphasize Putin's modesty and his perceived focus on doing his job as

opposed to loud campaigning.

“It's not about prosperity, it's about survival,” Stanovaya observed. “The stakes have been raised to the maximum.”

About 80% of the populace approves of Putin's performance, according to the independent pollster Levada Center. That support might come from the heart or it might reflect submission to a leader whose crackdown on any opposition has made even relatively mild criticism perilous.

Whether due to real or coerced support, Putin is expected to face only token opposition on the ballot.

## Macron visits Notre Dame one year before reopening

Associated Press

PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron visited Notre Dame Cathedral on Friday, one year before its scheduled reopening in 2024.

After a blaze burned through the roof and spire on April 15, 2019, Macron's visits have become a tradition, with Friday marking his sixth to highlight the rebuilding progress. Huge oak beams have been hoisted skyward so the cathedral can be re-roofed. The French leader on Friday went up the spire, reconstructed from its previous design by the famed 19th-century French architect Viollet-le-Duc. It stands at 315 feet and will soon be crowned with a cross and a rooster, restoring an emotional symbol for the French of their heritage.

“Since April 2019, the entire

nation has been rebuilding,” Macron told reporters. “And it's very moving to be here a year before. You can see the extraordinary progress of the work on this nave, the choir and the frames and the spire.”

The schedule calls for the completion of the penultimate restoration phase by the end of the year, with the cathedral's much-anticipated reopening set for Dec. 8, 2024.

During his visit, Macron paid homage to Gen. Jean-Louis Georgelin, who oversaw the reconstruction and died in August. Wearing a hardhat, Macron was given a tool to assist as Georgelin's name was inscribed in the wood of the spire under the aegis of an artisan, memorializing the general's contribution to the cathedral.

## Nintendo Live 2024 Tokyo event canceled over threats

Associated Press

TOKYO — Nintendo canceled its upcoming video game showcase and postponed several other events because of persistent threats to the company, its workers and players.

“We decided we could not amply ensure the safety of our customers,” Kyoto-based Nintendo Co. said in an online statement Thursday.

The Japanese manufacturer behind the Super Mario and Pokemon canceled Nintendo Live 2024 Tokyo, which had been set for Jan. 20 and 21. The annual event showcases Nintendo games and lets visitors sample them in a huge Tokyo exhibition hall.

Nintendo also postponed several contests, including the Japan championship for the popular ink-shooting game Splatoon, initially scheduled for later in December, as well as next year's Mario Kart and Splatoon contests.

The company declined to give details of the threats but said police were contacted.

Nintendo has been targeted before, but said the potential risk to the public proved too much.

The new dates for the postponed events will be announced later, Nintendo said.

“We apologize sincerely to all those who have been looking forward to the events,” it said.

Cancellation of an event over threats is not common in Japan, a relatively safe, low-crime nation. But recently, complaints have surfaced about verbal and online abuse, raising concern that the problem may be serious.

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# Patriots hang on to defeat Steelers

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The wins used to come so easy and so often for David Andrews early in his career with the New England Patriots, the veteran center barely noticed them.

That hasn't been the case in 2023. Not with the franchise enduring its worst season in nearly a quarter century and with potentially seismic changes looming.

So yeah, there was a sense of relief after a 21-18 win over Pittsburgh on Thursday night, a throwback of sorts to the Patriots' many big wins over their longtime AFC rival, albeit with far lesser stakes.

The offense that's looked lost for a month gained some momentum behind Bailey Zappe's three touchdown passes. The defense got the stops when necessary and New England (3-10) ended a five-game losing streak while damaging Pittsburgh's increasingly brittle playoff hopes.

"No one has quit in this locker room," said Andrews, a two-time Super Bowl champion. "We're fighting, we're working. We're trying to get better. That's all you can do. That's all

you can ask for. It hasn't been perfect."

No, it hasn't. That didn't stop the Patriots from coming into Acrisure Stadium and doing something that's become routine through the years: changing the trajectory of Pittsburgh's season. And not for the better.

The Steelers (7-6) lost to a two-win team at home for the second time in five days, dropping them out of the top spot in the AFC wild-card race.

"This stings," Pittsburgh coach Mike Tomlin said. "But we'll be back."

Maybe. The Steelers play three of their final four games on the road, all of them against playoff contenders.

Hunter Henry had two touchdown catches for New England. Ezekiel Elliott had 140 yards from scrimmage — 72 receiving, 68 rushing — and caught a TD for the NFL's lowest-scoring offense, which reached the end zone three times for the first time since October.

JuJu Smith-Schuster added 90 yards receiving against the team he starred for earlier in his career.

"It means a lot," Smith-Schuster said. "You know, honestly, you know, starting my crew here and coming back here and getting a 'W,' I love being on this side of the ball, I'll tell you that."

It's a side of the ball New England has rarely been on in 2023. The losses have piled up at a rate not seen since coach Bill Belichick's first season in 2000. That was six Super Bowls and nearly a quarter-century ago.

For three hours on Thursday night, the Patriots found a way to do what they so frequently have done against Pittsburgh: make all the plays that matter. Belichick improved to 15-4 against the Steelers and 10-3 against Tomlin in this latest matchup between the league's two longest-tenured coaches.

Belichick coached his 507th game, moving past George Halas into second-place all-time behind Don Shula (526), but it's hardly a guarantee he'll be back for another season with the Patriots.

New England had totaled 13 points in its previous three games. The Patriots exceeded that in the first half, with Zappe

hitting Elliott for an 11-yard score before finding Henry in the end zone twice to build a 21-3 lead, their largest of the season.

The normally stoic Zappe let loose when Elliott scored on the game's first possession, the first time all year New England has reached the end zone on its opening possession.

"It's really hard to score touchdowns in the NFL," Zappe said. "You've got to celebrate each one."

Touchdowns have been nearly as difficult to come by this season in Pittsburgh. Yet the Steelers have remained in the mix thanks in large part to their defense and an ability to thrive in tight games.

Pittsburgh, however, has lost two of its past three one-score games after winning its first six to start the season.

Mitch Trubisky completed 22 of 35 for 190 yards, passing for a touchdown and running for another while filling in for injured Steelers starter Kenny Pickett. Trubisky also threw an ill-advised pass in the first half that was picked off to set up the first of Henry's two scores.

## Lawsuit targets NCAA's college athlete transfer rule

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — A federal lawsuit filed by a group of states alleges the NCAA's transfer rule for college athletes violates antitrust law.

The lawsuit, filed in West Virginia's northern district, challenges the NCAA's authority to impose a one-year delay in the eligibility of certain athletes who transfer between schools. The suit said the rule "unjustifiably restrains the ability of these college athletes to engage in the market for their labor as NCAA Division I college athletes."

The lawsuit filed by West Vir-

ginia and six other states alleges violations of the Sherman Act.

NCAA rules allow underclassmen to transfer once without having to sit out a year. But an additional transfer as an undergraduate generally requires the NCAA to grant a waiver allowing the athlete to compete immediately. Without it, the athlete would have to sit out for a year at the new school.

The NCAA has implemented stricter guidelines for granting those waivers on a case-by-case basis.

In an interview with The Associated Press, North Carolina

Attorney General Josh Stein said the target is the waiver process.

"As long as the kid is in good academic standing and on track to graduate, that kid should be able to decide for him or herself what's in their best interest, for their personal growth, their happiness, their economic opportunity," Stein said. "That is absolutely the American Way. And that's a requirement of federal law. The rule offends that requirement."

The states seek a temporary restraining order against the NCAA from enforcing the transfer rule. Other states in-

involved are Colorado, Illinois, New York, Ohio and Tennessee.

"The NCAA is disappointed in the decision by seven state attorneys general to bring legal action — with the tacit support of a small number of schools — the result of which could potentially mean team rosters changing monthly or weekly," NCAA spokeswoman Saquandra Heath said in a statement.

"The NCAA believes that if a member school objects to a rule or policy, that member should propose alternative rules that apply to everyone, not turn to lawsuits to bypass the system they designed."

# NBA tournament steeped in Vegas glitz

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — When league officials decided to play the semifinals and championship game of the inaugural NBA In-Season Tournament in Las Vegas, they knew it wouldn't be an understated affair.

And it hasn't been.

Though the semifinals Thursday count in the standings and half a million dollars is on the line for the players who win the final, the tournament has the combination of an exhibition All-Star Game feel to a playoff atmosphere intensity not often

seen before Christmas.

Nelly and TLC set the tone by performing at Toshiba Plaza, where fans congregate outside T-Mobile Arena before entering the building.

Inside the arena were Julius Erving, Gary Payton, Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Vivica A. Fox. The two-time WNBA champion Las Vegas Aces also were in attendance.

There was a red-carpet entry for LeBron James, Giannis Antetokounmpo and other top players. They played on a red-and-blue court.

"Just all of the different things that they have made of it, and you get to be a part of it and you're like, man, this is pretty special," Bucks All-Star guard Damian Lillard said. "I think the atmosphere was what it was. When I played USAB, that's kind of how I felt, just like the energy in the building felt like USA Basketball in the summer because the crowd was just so neutral. But it was a good experience."

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver watched the action, and he will give a state-of-the-league news conference before Satur-

day's final. He no doubt will be asked about Las Vegas as a potential candidate for expansion, and Silver has said the city already is treated like the 31st franchise with each team playing in the Summer League here.

"This is like the worst-kept secret in the world, isn't it, that this is eventually going to be an NBA city?" Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said. "We've been coming here for so many years for Summer League. ... I think the turnout today shows that there's certainly interest in the NBA game."

## Lakers, Pacers reach In-Season Tournament final

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — LeBron James scored 30 points in less than three quarters and the Los Angeles Lakers steamrolled the New Orleans Pelicans 133-89 on Thursday night to reach the championship game in the NBA In-Season Tournament.

The Lakers will play the surprising Indiana Pacers on Satur-

day night for the inaugural NBA Cup. Indiana advanced with a 128-119 victory over the Milwaukee Bucks in the other semifinal. Unlike the other tournament games, that one will not count in the regular-season standings.

Austin Reaves scored 17 points for Los Angeles, Anthony Davis had 16 points and 15 rebounds and Taurean Prince fin-

ished with 15 points.

Trey Murphy III led the Pelicans with 14 points. Zion Williamson had 13.

**Pacers 128, Bucks 119:** Tyrese Haliburton had 27 points and 15 assists to help Indiana beat Milwaukee.

Myles Turner added 26 points for the Pacers. Obi Toppin had 14 on 6-of-8 shooting.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 37 points and 10 rebounds for Milwaukee. Damian Lillard added 24 points, Khriston Middleton had 20 and Brook Lopez 18.

Indiana opened the fourth quarter with a 14-8 run to take a 105-102 lead. Turner, Brown and Haliburton accounted for 17 points during a game-ending 21-13 run.

## No. 2 UCLA women dominate Cal State Northridge

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Londynn Jones scored 19 points and No. 2 UCLA thoroughly dominated Cal State Northridge in a 111-48 victory Thursday night.

The Bruins (7-0) had six players in double figures. Gabriela Jaquez had 18 points and nine rebounds, and Lauren Betts added 18 points. Kiki Rice had her first career triple-double with 14 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists, coming up just three steals short of a quadruple-double.

Only one of UCLA's 10 players failed to score as the Bruins topped 100 points for the second time this season. UCLA forced 24 turnovers that led to 44 points and outscored North-

ridge 64-2 in the paint.

The Matadors (2-5) were led by freshman Amiyah Ferguson with 21 points, including six 3-pointers. They dropped their fifth in a row.

**No. 11 Utah 74, Saint Joseph's 48:** Alissa Pili scored a season-high 31 points to reach 20-plus for the fifth straight game, and Utah's big fourth quarter toppled Saint Joseph's.

Pili took over in the first five minutes of the fourth, making all five of her field-goal attempts during a personal 14-2 run for a 65-43 lead. She finished 12 of 17 from the field and grabbed seven rebounds for Utah (8-1). Pili came up just short of tying her career high of 33 points.

Kennady McQueen scored 11 of Utah's opening 27 points and didn't score again. Saint Joseph's was held to six points in the first quarter.

Talya Brugler had 16 points for Saint Joseph's (8-1), which was attempting to start 9-0 for a second straight season. The Hawks are 7-33 against ranked teams under coach Cindy Griffin.

**No. 20 Florida State 99, Jacksonville 73:** Makayla Timpson had 19 points and 12 rebounds for her fifth double-double of the season as Florida State beat Jacksonville.

Ta'Niya Latson added 18 points for the Seminoles, who scored 15 straight in the first quarter to go ahead by double

figures for good. Sara Bejedi scored 15 points, Carla Viegas added a season-high 14 and O'Mariah Gordon had 12 points and eight assists for Florida State (7-2).

Edyn Battle scored 26 points for Jacksonville (3-5).

**No. 23 Gonzaga 78, California 70 (OT):** Yvonne Ejim scored 21 points, Brynna Maxwell had 18 and Gonzaga finally took control in overtime to beat California.

Kayleigh Truong's jumper for Gonzaga (9-2) with 31 seconds left in regulation tied it 65-all and forced overtime. Truong finished with 14 points and Kaylynne Truong had 12 assists.

Marta Suárez had 19 points and 10 rebounds for Cal (7-2).

# Sharks rally to beat Red Wings in OT

Associated Press

DETROIT — Mikael Granlund scored 37 seconds into overtime and the San Jose Sharks spoiled Patrick Kane's Detroit debut, overcoming a four-goal deficit to beat the Red Wings 6-5 in overtime Thursday night.

Nico Sturm and Tomas Hertl each scored twice for San Jose. Hertl, who has five goals in the past two games, and Fabian Zetterlund had the Sharks' first two short-handed goals of the season. Hertl tied it with 1:29 left on a rebound after San Jose pulled its goaltender for an extra skater.

The 35-year-old Kane, a nine-time All-Star who signed a one-year contract with Detroit on Nov. 28, didn't record a point. He hit the post early in the third period. Kane had his right hip surgically repaired six months ago.

Michael Rasmussen scored two goals in a 13-second span for Detroit. Klim Kostin, Lucas Raymond and Dylan Larkin also scored.

**Stars 5, Capitals 4 (SO):** Roope Hintz scored twice in the third period and visiting Dallas rallied to beat Washington in a shootout to end an two-game skid and spoil Alex Ovechkin's latest milestone.

Jason Robertson scored the only goal in the shootout to hand the Capitals a third consecutive defeat, despite Ovechkin recording his 1,500th regular-season NHL point. Scott Wedgewood made 23 saves in regulation and overtime and three more in the shootout.

Matt Duchene, playing his 1,000th game with family in attendance, assisted on Mason Marchment's goal in the second, and Tyler Seguin also scored for Dallas.

Ovechkin assisted on Dylan Strome's second goal for his 1,500th point. Ovechkin became the 16th player in league history to reach that plateau, and he remains in pursuit of Wayne

Gretzky's career goals record, needing 68 to break it.

**Kings 4, Canadiens 0:** Quinton Byfield had two goals and an assist, Cam Talbot made 24 saves and Los Angeles beat Montreal for its NHL-record 11th straight road victory to open the season.

The Kings (16-4-3) broke the mark of 10 set by Buffalo in 2006-07 and are one away from matching the NHL record of 12 consecutive road victories at any point during the season.

Drew Doughty had a goal and an assist and Trevor Moore also scored for Los Angeles. Samuel Montembeault stopped 38 shots for Montreal.

**Flyers 4, Coyotes 1:** Travis Konecny scored twice, Carter Hart made 25 saves and Philadelphia beat Arizona to end the Coyotes' winning streak at five.

Cam York had a goal and an assist and Joel Farabee also scored for the Flyers. They have won three straight, four of six and nine of 13.

Lawson Crouse scored for the Coyotes, who made NHL history by beating the last five Stanley Cup champions during the winning streak. Connor Ingram made 22 saves.

**Blackhawks 1, Ducks 0:** Petr Mrazek made 37 saves for his 25th career shutout and host Chicago beat Anaheim to end a four-game slide.

Philipp Kurashov scored for last-place Chicago, which had dropped 10 of 12 overall.

Connor Bedard picked up an assist while Leo Carlsson was mostly quiet in a matchup of the top two picks in the NHL draft. Bedard went No. 1 to Chicago, and Carlsson No. 2 to Anaheim.

Lukas Dostal made 24 stops for Anaheim. The Ducks lost for the 10th time in 11 games.

**Jets 4, Avalanche 2:** Kyle Connor scored twice, Connor Hellebuyck stopped 32 shots in his 250th career victory and Winnipeg topped Colorado.

The Jets won their third

straight coming off a three-game skid. Also, third-place Winnipeg moved within two points of Central Division-leading Colorado.

Josh Morrissey had a goal and an assist for Winnipeg, giving him 12 points in his last nine games. Adam Lowry also scored.

Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and assist and Joel Kiviranta also scored for Colorado. MacKinnon extended his overall points streak to 10 games and home streak to 12.

**Sabres 3, Bruins 1:** Devon Levi made 30 saves and Buffalo beat Boston to snap a four-game losing streak.

JJ Peterka, Tage Thompson and Victor Olofsson scored for Buffalo, which beat the Atlantic Division-leading Bruins for the first time in nearly a calendar year. The Bruins had won three straight against Buffalo.

Brad Marchand scored for Boston, which had its four-game winning streak halted. Marchand also recorded the 1,000th penalty of his career. Linus Ullmark finished with 33 saves.

**Devils 2, Kraken 1:** Simon Nemec scored his first career goal midway through the second period, Akira Schmid made 16 of his 37 saves in the third and New Jersey beat Seattle for its fifth victory in six games.

Nemec, the No. 2 pick in the 2022 draft, made his debut last week at home against San Jose and had two assists in his first game. Ondrej Palat also scored for New Jersey.

Tye Kartye scored for Seattle.

**Maple Leafs 4, Senators 3:** Joseph Woll made 29 saves before leaving because of an injury midway through the third period and Toronto held on to beat Ottawa.

Woll left after stopping a shot from Rourke Chartier. Toronto led 3-2 at the time, and William Nylander made it 4-2 with 6:57 remaining.

Mitch Marner, David Kampf and Calle Jarnkrok also scored for the Maple Leafs, and Martin

Jones stopped nine of 10 shots in relief of Woll.

Josh Norris, Jacob Bernard-Docker and Claude Giroux scored for Ottawa. Anton Forsberg stopped 18 shots.

**Predators 5, Lightning 1:** Ryan McDonagh and Roman Josi each had a goal and Nashville beat Tampa Bay for its third straight victory and ninth in 11 games.

Juuso Parssinen, Filip Forsberg and Yakov Trenin also scored and Juuse Saros made 32 saves.

Alex Barré-Boulet scored and Jonas Johansson made 25 saves for Tampa Bay.

**Islanders 7, Blue Jackets 3:** Mathew Barzal had two goals and two assists, Bo Horvat also scored twice and added an assist and New York routed Columbus.

Pierre Engvall, Cal Clutterbuck and Kyle Palmieri also scored to help New York extend its points streak to four games. Semyon Varlamov made 32 saves in his first home win this season.

Adam Fantilli had two goals and an assist for Columbus. Emil Bremstrom also scored.

**Canucks 2, Wild 0:** Casey DeSmith made 26 saves for his first shutout of the season and 10th in the NHL and Vancouver ended Minnesota's winning streak at four.

Nils Hoglander and Teddy Blueger scored to help Vancouver improve to 17-9-1.

Filip Gustavsson made 15 saves for Minnesota.

**Flames 3, Hurricanes 2:** Blake Coleman broke a tie with a short-handed goal midway through the third period and also had an assist in Calgary's victory over Carolina.

Ramus Andersson and Connor Zary also scored in the third to help Calgary overcome a 2-0 deficit. Dustin Wolf made 30 saves in his second career NHL start.

Stefan Noesen and Michael Bunting scored for Carolina.