

Hegseth faces fallout from boat strike

The Washington Post

Officials in Congress and the Pentagon said Monday they are increasingly concerned that the Trump administration intends to scapegoat the military officer who directed U.S. forces to kill two survivors of a targeted strike on suspected drug smugglers in Latin America, as lawmakers made initial moves to investigate whether the attack constituted a war crime.

The Washington Post reported Friday that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth gave a spoken order to kill the entire crew of a vessel thought to be ferrying narcotics in the Caribbean Sea, the first of nearly 20 such strikes directed by the administration since early September.

When two survivors were detected, the military commander overseeing the operation, Adm. Frank M. Bradley, directed another strike to comply with Hegseth's order that no one be left alive, people with direct knowledge of the matter told The Post. The Trump administration has said 11 people were killed as a re-

sult of the operation.

Karoline Leavitt, the White House press secretary, acknowledged Monday that Hegseth had authorized Bradley to conduct the strikes on Sept. 2. Bradley, she added, "worked well within his authority and the law, directing the engagement to ensure the boat was destroyed."

Herscripted remarks at a news briefing elicited a furious backlash within the Defense Department, where officials described feeling angry at the uncertainty over whether Hegseth would take responsibility for his alleged role in the operation — or leave the military and civilian staff under him to face the consequences.

Leavitt's statement "left it up to interpretation" who was responsible for the second strike that killed the two survivors, a separate military official said, imploring the White House to provide clarity on the issue.

One official said of Leavitt's statement, "It's throwing us, the service members, under the bus." Another person said some of Hegseth's top civilian staff ap-

peared deeply alarmed about the revelations and were contemplating whether to leave the administration.

Hegseth, writing on social media Monday night, said he stands by the admiral "and the combat decisions he has made — on the September 2 mission and all others since."

His statement is likely to deepen the sense of furor among military officials who suspect Hegseth is attempting to insulate himself from any legal recourse and leave Bradley — whom the secretary called "an American hero, a true professional" — to account for the fallout alone.

On Tuesday, Hegseth cited the "fog of war" in defending a follow-up strike, The Associated Press reported.

During a cabinet meeting Tuesday at the White House, Hegseth said that he did not see that there were survivors in the water when the second strike was ordered and launched, saying that "the thing was on fire" and citing the "fog of war" in defending the strike. Hegseth also said

he "didn't stick around" for the remainder of the mission following the first strike, and said that the admiral in charge had "made the right call" in ordering it, which he "had complete authority to do."

The Pentagon has declined The Post's request to interview Hegseth about his role in the strikes. President Donald Trump told reporters Sunday that he had discussed the matter with Hegseth, who, Trump said, assured him he did not give an order to kill everyone aboard the boat.

"And I believe him," the president added, "100 percent."

On Capitol Hill, key offices also were parsing Leavitt's remarks for signs of the administration's strategy as it seeks to quell unrest from members of Congress — including some top Republicans.

Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., who chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee, told reporters that he had spoken to Hegseth and the Joint Chiefs chairman, Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, and that he expects to speak with Bradley also.

Putin accuses Europe of sabotaging peace proposals

Associated Press

Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Kyiv's European allies Tuesday of sabotaging U.S.-led efforts to end the nearly 4-year-old war in Ukraine.

"They don't have a peace agenda, they're on the side of the war," Putin said after speaking to an investment forum and before he met in the Kremlin with a U.S. delegation led by envoy Steve Witkoff and President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Putin's accusations appeared to be his latest attempt to sow

dissension between Trump and European countries and set the stage for exempting Moscow from blame for any lack of progress.

He accused Europe of amending peace proposals with "demands that are absolutely unacceptable to Russia," thus "blocking the entire peace process," only to blame Russia for it.

"That's their goal," Putin said.

He reiterated his long-held position that Russia has no plans to attack Europe — a concern regularly voiced by some

European countries.

"But if Europe suddenly wants to wage a war with us and starts it, we are ready right away. There can be no doubt about that," Putin said.

Russia started the war in 2022 with its full-scale invasion of a sovereign European country, and European governments have since spent billions of dollars to support Ukraine financially and militarily, to wean themselves from energy dependence on Russia and to strengthen their own militaries to deter Moscow from seizing

more territory by force.

They worry that if Russia gets what it wants in Ukraine, it will have free rein to threaten or disrupt other European countries, which already have faced incursions from Russian drones and fighter jets, and an alleged widespread Russian sabotage campaign.

Trump's peace plan relies on Europe to provide the bulk of the financing and security guarantees for a postwar Ukraine, even though no Europeans appear to have been consulted on the original plan.

Report seeks clarity on DOD Indo-Pac efforts

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon has not given Congress a clear picture of how it prioritizes and funds deterrence efforts in the Indo-Pacific, leaving lawmakers without a full understanding of U.S. strategy as China expands its military reach, a government watchdog warned.

The Defense Department has failed to issue clear guidance on which programs should be included in its annual Pacific Deterrence Initiative budget report, the Government Accountability Office said in a Nov. 25 report.

“The result is a budget exhibit that may not reflect all the funded program priorities that [U.S. Indo-Pacific Command] needs for its regional strategy,” the GAO wrote.

Without reforms, “Congress will continue to face challenges in

using it to assess progress toward deterrence and posture objectives in the Indo-Pacific,” the report concludes.

Congress established the annual reporting requirement in 2021 to track the Pentagon’s efforts to counter China’s growing presence in the region. The PDI — not a standalone funding stream — consists of both a detailed budget exhibit and an independent assessment by the head of INDOPACOM on needed resources.

But the Pentagon and INDOPACOM build their inputs separately, the GAO said, creating inconsistencies. Programs prioritized by the combatant command are sometimes omitted from the budget exhibit prepared by the DOD.

The GAO reviewed PDI budget exhibits for fiscal years 2023

through 2025 and identified major discrepancies across the military services. Some branches, such as the Air Force and Marine Corps, included facility sustainment programs; the Army and Navy did not.

Some services focused on activities west of the International Date Line, while others included operations to the east, according to the report.

Several DOD organizations also included development programs unlikely to be operational within five years, even though the PDI is intended to emphasize near-term deterrence, the GAO wrote.

Assumptions about force posture varied widely. The Marine Corps included most of its Indo-Pacific forces in its submissions. The Army and Air Force were more selective, while the Navy

included “virtually none,” according to the report.

Navy officials told investigators that Pacific surface ships and submarines were not listed because the service was already funding those forces before the PDI’s creation.

By contrast, the Marines included the entire Okinawa-based III Marine Expeditionary Force in every PDI exhibit since 2023, arguing the force’s daily activities “contribute to ... integrated deterrence efforts against China and thus meet the intent of PDI,” the GAO wrote.

The Pentagon agreed with the GAO’s recommendations, including clarifying program selection criteria and updating processes to ensure INDOPACOM’s priorities are fully incorporated into the annual assessment.

GAO: Cutter program with zero deliveries needs oversight

By **ALISON BATH**
Stars and Stripes

An estimated \$20 billion Coast Guard shipbuilding program that has failed to put a cutter into service amid ballooning costs and lengthy delays must have better oversight, according to a government watchdog agency.

Stabilizing the design of the planned 25 Heritage-class offshore patrol cutters should be a top priority before the service authorizes construction of more vessels, the Government Accountability Office said in a 72-page report last week.

The estimated total costs for the program rose from \$12.5 billion in 2012 to \$19.6 billion in 2023, a 57% increase, the GAO said in the Nov. 25 report. The current cost estimate for the program is being worked out now.

“The risk of continued delays

and cost overruns is likely,” it added, noting that the design still is not finished and that the ships have yet to be delivered.

Delivery of the first ship, Argus, isn’t expected until at least December 2026, more than five years behind schedule.

Heritage-class ships are needed to replace the aging medium-endurance cutters used for search and rescue, interdiction of drugs and migrants, and securing ports, waterways and coastal areas, among other operations.

The Coast Guard aims to acquire the new cutters in three stages. Stage one includes four ships being built by Florida-based Eastern Shipbuilding Group with Austal USA in Alabama constructing nearly a dozen ships in the second phase.

The shipbuilder for the third and final stage of 10 ships has not yet been determined, the

GAO said.

At least three of the ships are under construction even though the design of key systems, such as a crane to onload and offload small boats, still is incomplete, the GAO noted.

That status threatens the ability of shipbuilders to meet program requirements and deadlines, the report stated.

The Coast Guard is part of the Homeland Security Department, which pushed back on the report, saying that the service already had updated its acquisition process to better align with leading shipbuilding practices.

“Before authorizing construction for a second stage of the cutters in August 2025, the program achieved a design maturity of 94%,” Jeffrey Bobich, DHS director of financial management, wrote in a Sept. 18 letter.

DHS also disagreed with the

report’s recommendation that the Coast Guard and Navy need to iron out an agreement on coordinating evaluation of the performance of Austal. The Navy is helping to supervise the cutter building program.

DHS pumped hundreds of millions of dollars more into the Heritage-class program, in part to shore up the financial stability of ESG after its facilities were devastated by a 2018 hurricane as the company started construction on Argus.

That financial boost is the biggest contributor to the program’s skyrocketing costs, according to the GAO.

The Coast Guard also offered financial incentives to ESG for meeting key deadlines, but the company has made incremental progress on the first two cutters. In July, the Coast Guard canceled the remaining two ships in the contract, the GAO said.

Proposed Ind. district map seeks GOP sweep

Associated Press

Republicans in the Indiana House of Representatives unveiled a new congressional map on Monday that aims to wipe out the state's two Democrat-held U.S. House districts, increasing pressure on GOP holdouts in the state Senate who have refused to heed President Donald Trump's redistricting demands.

Although they're confident they can pass redistricting in the state House, Republican lawmakers know that the fate of any proposal remains uncertain in the Senate, where their counterparts have held out for months despite threats from Trump to endorse primary opponents of defecting senators.

Republicans hold seven of Indiana's nine U.S. House seats. The president and national Republicans have urged lawmakers there to pursue a 9-0 GOP map ahead of the 2026 elections, when Democrats will need only

a modest number of gains nationally to overcome Republicans' current House margin.

Indiana Senate leadership recently backed off its previous intentions not to meet at all, agreeing to convene next Monday. However, it's still unclear whether enough senators will support a new map.

House Republicans in Indiana published a draft of a map Monday morning still featuring nine congressional districts, but with new boundaries designed to oust the state's two Democratic U.S. House members.

The city of Indianapolis, which reliably backs Democrats, would be split among four congressional districts. It's a major change to the current map where the city makes up the entirety of the 7th District.

"It's clear these orders are coming from Washington, and they clearly don't know the first thing about our community,"

longtime U.S. Rep. André Carson, a Democrat who represents Indianapolis, said in a statement.

Indiana's other current Democratic district is in the state's northwest corner near Chicago. The new map would instead group a large portion of Republican counties in northern Indiana with the cities of East Chicago and Gary to make a new 1st Congressional District.

The redistricting bill filed Monday was to be heard in committee Tuesday morning, meaning it could see a final vote in the House on Friday, according to chamber rules.

Indiana lawmakers have been under mounting pressure from the White House to redistrict, like Republicans in Texas, Missouri, Ohio and North Carolina have done. To offset the GOP gains, Democrats in California and Virginia have moved to do the same.

But some Indiana Republicans have been far more resistant. Republicans in the state Senate rebelled against Republican Gov. Mike Braun in November and said they would not attend a special session he ordered on redistricting.

The chamber's top Republican, President Pro Tem Rodric Bray, at the time said the Senate did not have the votes. A spokesperson for Bray's office did not respond Friday when asked if that is still the case.

Meanwhile, Trump attacked Indiana senators on social media, particularly Bray. Lawmakers endured a spree of threats and swatting, in which hoax calls attempted to bring law enforcement to the homes of senators who either said they do not support redistricting or have not taken a stance. At least one lawmaker in favor of redistricting and Braun were also threatened.

Doctor says Trump's MRI scan had 'normal' results

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump's doctor says the president had MRI imaging on his heart and abdomen in October as part of a preventive screening for men his age, according to a memo from the physician released by the White House on Monday.

Sean Barbabella said in a statement that Trump's physical exam included "advanced imaging" that is "standard for an executive physical" in Trump's age group. Barbabella concluded that the cardiovascular and abdominal imaging was "perfectly normal."

"The purpose of this imaging is preventative: to identify issues early, confirm overall health, and ensure he maintains long-term vitality and function," the doctor wrote.

The White House released Barbabella's memo after Trump, 79, on Sunday said he would release the results of the scan. He and the White House have said the scan was "part of his routine physical examination" but had declined until Monday to detail why Trump had an MRI during his physical in October at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Md., or on what part of his body.

"I think that's quite a bit of detail," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said.

The Republican president said Sunday during an exchange with reporters as he traveled back to Washington from Florida that the results of the MRI were "perfect."

"If you want to have it released, I'll release it," Trump said.

US air travelers without REAL IDs to pay \$45 fee

Associated Press

Air travelers in the U.S. without a REAL ID will be charged a \$45 fee beginning in February, the Transportation Security Administration announced Monday.

The updated ID has been required since May, but passengers without it have so far been allowed to clear security with additional screening and a warning. The Department of Homeland Security says 94% of passengers are already compliant and that the new fee is intended to encourage travelers to obtain the ID.

REAL ID is a federally compliant state-issued license or identification card that meets enhanced requirements mandated in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Obtaining the ID — indicated

by a white star in a yellow circle in most states — means taking more documents to the motor vehicle agency than most states require for regular IDs. It was supposed to be rolled out in 2008 but the implementation had been repeatedly delayed.

Beginning Feb. 1, travelers 18 and older flying domestically without a REAL ID and who don't have another accepted form of ID on them, such as a passport, will pay the non-refundable fee to verify their identity through TSA's alternative "Confirm.ID" system.

TSA officials said that paying the fee does not guarantee verification, and travelers whose identities cannot be verified may be turned away. If approved, however, the verification covers a 10-day travel period.

Cyber Monday rakes in sales for retailers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Shoppers scoured for deals online on Cyber Monday, delivering strong sales for retailers and capping a five-day spending spree that kicked off on Thanksgiving.

Adobe Analytics reported that as of 6:30 p.m. EST on Monday, U.S. consumers had already spent \$9.1 billion online for Cyber Monday, up 4.5% from the same day a year ago.

Adobe expects that when the final tally is in, consumers will spend between \$13.9 billion and \$14.2 billion for the day, making Cyber Monday the biggest online shopping day of the year—and setting records for that day.

Online spending was expected to peak between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. local time, with \$16 million to pass through online shopping carts every minute nationwide,

Adobe said

Electronics and apparel were leading the charge for Cyber Monday, Adobe reported.

The sales results are in line with Adobe Analytics prediction of \$14.2 billion online Monday, or 6.3% more than in 2024.

U.S. consumers already spent \$11.8 billion online during Black Friday, \$6.4 billion on Thanksgiving Day and another \$11.8 billion over the weekend — exceeding Adobe's forecasts.

Adobe said Monday that it expects the five-day weekend to drive 17.2% of overall online sales this season, at \$43.7 billion, up 6.3% compared with the year-ago period.

Purchases made across Cyber Week — the five major shopping days between Thanksgiving and Cyber Monday — provides a strong indication of how

much shoppers are willing to spend for the holidays.

"Cyber Week is off to a strong start," said Vivek Pandya, lead analyst at Adobe Digital Insights. "Discounts are set to remain elevated through Cyber Monday, which we expect will remain the biggest online shopping day of the season and year."

Software company Salesforce — which tracks digital spending from a range of retailers, including grocers — reported that Cyber Monday was off to a "strong start," with global online sales as of noon EST reaching \$17.3 billion, up 5.3% from last year. It said that the number of online orders was unchanged from a year ago.

Salesforce said U.S. online sales hit \$3.4 billion, or up 2.6%, on Cyber Monday during the

same time frame. Online orders declined by 1% from a year ago.

Before Cyber Monday shopping ended, Salesforce said it was expecting global online sales to grow 6% compared with the year-ago period to reach \$52.7 billion and for U.S. online sales to increase 4% compared with a year ago to \$13.3 billion.

The numbers were coming in slightly below Salesforce's original prediction for online sales to total \$13.4 billion in the U.S. and for global sales to reach \$53.7 billion on Cyber Monday.

While the amount of money going into online shopping carts was expected to reach new heights Monday, rising retail prices also may contribute to any record sales figures that materialize.

Consumers may also be buying fewer total items.

Acts of mass killing in US at lowest yearly total since '06

Associated Press

A shooting last weekend at a children's birthday party in California that left four dead was the 17th mass killing this year — the lowest number recorded since 2006, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University.

Experts warn that the drop doesn't necessarily mean safer days are here to stay and that it could simply represent a return to average levels.

"Sir Isaac Newton never studied crime, but he says 'What goes up must come down,'" said James Alan Fox, a criminologist at Northeastern University. The current drop in numbers is more likely what statisticians call a "regression to the mean," he said, representing a return to more average crime levels after an unusual spike in mass killings in 2018 and 2019.

The mass killings — defined as incidents in which four or more people are killed in a 24-hour period, not including the killer — are tracked in the database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University.

Fox, who manages the database, says mass killings were down about 24% this year compared to 2024.

Mass killings are rare, and that means the numbers are volatile, said James Densley, a professor of at Metropolitan State University in Minnesota.

"Because there's only a few dozen mass killings in a year, a small change could look like a wave or a collapse," when really it's just a return to more typical levels, Densley said. "2025 looks really good in historical context, but we can't pretend like that means the problem is gone for good."

Israel receives possible remains from militants

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Israel on Tuesday said it had received "findings" handed over by Palestinian militants in Gaza to the Red Cross. They were believed to be remains of one of the two hostages still in the territory: an Israeli and a Thai national.

Israel's government said they have been taken for forensics testing. Palestinian media has said they were found in Gaza's northern town of Beit Lahiya.

Israeli officials did not immediately clarify what exactly the term "findings" meant in this context.

The remains of 26 hostages taken in the Hamas-led Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war have already been returned since a U.S.-brokered ceasefire began on Oct. 10.

Israeli fire killed two Palestinians in Gaza in Tuesday.

An Israeli drone strike killed

a videographer in the south, said officials at Nasser Hospital, which received the body.

Momahed Wadi was killed in Khan Younis, the hospital said. Wadi owned a drone photography company that once specialized on filming occasions like weddings.

More recently, it posted footage of Gaza's destruction.

Also Tuesday, a man was shot dead near the Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza, according to Al-Awda Hospital.

Israel's military did not immediately comment on either death but has said killings are often in response to militants approaching or firing at its forces.

Gaza's Health Ministry said more than 350 Palestinians have been killed across the territory since the ceasefire. Both Hamas and Israel have accused the other of breaking the terms of the truce.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Lawsuit: Bus driver failed to intervene in assault

CA FRESNO — A Fresno parent has sued Central Unified School District and accused a school bus driver of negligence, alleging her child was assaulted by other students while in the district's care.

The lawsuit accuses an unnamed bus driver in the west Fresno school district of failing to properly supervise the student, described in the lawsuit as "autistic and nonverbal."

According to the complaint, the mother was told two students took off her daughter's helmet before hitting and "molesting" her.

The administration called this sexual assault and said law enforcement was involved, according to the complaint.

Along with charging the district with failing to properly supervise the plaintiff, the lawsuit separately accuses school staff of causing a buckle fracture on the student's arm in September 2024.

Pedestrian in wheelchair killed while crossing road

NV LAS VEGAS — A man in a wheelchair was killed early Sunday after he was struck by a car while crossing West Flamingo Road in Las Vegas, according to a Metropolitan Police Department news release.

The crash occurred at about 5:22 a.m. west of South El Capitan Way, police said.

Evidence and surveillance footage showed that a 2024 Kia Forte was traveling eastbound in the right travel lane when the pedestrian crossed Flamingo Road outside a marked or im-

plied crosswalk.

Police said the man, described as 50 to 60 years old, was traveling northbound in front of the car's path when the front left of the Kia struck him, ejecting him from his chair.

He was taken to University Medical Center's trauma center, where he died.

The driver, a 66-year-old Las Vegas woman, remained at the scene, showed no signs of impairment and cooperated with investigators.

Senator, fiance wed in private ceremonies

DC WASHINGTON — Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., long one of Washington's most eligible bachelors, is officially off the market.

The 56-year-old married Alexis Lewis, 38, last week in private ceremonies, trading in years of public speculation about his love life for a new ring on his left hand.

On Nov. 24, the couple said "I do" with their parents as witnesses at the U.S. District Court in Newark, N.J. Then Saturday in Washington, D.C., they held a ceremony and celebration with family at a private venue.

Lewis, a Washington native who has changed her last name to include Booker on social media, is a vice president of investments at Brasa Capital Management, a real estate investment firm. She and Booker began dating last year after a mutual friend set them up on a blind date.

In 2013, Town & Country named Booker one of its "Top 40 Bachelors." He later dated actress Rosario Dawson, whom he first met at a political fundraiser in 2018. The two split by early

2022 but remained friendly; she was one of the first VIPs to congratulate them on the Instagram when they got engaged.

Casinos advance at golf course, near stadium

NY NEW YORK — Casinos proposed for a golf course in the Bronx and next to the New York Mets' ballpark are poised to cash in on a lucrative state gambling license for the New York City area.

The two proposals were recommended for licensing by a key state gaming board on Monday.

The New York Gaming Facility Location Board also called for awarding a license to Resorts World to expand its slots parlor located in Queens near the John F. Kennedy Airport into a full-scale casino with table games and other amenities.

Bally's \$4 billion casino plan for the city-owned Ferry's Point golf course also means President Donald Trump will also see a significant casino windfall.

The Rhode Island-based company purchased the rights to operate the course in 2023, with the promise to pony up another \$115 million if it won a casino license.

The recommendations now head to the state Gaming Commission, which is expected to formally issue the licenses before the end of the year, as the gambling revenues from the facilities are already factored into the budget.

Police warn about checks stolen out of mailboxes

AL MADISON — The Madison Police Department is alerting the public to a recent increase in check

theft from residential mailboxes.

In a statement on Monday, the department identified the Balch Road area in Madison and Madison County as a hot-spot.

"Thieves are quickly altering these checks and fraudulently cashing them before the victims realize anything is wrong," the statement said.

To avoid becoming a victim, the police urge using other payment methods, such as online payments, pay-by-phone, or dropping mail directly at secure postal locations.

People are also urged to track the status of incoming mail using Informed Delivery, which sends a daily email with info on mail and packages they are to receive that day.

Man had 42 driver's license suspensions

NY ONEIDA — A routine traffic stop turned into much more last week for deputies in Oneida County.

According to Oneida County Sheriff Robert Maciol, on Wednesday, deputies who pulled over a vehicle in Paris found that the driver, Tyler Redmond, had a suspended driver's license with 42 suspensions imposed on 14 different dates.

Redmond was arrested and charged with first-degree aggravated unlicensed operation, a class E felony. He is being held at the Oneida County Corrections Facility pending his arraignment. Authorities also issued Redmond several uniform traffic tickets for the town of Paris.

— From wire reports

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and Military News

Pats top Giants for 10th straight win

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Led by Drake Maye and Marcus Jones, the New England Patriots became the first NFL team to reach 11 wins this season.

They also left no doubt about the gulf between them and the New York Giants at the moment.

Maye passed for two touchdowns, Jones had a 94-yard punt return for a TD and New England beat New York 33-15 on Monday night.

It was the 10th straight win for the AFC-leading Patriots (11-2), the franchise's longest streak since winning 10 consecutive games in 2015. Mike Vrabel also became the third coach since 1970 to have a win streak of 10 or more games in his first season with a team.

Maye completed 24 of 31 passes for 282 yards with no interceptions. Vrabel said it was another example of his quarterback "realizing what he can be."

"Just trying to be the face, trying to be the conductor," Maye said. "Trying to want the pressure. You want the ball in my hands."

The Giants (2-11) lost their seventh straight game and

third in a row since firing former coach Brian Daboll. Rookie quarterback Jaxson Dart returned after missing two games because of a concussion, but there wasn't much he could do.

Dart threw a touchdown pass to Darius Slayton and finished 17 of 24 for 139 yards. Devin Singletary added a touchdown run.

"We were just scratching and clawing. You're trying to find any way to catch up," Dart said.

Dart played with his usual style in his return. On a second down on the team's second offensive series, he scrambled toward the New York bench and tried to tip-toe up the sideline for extra yards.

It left him open for a clean hit to the midsection by New England linebacker Christian Elliss, who sent Dart hard to the turf.

"Stay inbounds? What am I supposed to do," Elliss said. "We play hard on defense. We try to bring life to this team."

The forceful tackle caused a brief shoving match between several players. No flags were thrown for Elliss' tackle, but after a discussion

by officials, Giants tight end Theo Johnson was called for unnecessary roughness for his role in the post-play scrum.

Dart was not evaluated following the hit and remained in the game for the next play.

"I'm not playing soccer out here. You're going to get hit," Dart said. "Things happen. It's part of the game."

After the Patriots took a 17-0 lead on a 3-yard TD pass by Maye to Kayshon Boutte, Dart found traction on New York's third possession and capped a six-play, 62-yard drive with a catch-and-run TD pass to Slayton that covered 30 yards.

The Giants defense started the game well, holding New England to a field goal on the game's opening possession in its first game under the direction of interim coordinator Charlie Bullen. Bullen was elevated to the role after Shane Bowen was fired 12 games into his second season.

It didn't last.

Trailing 10-0 after Jones' TD and a quick three-and-out that included the Elliss hit on Dart, Maye used a 36-yard pass to Hunter Henry to set up his touchdown pass to

Boutte.

The Patriots led 30-7 at halftime, marking the first time since Week 17 of 2009 season that New York had allowed 30 points in the first half.

Return game

Jones became the fourth player in New England history to return two punts for TDs in a single season, joining Troy Brown (2001), Irving Fryar (1985) and Mike Haynes (1976).

Hold on

Lined up for a 47-yard field-goal attempt in the second quarter, Giants kicker Younghoe Koo got his cleat caught in the turf and never got off a kick. Holder Jamie Gillan tried to get up and run but was tackled for what was scored as a 13-yard sack by Jeremiah Pharms.

It wasn't New York's only special teams mishap. Gunner Olszewski also fumbled on a kickoff return late in the first half after being sandwiched on a tackle by Marte Mapu and Elliss.

The Patriots recovered on the Giants 27 and eventually added Andy Borregales' second field goal of the half.

Chargers QB Herbert has surgery on non-throwing hand

Associated Press

EL SEGUNDO, Calif. — Los Angeles Chargers quarterback Justin Herbert's availability to play will be determined later this week after undergoing surgery on his non-throwing hand Monday.

Herbert is day-to-day, the team said in a statement, after he broke a bone in his left hand in the first quarter of a 31-14 win against the Las Vegas Raiders on Sunday, playing the last three quarters in a cast and

wearing a glove.

He was 15 of 20 for 151 yards, two touchdowns and one interception.

Herbert has completed 66.9% of his passes for 2,842 yards and 21 touchdowns against 10 interceptions, and he is second on the team with 353 yards rushing. He has also taken the third-most sacks in the NFL (38) and is on pace to absorb the most hits in his six seasons with the Chargers.

Head coach Jim Harbaugh

said earlier Monday afternoon that backup Trey Lance would receive more snaps in practice to prepare for situations where the offense operates under center, such as at the goal line and in short yardage. Los Angeles had to work exclusively out of the shotgun and pistol after Herbert was hurt, though he did take a handful of snaps from under center on the sideline before returning to the game.

"Justin, he's one of those quarterbacks that takes all the

reps. He's a machine like that, and we got to make sure that Trey's getting more of those goal-line reps, those situations under center," Harbaugh said.

The Chargers (8-4), who host the Philadelphia Eagles on Monday night, currently hold the first wild-card in the AFC and are two games behind the Denver Broncos for first in the AFC West. LA defeated the Broncos 23-20 on Sept. 21 and will travel to Denver to close out the regular season Jan. 4.

Suns snap Lakers' 7-game winning streak

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Dillon Brooks scored 33 points, Collin Gillespie added 16 of his career-high 28 in the fourth quarter and the Phoenix Suns emphatically snapped the Los Angeles Lakers' seven-game winning streak with a 125-108 victory Monday night.

Devin Booker scored 11 points before leaving with two minutes left in the first quarter with a right groin injury, yet the Suns improbably played a remarkable game in their leading scorer's absence.

Gillespie hit a career-best eight 3-pointers for Phoenix, which had lost three of four. The Suns forced 22 Lakers turnovers and streaked to a 21-point lead in the third quarter, blowing out Los Angeles despite Luka Dončić's 38 points.

Austin Reaves added 16 points for the Lakers, who were playing their third home game in four nights. LA was mostly listless after Dončić scored 20 points in yet another phenomenal first quarter.

LeBron James finished with 10 points, barely keeping alive his streak of scoring in double di-

gits in 1,297 consecutive regular-season games. James made a 3-pointer with 6:51 left to preserve the streak, which began Jan. 7, 2007 — less than three weeks after Cooper Flagg was born.

Pistons 99, Hawks 98: Cade Cunningham scored eight of his 18 points in the final 3:21, and host Detroit rallied to beat Atlanta.

The Hawks had a chance to win with 0.1 seconds left, but Jalen Johnson couldn't convert a tip-in as time expired.

Jalen Duren had 21 points and 11 rebounds for the Pistons, who won for the 15th time in 17 games. Caris LeVert added 14 points and made two key defensive plays down the stretch.

Wizards 129, Bucks 126: CJ McCollum scored 28 points, including a 3-pointer with 14.4 seconds remaining that helped host Washington outlast Milwaukee.

The Wizards (3-16) have won two of three following a 14-game losing streak, and the Bucks only managed a split in two games against Washington and Brooklyn — two of the NBA's worst teams.

Heat 140, Clippers 123: Nor-

man Powell scored 30 points against his former team, Bam Adebayo had 27 points and 14 rebounds in 32 minutes and host Miami downed reeling Los Angeles.

Tyler Herro and Andrewiggins each scored 22 for the Heat, who trailed by two early in the second quarter before going on a 30-2 run. Miami also hit 24 3-pointers, tying a franchise record done on two previous occasions.

Nets 116, Hornets 103: Michael Porter Jr. scored 35 points, Noah Clowney had 18 and host Brooklyn beat Charlotte.

Nic Claxton added 13 points, 11 rebounds and six assists for the Nets, who had lost four in a row. Reserves Danny Wolf and Drake Powell each scored 10 points.

Magic 125, Bulls 120: Desmond Bane scored 18 of his 37 points in the fourth quarter, helping host Orlando beat Chicago.

Bane made a go-ahead 3-pointer with 3:23 left, sparking an 8-0 run for the Magic. He also capped the decisive sequence with a foul shot that

made it 117-111 with 2:11 to go.

Cavaliers 135, Pacers 119: Donovan Mitchell scored 43 points to lead visiting Cleveland to a victory over Indiana.

Mitchell, who made 16 of 27 shots from the field, also had nine rebounds and six assists. Jaylon Tyson added 27 points on 10-of-13 shooting and a team-high 11 rebounds. Evan Mobley and DeAndre Hunter each scored 13 for the Cavaliers.

Mavericks 131, Nuggets 121: Anthony Davis scored a season-high 32 points in his second game back from injury, and visiting Dallas beat Denver.

Rookie Ryan Nembhard had 28 points and 10 assist, both career bests, to help the Mavericks win consecutive games for the first time this season. Cooper Flagg added 24 points for Dallas, which hit 16 of 31 shots from 3-point range.

Jazz 133, Rockets 125: Lauri Markkanen scored 29 points and Keyonte George added 28 as host Utah outlasted Houston.

Jusuf Nurkic had a season-high 18 points and nine rebounds before fouling out, and Ace Bailey added 13 points as the Jazz (6-13) improved to 6-6 at home.

Crosby nears another Penguins record in win over Flyers

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Pittsburgh star Sidney Crosby scored his 58th and 59th career goals against the Philadelphia Flyers and his continued excellence in the cross-state rivalry helped lead the Penguins to a 5-1 win on Monday night.

Crosby, who has 18 goals this season, has dominated Philly like no other visiting player has done in Flyers history. Crosby has 59 goals and 137 points in 92 games against Philadelphia, the most in both categories any opponent has ever put up on the Flyers.

Crosby moved seven shy of Mario Lemieux for the most regular-season points with Pittsburgh. He already holds the team record for regular and postseason points combined.

"I'm sure he knows me well enough to

know that's not something I really want to talk about it," Crosby said of not having heard from Lemieux recently. "Just go out there and play. If it happens, it happens."

Sabres 5, Jets 1: Josh Norris scored two goals and added an assist in his first game back after aggravating an injury in the season opener and host Buffalo beat Winnipeg.

Norris scored his first goal of the season with 5:06 remaining in the first period on a backhand shot, assisted by Zach Benson and Tage Thompson. He added a backhand shot 41 seconds into the third, assisted by Benson and Rasmus Dahlin. Norris also recorded one assist in the game.

Ducks 4, Blues 1: Mason McTavish and Pavel Mintyukov each scored first period goals to help visiting Anaheim beat St. Louis.

Leo Carlsson also scored, Chris Kreider

added an empty-net goal and Ville Husso made 22 saves for the Ducks, who successfully killed six Blues power plays.

Blue Jackets 5, Devils 3: Sean Monahan scored twice and visiting Columbus overcame an early two-goal deficit to beat New Jersey.

Charlie Coyle scored the go-ahead goal 6:40 into the third period and added two assists. Miles Wood had a goal and an assist for the Blue Jackets, and Denton Mateychuk also scored.

Sharks 6, Mammoth 3: Tyler Toffoli had two goals and two assists as host San Jose defeated Utah.

Will Smith also scored twice for the Sharks, giving him 12 goals this season. He added an assist. Pavol Regenda scored in his San Jose debut, and Adam Gaudette had the other Sharks goal.

Hamlin testifies at NASCAR antitrust trial

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Three-time Daytona 500 winner Denny Hamlin outlined the precarious situation facing NASCAR teams, testifying Tuesday in the federal antitrust trial against the stock car series that the race team he co-owns spent more than \$700,000 to the series in 2022 alone and how agreeing to its charter proposal last fall would have been like signing his own “death certificate.”

Hamlin was the first witness called when testimony began Monday in the antitrust case brought by 23XI Racing, which is owned by Hamlin and Basketball Hall of Famer Michael Jordan, and Front Row Motorsports, owned by fast-food franchiser Bob Jenkins. The two teams have contended that NASCAR is a monopoly which has handcuffed teams with a no-win revenue model.

Hamlin returned to the stand for more than three hours and was asked about line items in 23XI Racing’s budget. He noted how more than \$703,000 three years ago was spent on costs to NASCAR ranging from entry fees, credentials for team members to enter the track and even access to Internet signals. He al-

so said he and Jordan spent \$100 million to build 23XI and “all it takes is one sponsor to go away and all our profit is gone.”

All 15 of NASCAR’s teams had been vocal for over two years that the last charter agreement made it impossible for them to turn a profit and they demanded four changes in prolonged negotiations. When the final offer came from NASCAR and lacked most of what the teams asked for, 23XI and Front Row refused to sign and instead sued.

23XI has turned a profit in all but one of its five seasons, but its financial success is largely a product of Jordan’s star power drawing top-dollar sponsors. Plaintiffs’ attorney Jeffery Kessler told the jury Monday that a NASCAR-commissioned study found that 75% of teams lost money in 2024.

Hamlin testified that the TV deal NASCAR signed ahead of the 2025 season has not been a boon to race teams because of a shift toward streaming services, and big-ticket sponsors want to be on television. He also referred to a meeting with NASCAR chairman Jim France, who indicated teams are spending too much and it should only cost \$10 million per car. Hamlin

testified it costs \$20 million.

“We cannot cut more. Tell me how to get my investment back? He had no answer,” Hamlin said.

As for refusing to sign the charter agreements last fall, Hamlin said the last-ditch proposal from NASCAR “had eight points minimum that needed to be changed. When we pointed that out, we were told ‘Negotiations are closed.’”

“I didn’t sign because I knew this was my death certificate for the future,” he said, later adding: “I have spent 20 years trying to make this sport grow as a driver and for the last five years as a team owner. 23XI is doing our part. You can’t have someone treat you this unfairly and I knew it wasn’t right. They were wrong and someone needed to be held accountable.”

Under cross-examination, Hamlin was asked why he paints a rosier picture of NASCAR on podcast appearances. He replied that he is regurgitating NASCAR talking points because any negative comments can lead to retribution.

“You can take all my things out of context and paint a picture that everything is fine,” he said. “The reality is, (being) negative

affects me in (technical inspection), getting called to the hauler, NASCAR not liking what I said.”

NASCAR is owned and operated by the Florida-based France family, which founded the series in 1948. Kessler said over a three-year period almost \$400 million was paid to the France Family Trust and a 2023 evaluation by Goldman Sachs found NASCAR to be worth \$5 billion. The pretrial discovery process revealed NASCAR made more than \$100 million in 2024, while Jenkins testified in a deposition that he has lost \$60 million over the last decade and \$100 million since starting his team in 2004.

NASCAR has contended that it is doing nothing wrong and has not restrained trade or commerce by its teams. The series has said the original charters were given for free to teams when the system was created in 2016 and the demand for them created a market of \$1.5 billion in equity for chartered organizations.

Hamlin countered that 11 of the original 19 chartered organizations are out of business; all three of 23XI’s charters came from teams that ceased operations.

Source: Mets signing relief pitcher Williams to 3-year deal

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Free agent reliever Devin Williams has agreed to a contract with the New York Mets, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press on Monday night.

The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the deal was pending a physical and had not been announced.

Multiple media reports indicated the sides agreed to a three-year contract.

Williams spent last season across town with the New York Yankees, going 4-6 with a career-worst 4.79 ERA and 18 saves in 22 chances. He lost the closer’s job, regained it and then lost it again before finishing the year with four scoreless outings during the American League playoffs.

The 31-year-old right-hander is a two-time All-Star who twice won the Trevor Hoffman NL Reliever of the Year Award with the Milwaukee Brewers while Mets president of baseball operations David Stearns was running that team. Williams was also voted the 2020 NL Rookie of the Year.

The Brewers traded Williams to the Yankees for pitcher Nestor Cortes and infielder Caleb Durbin last December.

With the Mets, Williams could replace free agent closer Edwin Díaz or complement him in a rebuilt bullpen.

Williams was pitching for Milwaukee when he gave up a go-ahead homer to New York slugger Pete Alonso in the deciding Game 3 of their 2024 NL Wild Card Series.

The three-run shot put the Mets ahead in the ninth inning as they went on to win the series.

Known for a changeup so deceptive it’s called The Airbender, Williams struck out 90 batters and walked 25 in 62 innings over 67 appearances during his lone season in pinstripes. He made \$8.6 million in 2025.

After the Yankees were eliminated from the postseason, Williams said he was open to re-signing with the team.

“At first it was a challenge, but I’ve grown to love being here,” the reliever said in October following a 5-2 loss to the Toronto Blue Jays in Game 4 of their AL Division Series. “I love this city. I love taking the train to the field every day. Yeah, I really enjoyed my experience here.”