

## Navy turns to AI for shipbuilding industry

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy is investing \$448 million in AI and autonomy to speed up use of the technologies across the shipbuilding industry as part of efforts to revitalize it and encourage innovation, the service announced this week.

The investment in the Navy's Shipbuilding Operating System will use software from American technology giant Palantir to offer shipbuilders, shipyards and suppliers the resources needed to modernize their operations, Secretary of the Navy John Phelan said Tuesday in a statement.

"By enabling industry to adopt AI and autonomy tools at scale, we're helping the shipbuilding industry improve schedules, increase capacity and reduce costs," Phelan said. He added that the initiative was

about "doing business smarter and building the industrial capability our Navy and nation require."

The initiative will aggregate data from planning systems and databases, among other sources, to eliminate bottlenecks, streamline workflows and mitigate risk, allowing for quicker, more informed decisions, the Navy said.

For example, using AI helped one shipbuilder reduce submarine schedule planning from 160 manual hours to under 10 minutes while another was able to cut material review times from weeks to under one hour, according to the statement.

The initial effort will focus on submarine shipbuilders, shipyards and suppliers with expansion to surface ship programs as the Navy validates and refines the approach, according to the statement.

Phelan has promised to reshape how the Navy builds and fields ships with a focus on cutting costs and getting vessels out to sea faster.

In November, he announced that the Navy was canceling the bulk of the \$22 billion Constellation-class frigate program that had been beset with delays and cost overruns.

Just two of the ships, already under construction, will be completed.

The move would free up money and shipyard space for other projects, Phelan said in a video posted to his X account on Nov. 25.

A little more than a week later, in another video, Phelan said the Navy had selected the design for its medium landing ships, calling the choice a second step in overhauling the service's shipbuilding efforts.

The roughly 4,000-ton ves-

sels, designed by Dutch shipbuilder Damen, can carry cargo and Marines more than 3,400 miles, offering "the right balance of capability, affordability and speed to field," Phelan said in the Dec. 5 post that was made to his X account.

Its crane, berthing, helicopter and cargo capacities make "it an excellent choice for the Marine Corps requirement of no less than 35 medium landing ships to support naval expeditionary forces," Gen. Eric Smith, Marine Corps commandant, said in the posted video.

The ship offers Marines the agility and flexibility needed in austere environments where there are no ports, Smith added.

Under a Trump administration working plan dubbed "The Golden Fleet," the Navy could potentially grow from its current 287 ships to as many as 300 crewed vessels.

## Right to Repair Act omitted from defense policy bill

By MATTHEW ADAMS  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A defense policy bill expected to be voted on this week does not include provisions that would have ensured the military's ability to purchase the technical data, parts and information needed to repair its own equipment.

The National Defense Authorization Act for 2026, finalized on Sunday, does not include the House and Senate versions of the Right to Repair Act that would require defense contractors to provide technical data necessary for military personnel to repair equipment in the field.

Both versions of the bill include language that would save taxpayers billions of dollars

while enhancing military readiness, according to Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts. Warren and Sen. Tim Sheehy, R-Mont., introduced the bipartisan legislation in July.

"For decades, the Pentagon has relied on a broken acquisition system that is routinely defended by career bureaucrats and corporate interests," Warren and Sheehy said in a joint statement. "Military right-to-repair reforms are supported by the Trump White House, the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, entrepreneurs, small businesses and our brave service members. The only ones against this common-sense reform are those taking advantage

of a broken status quo at the expense of our warfighters and taxpayers."

The NDAA is an annual bill that outlines defense priorities and spending, which includes a 3.8% pay raise for troops and \$400 million in military assistance to Ukraine.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth last month unveiled changes to how the Pentagon goes about purchasing weapons, allowing the military to more rapidly acquire technology.

Hegseth spoke to military leaders and defense contractors in Washington at the National War College, where he detailed the transformation of the Defense Acquisition System in accordance with an executive or-

der that was signed by President Donald Trump in April.

The Pentagon in April directed the Army to review existing contracts and ensure future agreements guarantee repair rights.

"The military should be able to repair its own equipment," Charlie Schuyler, U.S. Public Interest Research Group legislative associate, said in a statement. "Despite support from Republicans, Democrats, the White House and key military leaders, troops will keep waiting for repairs they could perform themselves. Taxpayers will keep paying inflated costs. And in some cases, soldiers might not get the equipment they need when they need it most."

# Hegseth weighing release of boat strike video

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told congressional leaders Tuesday that he was still weighing whether to release the full video of an attack on an alleged drug boat that killed two survivors, even as he faced intensifying demands from Congress for disclosure.

Hegseth provided a classified briefing for congressional leaders alongside Secretary of State Marco Rubio and CIA Director John Ratcliffe at the Capitol. Inside the secure room, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer asked the defense secretary whether he would allow every member of Congress to view the video of the attack from September.

Schumer said Hegseth's response was: "We have to study it."

Lawmakers are demanding a full accounting from the Depart-

ment of Defense on the military campaign and the particular attack that killed two people who were clinging to the wreckage of an initial strike.

Legal experts say that action may have violated the laws governing the use of deadly military force. The situation has awakened the Republican-controlled Congress to its oversight role after months of frustration about the trickle of information from the Pentagon.

Schumer described the briefing as "very unsatisfying" and added that "Democrats and Republicans had a right to see it, wanted to see it and should see it."

Separately Tuesday, the U.S. Navy admiral who is retiring early from command of the campaign to destroy vessels allegedly carrying drugs near Venezuela spoke to key lawmakers overseeing the U.S. military. The classi-

fied video call between Adm. Alvin Holsey, who will be retiring from U.S. Southern Command in the coming days, and the GOP chair and ranking Democrat of the Senate Armed Services Committee represented another determined step by lawmakers to get answers about the operation.

Sen. Roger Wicker, the Republican chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, declined to discuss the specifics of the call but described Holsey as a "great public servant." He also said that the Pentagon is weighing whether releasing the video would disclose classified information.

In its annual defense authorization bill, Congress is demanding that the Pentagon turn over unedited video of the strikes, as well as the orders authorizing the attacks. The legislation threatens to withhold a quarter of Hegseth's travel budget if he refuses.

"There is a growing demand

that everyone get a right in the Senate to see it," said Rhode Island Sen. Jack Reed, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

He added that Holsey answered the senators' questions but also said that "there are still many questions." Reed later added that Holsey did not give a reason for his retirement other than saying it was a personal decision.

On Tuesday, the U.S. military flew a pair of fighter jets over the Gulf of Venezuela in what appears to be the closest American warplanes have come to the country's airspace since the start of the Trump administration's pressure campaign.

Lawmakers are trying to understand the purpose and parameters of President Donald Trump's campaign, which has struck 22 boats and killed at least 87 people since it started in September.

## USCG seizes 150,000 pounds of coke in Pacific since summer

**BY GARY WARNER**

*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. Coast Guard has seized more than 150,000 pounds of cocaine off the west coast of North America since early August, the service said Tuesday.

"Operation Pacific Viper" has been directed at drug running in the eastern Pacific Ocean, using Coast Guard sea and air assets from the Southwest District based in Alameda, Calif.

"This milestone is a testament to the vigilance and tenacity of our crews," said Adm. Kevin Lunday, the Coast Guard's acting commandant.

The Coast Guard said the operation had accelerated counter-drug operations from illicit suppliers in Central and South America. The service said 80%

of all U.S.-bound narcotics seizures occur at sea.

The service cited several of what it said were record-setting interdictions. On Dec. 2, Coast Guard Cutter Munro seized over 20,000 pounds of cocaine, disabling a smuggling vessel with gunfire before seizing its cargo.

"This was the Coast Guard's largest at-sea interdiction since March 2007," the service said in a statement.

The Coast Guard Cutter James executed four significant seizures over 10 days in November, netting 19,819 pounds of cocaine.

The Coast Guard is the United States' lead federal agency for maritime drug interdiction within the Department of Homeland Security.

## Airlifters on Guam prep for Operation Christmas Drop

**BY SETH ROBSON**

*Stars and Stripes*

ANDERSEN AIR FORCE BASE, Guam — Airmen from the United States and Canada prepared dozens of colorful supply bundles Wednesday at the home of the Air Force's 36<sup>th</sup> Wing as part of the Defense Department's longest running humanitarian-aid mission.

Service members and civilian volunteers decorated 270 bundles on Monday with images of Christmas trees, Santas, sleighs, elves and other holiday symbols before they were parachuted to Pacific islanders this week as part of Operation Christmas Drop.

The bundles typically contain essentials like food, water, medical supplies, fishing gear and clothing but some toys, too.

Now in its 74th year, the annual mission began during the 1952 Christmas season, when the crew of a B-29 Superfortress flying near Guam spotted islanders waving from below and dropped supplies as an act of goodwill. The mission drops provisions each year for 56,000 people across 59 islands, according to a Monday news release from the 374<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing of Yokota Air Base, Japan.

U.S. airlifter crews will fly Christmas Drop sorties until Friday alongside planes from Canada, Japan and South Korea, wing spokeswoman 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Macaiah Honable said by email Wednesday. Seven aircraft are delivering bundles to the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Honable said.

# Judge: DOJ can unseal Epstein case records

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Secret grand jury transcripts from Jeffrey Epstein's 2019 sex trafficking case can be made public, a judge ruled Wednesday, joining two other judges in granting the Justice Department's requests to unseal material from investigations into the late financier's sexual abuse.

U.S. District Judge Richard M. Berman reversed his earlier decision to keep the material under wraps, citing a new law that requires the government to open its files on Epstein and his longtime confidant Ghislaine Maxwell. The judge previously cautioned that the 70 or so pages of grand jury materials slated for release are hardly revelatory and "merely a hearsay snippet" of Epstein's conduct.

On Tuesday, another Manhattan federal judge ordered the re-

lease of records from Maxwell's 2021 sex trafficking case. Last week, a judge in Florida approved the unsealing of transcripts from an abandoned Epstein federal grand jury investigation in the 2000s.

The Justice Department asked the judges to lift secrecy orders after the Epstein Files Transparency Act, passed by Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump last month, created a narrow exception to rules that normally keep grand jury proceedings confidential.

The law requires that the Justice Department disclose Epstein-related records to the public by Dec. 19.

Questions about the government's Epstein files have dominated the first year of Trump's second term, with pressure on

the Republican intensifying after he reneged on a campaign promise to release the files. His administration released some material, most of it already public, disappointing critics and some allies.

Epstein, a millionaire money manager known for socializing with celebrities, politicians, billionaires and the academic elite, killed himself in jail a month after his 2019 arrest. Maxwell was convicted in 2021 by a federal jury of sex trafficking for helping recruit some of Epstein's underage victims and participating in some of the abuse. She is serving a 20-year prison sentence.

Maxwell's lawyer told a judge last week that unsealing records from her case could spoil her plans to file a habeas petition, a legal filing seeking to overturn her conviction. The Supreme

Court in October declined to hear Maxwell's appeal.

Berman was matter of fact in his ruling Wednesday, writing that the transparency law "unequivocally intends to make public Epstein grand jury materials and discovery materials" that had previously been covered by secrecy orders. The law "supersedes the otherwise secret grand jury materials," he wrote.

The judge implored the Justice Department to carefully follow the law's privacy provisions to ensure that victims' names and identifying information are redacted, or blacked out.

In court filings, the Justice Department informed Berman that the only witness to testify before the grand jury was an FBI agent who, the judge noted, "had no direct knowledge of the facts of the case."

## Pacific Northwest braces for new bout of heavy rain

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Pacific Northwest residents braced for another round of heavy rain Wednesday after a powerful storm clobbered the region the day before, swelling rivers, closing roads and prompting high water rescues.

By early Wednesday, some areas in the Cascade mountain range in Washington were reporting "impressive" rain rates near or exceeding a half-inch per hour, the National Weather Service in Seattle posted on X. Paradise on Mount Rainier picked up 3.25 inches of rain in 10 hours, it said.

On Tuesday, the first in what is expected to be a series of damaging storms this week caused power outages, flooding and school closures in parts of Oregon and Washington.

Fire officials northeast of Seattle said rescue crews used inflatable kayaks to pull people from stranded cars, and carried another

person about a mile to safety after they were trapped in the woods by rising water.

Forecasters warned that the worst was still to come, with some major rivers expected to crest later in the week. The Skagit River near Concrete, which is northeast of Seattle, was forecast to rise more than 15 feet above major flooding levels by Thursday, which would break a record, according to the National Water Prediction Service.

Harrison Rademacher, a meteorologist with the weather service in Seattle, described the atmospheric river soaking the region as "a jet stream of moisture" stretching across the Pacific Ocean "with the nozzle pushing right along the coast of Oregon and Washington."

The weather service forecast several days of heavy rainfall on the coast and more than a foot of new snow in the northern Rockies in northwestern Wyoming.

## Trump's inflation speech turns to other grievances

Associated Press

MOUNT POCONO, Pa. — On the road in Pennsylvania on Tuesday, President Donald Trump tried to emphasize his focus on combating inflation, yet the issue that has damaged his popularity couldn't quite command his full attention.

The president told the crowd gathered at a casino and resort in Mount Pocono that inflation was no longer a problem and that Democrats had used the term "affordability" as a "hoax" to hurt his reputation. But his remarks weaved wildly to include grievances he first raised behind closed doors in his first term in 2018 — and later denied saying — asking why the U.S. doesn't have more immigrants from Scandinavia.

"Why is it we only take people from s—hole countries, right?" Trump said onstage. "Why can't we have some people from Norway, Sweden, just a few?"

Trump said he objected to taking immigrants from "hell-holes like Afghanistan, Haiti, Somalia and many other countries." He added for emphasis that those places "are a disaster, right? Filthy, dirty, disgusting, ridden with crime."

Tuesday's gathering in a competitive House district was an official White House event, yet it seemed more like one of his signature campaign rallies.

Trump displayed a chart comparing price increases under his predecessor, Joe Biden, to prices under his own watch to argue his case. But the overall inflation rate has climbed since he announced broad tariffs in April and left many Americans worried about their grocery, utility and housing bills.

"I have no higher priority than making America affordable again," Trump said. "They caused the high prices and we're bringing them down."



# Ukraine to give revised peace plans to US

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine planned to hand its latest peace proposals to U.S. negotiators Wednesday, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, a day ahead of his urgent talks with leaders and officials from about 30 other countries supporting Kyiv's effort to end the war with Russia on acceptable terms.

As tension builds around a U.S. push for a settlement, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron spoke to President Donald Trump by phone Wednesday.

Negotiations are at "a critical moment," the European leaders said in official statements.

Washington's goal of a swift

compromise to stop the fighting that followed Russia's all-out invasion in February 2022 is reducing Kyiv's room for maneuvering.

Zelenskyy is walking a tightrope between defending Ukrainian interests and showing Trump he is willing to make some compromises, even as Moscow shows no public sign of budging its demands.

Ukraine's European allies are backing Zelenskyy's effort to ensure that any settlement is fair and deters future Russian attacks, as well as accommodating Europe's defense interests.

The French government said Ukraine's allies — dubbed the "Coalition of the Willing" — will discuss the negotiations Thursday by video. Zelenskyy said it

would include those countries' leaders.

"We need to bring together 30 colleagues very quickly. And it's not easy, but nevertheless we will do it," he said late Tuesday.

Merz said "we are currently witnessing considerable diplomatic momentum."

Zelenskyy said discussions with the U.S. were scheduled later Wednesday to focus on a document detailing plans for Ukraine's postwar reconstruction and development.

Also, Ukraine is finalizing work on a separate, 20-point framework for ending the war. Zelenskyy said Kyiv expects to submit that document in the near future.

After Trump called for a pres-

idential election in Ukraine, Zelenskyy said his country would be ready for such a vote within three months if partners can guarantee safe balloting during wartime and if its electoral law can be altered.

Zelenskyy told reporters late Tuesday he is "ready" for an election but would need help from the U.S. and possibly Europe to ensure its security. He suggested that Ukraine could be ready to hold balloting in 60 to 90 days if that provision is met.

"To hold elections, two issues must be addressed: primarily, security — how to conduct them, how to do it under strikes, under missile attacks; and a question regarding our military — how they would vote," Zelenskyy said.

## Louvre thieves escaped with 30 seconds to spare

Associated Press

PARIS — Thieves who stole more than \$100 million in crown jewels from the Louvre in October escaped with barely 30 seconds to spare, a French Senate inquiry said Wednesday, as lawmakers detailed a cascade of security failures that allowed the gang to slip away in broad daylight.

The parliamentary probe, ordered after the embarrassing Oct. 19 heist, found that only one of two cameras covering the break-in point at the museum was functioning.

The probe also discovered that security staff lacked enough screens to monitor footage in real time.

And when the alarm finally did sound, police were initially dispatched to the wrong location in the museum, investigators told senators.

"Give or take 30 seconds, guards or police could have intercepted them," Noël Corbin, head of the inquiry, told the Sen-

ate's culture committee during a hearing on the matter.

The report also cited outdated equipment, unaddressed vulnerabilities flagged in earlier audits and poor coordination between the Louvre and its supervisory authorities as all being contributing factors to the robbery that stunned the world with its audacity.

It said the balcony used by the thieves had been identified as a weak point several years prior to the robbery but never reinforced.

The findings increase pressure on Louvre director Laurence des Cars, who is due to be questioned by lawmakers next week.

All four suspected members of the motorbike-mounted crew have been arrested, but the missing jewels, which are valued to be worth a total of about \$102 million, have not managed to be recovered despite ongoing vast efforts from international authorities.

## Mangione's notes to self: 'Pluck eyebrows,' 'FBI slower overnight'

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Pluck eyebrows. Buy less conspicuous shoes. Take a bus or a train west toward Cincinnati and St. Louis. Move around late at night. Stay away from surveillance cameras.

A to-do list and travel plans found during Luigi Mangione's arrest and revealed in court this week shed new light on the steps he may have taken — or planned to take — to avoid capture after UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson's killing last year.

"Keep momentum, FBI slower overnight," said one note. "Change hat, shoes, pluck eyebrows," said another.

The notes, including a hand-drawn map and tactics for surviving on the lam, were shown on Monday at a pretrial hearing as Mangione's bid to prevent prosecutors from using evidence seized during his Dec. 9, 2024, arrest at a McDonald's in Altoona, Pa.

Excerpts of body-worn came-

ra footage of the arrest, previously unseen by the press or the public, were released on Tuesday.

Police said they discovered the notes in Mangione's backpack, along with a 9 mm handgun that prosecutors said matches the one used to kill Thompson five days earlier; a loaded gun magazine and silencer; and a notebook in similar handwriting which he purportedly described his intent to "wack" a health insurance executive.

Mangione's lawyers haven't disputed the authenticity of the notes or the provenance of the gun, pocket knife, fake ID, driver's license, passport, credit cards, AirPods, protein bar, travel toothpaste, flash drives and other items seized from him and his backpack.

But they argue that anything found in the bag should be barred because police didn't have a search warrant and lacked the grounds to justify a warrantless search.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Painter O'Keeffe's views of desert to be preserved

**NM** SANTA FE — A new conservation agreement will preserve land with breathtaking desert vistas that inspired the work of 20th century painter Georgia O'Keeffe and ensure visitors access to an adjacent educational retreat, several partners to the pact announced Tuesday.

Initial phases of the plan establish a conservation easement across about 10 square miles of land, owned by a charitable arm of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), on the outskirts of the village of Abiquiú.

That easement stretches across reservoir waterfront and native grasslands to the doorstep of a remote home owned by O'Keeffe's estate, a few miles from her larger home and studio in Abiquiú. Both homes are outside the conservation area and owned and managed separately by the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe.

Jonathan Hayden, executive director of the New Mexico Land Conservancy that helped broker the conservation plan and will oversee easements, said the voluntary plan guards against the potential encroachment of modern development that might subdivide and transform the property, though there are not any imminent proposals.

### Man marks his 15,000th spin on Disneyland ride

**CA** SANTA ANA — For a Disneyland enthusiast who marked his 15,000th spin Monday on an auto-racing attraction inspired by the animated film "Cars," it's not about winning.

It's about the ride.

Jon Alan Hale said he was eager to try out the Radiator Springs Racers ride at Disney California Adventure after undergoing gastric bypass and knee replacement surgeries in 2010 and 2011. He said he quickly found himself hooked on the ride, which debuted in 2012, and began tracking his races in a notebook, jotting down his car's color, lane and whether he wins or loses.

"I fell in love with the ride," said the television technician from Brea, Calif.

Hale said he started carrying a sign to mark every hundredth ride, and remembered how Disneyland workers clapped when he reached 1,000.

On Monday, Hale took the ride with friends who work at the theme park while wearing a "Cars" themed cap and holding a 15,000 sign. Hale said he's taken the ride on average 13 times per visit, thanks to the fast-moving line for single riders.

### Convicted ex-clerk's bid for freedom is rejected

**CO** DENVER — A federal magistrate judge on Monday rejected a bid by a former Colorado county clerk to be released from prison while she appeals her state conviction for orchestrating a data breach scheme driven by false claims about voting machine fraud in the 2020 presidential race.

Former Mesa County Clerk Tina Peters filed a federal lawsuit asking that she be released on bond while her appeal is considered. Attorneys for the state had argued the case should be thrown out partly because of a legal doctrine that prevents fed-

eral courts from getting involved in pending state criminal cases.

Federal magistrate judge Scott Varholak ruled Monday that Peters didn't make a case that he should get involved in overturning her state sentence.

Peters argued that the magistrate judge should free her because she said the state judge who sentenced her to nine years behind bars violated her First Amendment rights. Peters claimed he punished her for making allegations about election fraud, but prosecutors argued that the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed judges to consider people's speech during sentencings if they deem it relevant.

President Donald Trump and other supporters, including retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, national security adviser during Trump's first term, have called for Peters, 70, to be released.

### PepsiCo to cut prices as part of deal with investor

**NY** PURCHASE — PepsiCo plans to cut prices and eliminate some of its products under a deal with an activist investor announced Monday.

The Purchase, N.Y.-based company, which makes Cheetos, Tostitos and other Frito-Lay products as well as beverages, said it will cut nearly 20% of its product offerings by early next year. PepsiCo said it will use the savings to invest in marketing and improved value for consumers. It didn't disclose which products or how much it would cut prices.

PepsiCo said it also plans to accelerate the introduction of new offerings with simpler and

more functional ingredients, including Doritos Protein and Simply NKD Cheetos and Doritos, which contain no artificial flavors or colors.

PepsiCo is making the changes after prodding from Elliott Investment Management, which took a \$4 billion stake in the company in September. In a letter to PepsiCo's board, Elliott said the company is being hurt by a lack of strategic clarity, decelerating growth and eroding profitability in its North American food and beverage businesses.

### State's abandoned nuke plants could be revived

**SC** COLUMBIA — South Carolina's stalled nuclear power project could finally finish construction as a private company has offered to pay \$2.7 billion to the state-owned utility and a small share of the power if they can reach an agreement to get the two reactors up and running.

The half-built reactors ended up so far behind schedule that the project was abandoned in 2017. However, the potential deal is a long way from complete. There will be up to two years of negotiations between utility Santee Cooper and Brookfield Asset Management on the thousands and thousands of details.

The deal would also let Brookfield keep at least 75% of the power generated by the new plant that they could mostly sell to whom they want, such as energy-gobbling data centers.

Santee Cooper was a minority partner in the doomed plan to build two new nuclear reactors at the V.C. Summer site.

— From wire reports

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# Ball, No. 5 UConn edge out No. 18 Florida

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Solo Ball scored 19 points and No. 5 UConn earned its fourth victory over a ranked opponent already this season, beating No. 18 Florida 77-73 on Tuesday night in the Jimmy V Classic.

Alex Karaban added 13 points and Tarris Reed Jr. had 12 points and five rebounds in his return from a lingering ankle injury that caused him to miss the previous two games. Malachi Smith handed out nine assists as the Huskies (9-1) shot 50%, including 59.3% in the first half while building a seven-point halftime lead.

Ball went 6-for-14 from the field and drained a trio of 3-pointers in a matchup of power programs that have combined to win the past three NCAA titles.

Xaivian Lee led the defending champion Gators (5-4) with 19 points, but shot 5-for-14 and missed six of seven 3-point tries. Thomas Haugh added 18 and Alex Condon finished with 14 points and nine rebounds.

Florida shot 42.4% in a rematch of last season's second-round NCAA Tournament game that ended UConn's hopes for a third consecutive national championship.

The Huskies won their fifth straight game since a 71-67 home loss Nov. 19 to then-No. 4 Arizona, now the top-ranked team in the country. UConn also has wins over Top 25 opponents

BYU, Illinois and Kansas.

The Huskies won for the 11th time in their past 13 games at Madison Square Garden.

The Gators held a 55-54 lead after a difficult layup by Haugh with 8:02 left, but UConn took the lead for good on the next possession on a jumper by Braylon Mullins. Karaban followed with a 3 after blocking Lee's layup attempt.

Ball made a 3 and then a layup by Smith opened a 66-58 lead with 4:31 remaining.

Still, Florida had a chance to tie it after Boogie Fland's layup with 13 seconds to go and a turnover by the Huskies on the inbounds play. The Gators were called for a five-second violation, however, and Ball hit a free throw to seal it.

**No. 2 Michigan 89, Villanova 61:** Elliot Cadeau scored 15 of his 18 points in the first half to help the host Wolverines build a 30-point lead as Michigan coasted over the Wildcats.

The unbeaten Wolverines (9-0) are the only team since at least the 1995-96 season to win six straight games by at least 25 points with at least two of those against ranked opponents, according to Sportradar.

Michigan is off to its best start since opening 11-0 five years ago.

Villanova (7-2) had won seven straight — its longest winning streak in four years — under first-year coach Kevin Willard.

The Wildcats' Devin Askew had 18 points, Christian Jeffrey scored 12 and Acaden Lewis added 11.

**No. 10 BYU 67, Clemson 64:** Robert Wright III made a 3-pointer as time expired after AJ Dybantsa scored 22 of his season-high 28 points in the second half, and the Cougars stormed back from a 22-point deficit to beat the Tigers in the Jimmy V Classic.

BYU (8-1) lost a six-point lead in the final 70 seconds, but completed the comeback when Wright took an inbounds pass from Mihailo Boskovic and sank a long 3 from the right side.

Clemson scored 21 straight points over the last 6:45 of the first half to build a 43-22 cushion at halftime. But after trailing 44-22 with 18½ minutes remaining, the Cougars pulled off the largest second-half comeback in school history.

Dybantsa surpassed his previous high of 25 in BYU's two-point loss to UConn on Nov. 15 in Boston. The freshman sensation shot 9 for 17 and grabbed nine rebounds to go with six assists. He highlighted the biggest night of his college career so far with a one-handed dunk from the middle of the lane that put the Cougars up 62-56 with 1:10 left.

After his thunderous slam, Clemson rallied, and a layup by Dillon Hunter tied it at 64 with 5 seconds remaining.

**No. 13 Illinois 88, Ohio State 80:** Keaton Wagler scored 23 points and the visiting Fighting Illini opened their Big Ten schedule with a victory over the Buckeyes.

David Mirkovic had 22 points, including 11 in the first eight minutes, and eight rebounds. Andrej Stojakovic scored 17 for Illinois (8-2, 1-0 Big Ten). It was the Illini's 35th road win in league play since 2019-20, most in the conference.

Bruce Thornton led Ohio State (7-2, 1-1) with 34 points, six rebounds and six assists. The senior guard had 24 points in the first half when he was 6-for-7 on 3-pointers.

Illinois made its first 13 foul shots and finished 29 of 32, their second-most free throws in a game this season. Wagler, Mirkovic and Stojakovic combined to go 23 of 24 from the line.

**No. 24 Virginia 84, Maryland-Eastern Shore 60:** Sam Lewis scored 15 points, Thijs De Ridder added 13 and the host Cavaliers routed the Hawks for their fourth straight victory.

Chance Mallory had 10 points, six steals and five assists for Virginia (9-1).

The Cavaliers scored 80 points or more for the ninth time in their 10 games under first-year coach Ryan Odom.

For the second straight game, Odom stuck to a nine-man rotation until the final minutes.

## Magic top Heat, will face Knicks in NBA Cup semifinals

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Desmond Bane matched his season high with 37 points and the Orlando Magic advanced to the NBA Cup semifinals with a 117-108 victory over the Miami Heat on Tuesday night.

Jalen Suggs scored 20 points and Paolo Banchero added 18 points and seven rebounds for the Magic, who will play the Knicks on Saturday in the semifinal round at Las Vegas.

Norman Powell led the Heat with 21 points. Tyler Herro added 20 and Bam Adebayo and

Andrew Wiggins each had 19 for Miami, which has lost three times in Orlando this season.

Bane hit two 3-pointers and scored on a three-point play in the first 2:06 of the fourth quarter, stretching the Magic's six-point lead to 13. The Heat never got the margin under nine until the final minute.

Orlando played for the first time this season without Franz Wagner, who is expected to be out several weeks with a high ankle sprain.

**Knicks 117, Raptors 101:** Jalen Brunson scored 35 points, Josh Hart added 21 and vis-

iting New York advanced to the NBA Cup semifinals for the first time in three tries by beating struggling Toronto.

Karl-Anthony Towns had 14 points and 16 rebounds for the Knicks, who will face Orlando in the semifinal round at Las Vegas on Saturday.

Towns returned after sitting out Sunday's home win over the Magic because of tightness in his left calf.

Mikal Bridges scored 15 points for New York and OG Anunoby had 13 against his former team.



# Chesney starts at UCLA with promise to win

*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — Bob Chesney started his UCLA football coaching era with energy, inspiration and a promise to win.

And already he's sounding like a Bruin.

"We don't need to be the other school in this town, we need to be 'the' school in this town," Chesney said with emphasis at his introductory news conference Tuesday.

Chesney replaces DeShaun Foster, a UCLA alum who was fired in his second year after an 0-3 start this season and 5-10 record. The Bruins finished the season 3-9, including a 29-10 loss to crosstown rival Southern California.

One of the things UCLA liked about Chesney was his rebuilding prowess. He's won or led his team to a conference championship game within three years of being the coach. He's coached at Salve Regina, As-

sumption, Holy Cross and now James Madison, where he's taken his team to their best season in history, making the College Football Playoff. Chesney will stay to coach the No. 12 Ducks as they take on No. 5 Oregon.

A coach getting a job before the season ends always turns into a matter of whether he'll stay to finish out the season or depart for his new school. Bruins athletic director Martin Jarmond said he told Chesney early on that they supported him coaching JMU no matter how long the season lasted.

"It means everything to me. There's really zero chance I would be anywhere that wouldn't allow you to finish a mission you started," Chesney said. "That would break everything in my mind. It would break the trust of those players and our relationship with them. It's empathy. I wouldn't want my coach walking out on us in a

mission that we're still committed to. To be honest, I feel funny being here a little bit, with them watching back at home.

"Ultimately, I'm committed to that mission and now I have to be dually committed to this responsibility when we walk through that door as well. I don't think it would be an option for me anywhere if someone said, 'Walk away from your team, you have to be with us immediately.' I understand the work will get harder. I understand the hours will get longer, but that was important for me to do both."

The coach search committee was a who's who of UCLA alumni, including Dodgers manager Dave Roberts, executive Bob Myers, Casey Wasserman and more.

Myers said it was an honor to be part of the search.

"What stood out with Bob was that he won in a variety of plac-

es and shown the ability to lead and win in places where it was hard to win," said Myers, who was at the introductory news conference. "UCLA, although it has all these national championships, we have struggled in football recently. To get someone we thought could build a program was important. Someone we felt could be here for 20 years and someone who wanted to be here for 20 years."

The Bruins haven't had double-digit wins since Jim Mora took them to a 10-3 season in 2014.

It's more than winning for Chesney, who said UCLA has all the right ingredients from academic success to location to weather and more.

"We have found in Bob Chesney exactly the right leader to help bring greatness, pride and a winning tradition back to UCLA football," Bruins chancellor Julio Frenk said.

## NHL addressing ice safety issues ahead of Milan Olympics

*Associated Press*

The NHL said Tuesday that it remains cautiously optimistic about sending the world's best hockey players to the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics in February amid issues with a smaller-than-expected rink size and questions regarding ice quality due to construction delays.

Deputy commissioner Bill Daly reiterated that belief in an email to The Associated Press a day after briefing the NHL's board of governors on the Olympics during their meeting in Colorado Springs, Colo.

"We're making progress and moving toward the goal, but there doesn't seem to be anything insurmountable in getting to completion," Daly told reporters Monday.

Daly said there's nothing the NHL or organizers can do about the dimensions of the not-yet-completed 16,000-seat Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena and secondary Rho facility.

"It's a structural issue. It would be impossible to correct," he said.

What can still be addressed is ensuring the ice quality is safe for players, with Daly saying Olympic officials are taking up the NHL's offer to use their experts to assist

once the ice surface is scheduled to be laid in the coming weeks.

"We're basically moving everybody there to try to help get this done in a way that's acceptable for NHL athletes," he said. "I'm cautiously optimistic that's all going to be fruitful."

At this point, with the Games less than two months away, Daly said the only issue that would prevent the NHL from returning to Olympic participation for the first time since the 2014 Sochi Games would be safety concerns due to the ice surface.

"Obviously, if the players feel like the ice is unsafe, we're not going to play. It's as simple as that," Daly said. "So whatever flows from that, flows from that. I'm not really all that concerned about it."

Daly said the completion date of the main rink is set for Feb. 2, three days before the women's tournament opens and nine days before the men begin play.

The NHL was caught off guard when it became apparent the two rinks' dimensions will be slightly wider and 3 feet shorter than what the league and International Ice Hockey Federation agreed upon.

The ice is already in at Rho, which is play-

ing host to the Group B Under-20 world championship tournament this week. Japan captain Daigo Hotta referred to the ice as feeling "a little soft" during a pre-game skate, but firmed up by game time.

The 19-year-old Hotta, who has played in the United States since his family relocated when he was 5, almost immediately noticed the difference in rink dimensions.

"I play back in the States. The rinks are pretty small, but I think this one is one of the smallest rinks I've ever played in," he said Tuesday. "The neutral zone's smaller. The space between the dots and the boards. I think everything's a little smaller than normal."

The head of games operations for Milan Cortina dismissed questions about the rink size by noting the ice surfaces are consistent with IIHF rules, and have the same dimensions as the ones used in Beijing in 2022, and the one in Stockholm on which Pittsburgh and Nashville played twice last month as part of the Global Series.

"It is clear that the dimensions of the rink are different, but if you come to play in Europe, all the rinks have this type of size," Andrea Francisi said Tuesday. "So somehow you have to adapt to this kind of dimension."

# Ducks' Carlsson hits winning goal in SO

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Beckett Sennecke scored a short-handed goal with 1 second remaining to force overtime, Leo Carlsson scored in the shootout and the Anaheim Ducks beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 4-3 on Tuesday night for their fifth win in seven games.

The 19-year-old Sennecke eluded three defenders and his shot deflected off the glove of Pittsburgh's Erik Karlsson and into the net. A replay review confirmed the shot beat the buzzer.

Ville Husso made 45 saves, including seven in overtime, and stopped all three shots in the shootout.

Jackson LaCombe and Troy Terry also scored for the Ducks. Noel Acciari, Tommy Novak and Anthony Mantha scored for the Penguins, and Arturs Silovs stopped 25 shots as Pittsburgh suffered its second consecutive shootout loss.

Mantha put the Penguins ahead 3-2 on the power play with 3:55 remaining. Sidney Crosby won a faceoff and assisted on Mantha's goal for his 1,717th career point, moving him within five of Mario Lemieux's franchise record.

Novak poked in a rebound of his own shot with 19 seconds left in the second period to tie it at 2-all, extending his goal streak to four games.

LaCombe scored from a nearly impossible angle in the second period to make it 1-all. He was nearly parallel with the goal line when he flicked the puck between Silovs' head and the near post.

Terry put the Ducks ahead 2-1 later in the second when he secured a bouncing puck and slammed it past Silovs.

Sennecke assisted on LaCombe's goal. The rookie has 26 points in 30 games, becoming the fastest teenager in Ducks history to reach 25 points. Mason McTavish took 40 games to reach the mark in 2022-23.

**Flyers 4, Sharks 1:** Travis Ko-

necny got his 500th NHL point and Dan Vladar only had to make 17 saves as host Philadelphia beat San Jose.

Konecny helped tie the game at 1-all late in the first period when he backhanded a lofty puck into the neutral zone. Christian Dvorak found it and promptly deked to his back hand for an easy score with 1:21 to play in the period. The assist was Konecny's 500th career point. He added an empty-net goal with 1:43 left to play.

The Sharks scored first when Collin Graf drilled home a cross-slot pass from John Klingberg 11:33 into the game.

**Lightning 6, Canadiens 1:** Tampa Bay scored three times in the first period, Darren Raddysh scored a pair of third-period goals, and the Lightning coasted to a road win over Montreal.

Brayden Point, Pontus Holmberg and Nikita Kucherov had goals in the first period to help the Lightning snap a four-game losing streak. Charle-Edouard D'Astous added a second-period goal for Tampa Bay.

Oliver Kapanen scored a power-play goal in the final minute of the second period for Montreal. Jakub Dobes allowed three goals on 14 shots before being replaced by Sam Montembeault to start the second period. Montembeault, making his first appearance since Dec. 2, surrendered three goals on 12 shots.

**Hurricanes 4, Blue Jackets 1:** Eric Robinson ended a 10-game stretch without a goal by breaking a third-period tie and host Carolina beat Columbus.

Seth Jarvis, Jordan Staal and Jordan Martinook had Carolina's other goals and Andrei Svechnikov supplied two assists. Brandon Bussi made 23 saves to improve his record to 9-1-0 for the Hurricanes, who wrapped up a 4-3-0 homestand. Bussi is the only Carolina goalie to win a game since Nov. 17.

**Devils 4, Senators 3:** Cody Glass scored the tiebreaking

goal on a wrist shot with 7:36 remaining, and visiting New Jersey beat Ottawa to snap a five-game skid.

Jakob Markstrom stopped 35 shots, making several saves in the final minutes to secure the victory.

Arseny Gritsyuk had a goal and two assists for the Devils, who also got goals from Simon Nemec and Paul Cotter.

Ottawa struck 96 seconds in when Drake Batherson scooped up a rebound and lifted it over Markstrom. New Jersey responded a few minutes later when Nemec stepped into a shot from the high slot and beat Linus Ullmark.

New Jersey took the lead four minutes into the second. A giveaway by Jordan Spence allowed Cotter to break in alone and tuck a backhand shot past Ullmark.

**Islanders 5, Golden Knights 4 (SO):** Emil Heineman scored in the fourth round of the shootout after host New York allowed a tying goal in the closing seconds of regulation, and the Islanders beat Vegas.

Ilya Sorokin made 33 saves in regulation and overtime before stopping all four Vegas attempts in the shootout.

Bo Horvat scored twice, while Marc Gattcomb and Simon Holmstrom also scored for the Islanders, who moved to 5-0 against Pacific Division opponents.

Ivan Barbashev, Mitch Marner and Noah Hanifin added goals for the Golden Knights as their four-game win streak was halted.

**Bruins 5, Blues 2:** Mark Kastelic and Fraser Minten scored two goals each and visiting Boston rallied to beat St. Louis.

Pavel Zacha scored an empty-net goal, while David Pastrnak had two assists in his first game since Nov. 16 after missing five games with an undisclosed injury. Sean Kuraly also had two assists for the Bruins, who won their third straight game and their second against the Blues in

the last five days.

Robert Thomas scored twice for the Blues and Joel Hofer made 26 saves.

**Stars 4, Jets 3:** Jason Robertson scored his team-leading 19th goal and Mikko Rantanen had three assists as Dallas extended its point streak to 11 games with a road victory over Winnipeg.

The Stars are 9-0-2 in their last 11. They've also earned at least one point in 13 straight road games (9-0-4), extending their franchise record.

Eric Comrie made 15 saves for Winnipeg, which is 2-7-1 in its last 10 games.

**Sabres 4, Oilers 3 (OT):** Alex Tuch scored 33 seconds into overtime and Buffalo snapped a three-game losing streak with a road victory over Edmonton.

Josh Doan had a pair of goals and Tage Thompson had a goal and two assists for the Sabres, who won just their third road game of the season. Rasmus Dahlin had three assists.

Connor McDavid had two goals for the Oilers, including one with just two seconds remaining in regulation to send the game into overtime. Vasily Podkolzin also scored for the Oilers and Stuart Skinner made 24 stops.

**Predators 4, Avalanche 3 (SO):** Ryan O'Reilly scored the only goal in a shootout to give Nashville a home victory over Colorado.

Jonathan Marchessault, Reid Schaefer and Brady Skjei scored in regulation for the Predators (11-14-4), who have won three of four. Juuse Saros made 39 saves.

Brock Nelson, Artturi Lehkonen and Cale Makar scored for the NHL-leading Avalanche (21-2-7), who dropped to 0-4 in shootouts this season. Scott Wedgewood stopped 26 shots in regulation and overtime.

With the Avalanche trailing late and Scott Wedgewood pulled for an extra attacker, Makar scored a power-play goal with eight seconds left to send the game to overtime.