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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Senate rejects witnesses, sets final vote

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate narrowly rejected Democratic demands to summon witnesses for President Donald Trump's impeachment trial late Friday, all but ensuring Trump's acquittal in just the third trial to threaten a president's removal in U.S. history. But senators pushed off final voting on his fate to next Wednesday.

The delay in timing showed the weight of a historic vote bearing down on senators, despite prodding by the president eager to have it all behind him in an election year and ahead of his State of the Union speech Tuesday night.

Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell spoke by phone to lock in the schedule during a tense night at the Capitol as rushed negotiations proceeded on and off the Senate floor. The trial came to a

standstill for about an hour. A person unauthorized to discuss the call was granted anonymity to describe it.

The president wanted to arrive for his speech at the Capitol with acquittal secured, but that will not happen. Instead, the trial will resume Monday for final arguments, with time Monday and Tuesday for senators to speak. The final voting is planned for 4 p.m. Wednesday, the day after Trump's speech.

Trump's acquittal is all but certain in the Senate, where his GOP allies hold the majority and there's nowhere near the two-thirds needed for conviction and removal.

Nor will he face potentially damaging, open-Senate testimony from witnesses.

Despite the Democrats' singular focus on hearing new testimony, the Republican majority brushed past those demands and will make this

the first impeachment trial without witnesses. Even new revelations Friday from former national security adviser John Bolton did not sway GOP senators, who said they'd heard enough.

That means the eventual outcome for Trump will be an acquittal "in name only," said Rep. Val Demings, D-Fla., a House prosecutor, during final debate.

Trump was impeached by the House last month on charges that he abused power and obstructed Congress as he tried to pressure Ukraine to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden, using military aid as leverage as the ally fought Russia. He is charged with then blocking the congressional probe of his actions.

Senators rejected the Democrats' effort to allow new witnesses, 51-49, a near party-line vote. Republicans Susan Col-

ins of Maine and Mitt Romney of Utah voted with the Democrats, but that was not enough.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer called that decision "a tragedy on a very large scale." Protesters' chants reverberated against the walls of the Capitol.

But Republicans said Trump's acquittal was justified and inevitable.

"The sooner the better for the country," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, a Trump confidant. "Let's turn the page."

The next steps come in the heart of presidential campaign season before a divided nation. Democratic caucus voting begins Monday in Iowa, and Trump gives his State of the Union address the next night. Four Democratic candidates have been chafing in the Senate chamber rather than campaigning.

US pursues negotiations as it bombs Taliban

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — New U.S. Air Force statistics show the U.S. dropped more bombs on Afghanistan last year than any year since 2013, even as Washington's peace envoy sought to boost regional support for a reduction in violence ahead of a final deal to end America's longest war.

In a statement Saturday, the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad said Zalmay Khalilzad was in Pakistan the previous day to rally support for getting an agreement with the Taliban to reduce their attacks, as a first step toward a peace agreement to end 18 years of war in neighboring Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry, following a series of meetings with Khalilzad on Friday, said it supported a quick peace deal with the Taliban and repeated Washington's call for a reduction in violence.

But the violence on the side of Afghan government forces and its U.S. allies has also raised concerns. Stepped up bombings by the United States and operations by CIA-trained Afghan special forces — several of which have resulted in civilian casualties — have been sharply criticized by human rights groups, some Afghan officials and even resulted in the sacking of Afghanistan's intelligence chief.

In 2019, the U.S. Air Force dropped 7,423 bombs on Afghanistan, up slightly from 2018 when it dropped 7,362 bombs on the war-shattered country, according to statistics from the U.S. Central Command Combined Air Operations Center.

Earlier, the Taliban said they offered Khalilzad a 10-day cease-fire window in which to sign a peace agreement that would be followed by intra-Afghan negotiations.

Khalilzad was appointed by the White House in 2018 to find a negotiated end to Afghanistan's war that would allow the United States to bring home its estimated 13,000 soldiers and end its longest military engagement.

He has held multiple rounds of talks with the Taliban in the Mideastern state of Qatar where the militant group maintains a political office.

Talks in recent weeks have focused on finding a way to reduce hostilities and bring both sides in the conflict to the negotiating table. Until now the Taliban have refused to talk to Afghan President Ghani's government.

Ghani has also been unable to agree on a negotiating team with Abdullah Abdullah who is currently his partner in Afghanistan's so-called Unity Government. Abdallah accuses the president of foiling efforts at peace by imposing new conditions on talks.

US declares health emergency for virus

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States on Friday declared a public health emergency and took drastic steps to significantly restrict entry into the country because of a new virus that hit China and has spread to other nations.

President Donald Trump has signed an order that will temporarily bar foreign nationals, other than immediate family of U.S. citizens and permanent residents, who have traveled in China within the last 14 days. The new restrictions, which take effect at 5 p.m. EST on Sunday, were announced by Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, who is coordinating the U.S. response.

“It is likely that we will continue to see more cases in the United States in the coming days and weeks, including some limited person-to-person transmissions,” Azar said. “The American public can be assured the full weight of the U.S. government is working to safeguard the health and safety of the American people.”

Americans returning from China will be allowed into the country, but will face screening at select ports of entry and be required to undertake 14 days of self-screening to ensure they don’t pose a health risk. Those returning from Hubei province, the center of the outbreak, will be subject to up to 14 days of mandatory quarantine.

Beginning Sunday, the U.S.

will also begin funneling all flights to the U.S. from China to seven major airports where passengers can be screened for illness.

The virus has infected more than 10,000 people globally in just two months, a troublesome sign that prompted the World Health Organization to declare the outbreak a global emergency. A public health emergency in the U.S. allows the government to tap additional resources to send to states, such as emergency funding and if necessary drugs or equipment from the national stockpile, and to suspend certain legal requirements.

Dr. Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said that

while the risk in the U.S. is low, “I want to emphasize that this is a significant global situation, and it continues to evolve.”

There are seven cases of this virus in the U.S. and all were travelers except for a Chicago man who caught it from his wife, who had been in China.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, infectious diseases chief at the National Institutes of Health, said one reason the U.S. stepped up its quarantine measures was an alarming report from Germany that a traveler from China had spread the virus despite showing no symptoms. Fauci contrasted it with the response to recent outbreaks of Ebola, which can’t be spread unless someone is very ill.

‘Domestic outbreak control’ needed if disease spreads

Associated Press

BEIJING — China’s death toll from a new virus rose to 259 on Saturday, and a World Health Organization official said other governments need to prepare for “domestic outbreak control” if the disease spreads in their countries.

Beijing criticized Washington’s order barring entry to most foreigners who visited China in the past two weeks.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced similar measures on Saturday, following Japan and Singapore.

Meanwhile, South Korea and India flew hundreds of their citizens out of Wuhan, the city at the center of an area where some 50 million people are prevented from leaving in a sweeping anti-virus effort. The evacuees went into a two-week quarantine. Indonesia also sent a plane.

The number of confirmed

cases in China rose to 11,791, surpassing the number in the 2002-03 outbreak of SARS, or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome. The virus’s rapid spread in two months prompted the World Health Organization on Thursday to declare it a global emergency.

That declaration “flipped the switch” from a cautious attitude earlier to recommending governments prepare for the possibility the virus might spread, said the WHO representative in Beijing, Gauden Galea. Most cases reported so far have been people who visited China or their family members.

The agency acted out of concern for poorer countries that might not be equipped to respond, said Galea. Such a declaration calls for a coordinated international response and can bring more money and resources.

WHO said it was especially concerned that some cases

abroad involved human-to-human transmission.

“Countries need to get ready for possible importation in order to identify cases as early as possible and in order to be ready for a domestic outbreak control, if that happens,” Galea told The Associated Press.

Meanwhile, the ruling Communist Party postponed the end of the Lunar New Year holiday in Hubei province, where Wuhan is located, for an unspecified “appropriate extent” and appealed to the public there to stay home.

Another locked-down city in Hubei, Huanggang, on Saturday banned almost all of its residents from leaving their homes in the most stringent controls imposed yet. The government said only one person from each household would be allowed out to shop for food once every two days.

DOD: Military at low risk of getting virus

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The risk to most Defense Department personnel worldwide of contracting the deadly coronavirus is low, the Pentagon said in guidance issued Friday about the fast-spreading illness, but they should take precautions to avoid getting sick by frequent handwashing and avoiding potentially sick people.

The guidance instructs troops and other DOD personnel to avoid all unofficial, non-essential travel to China for the foreseeable future, according to a memorandum dated Thursday.

Because of the “dynamic nature of this outbreak” personnel should frequently check the latest information and precautions issued by the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is monitoring the outbreak, the memo stated.

Miramar fighter squadron chief discharged for 'poor judgment'

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — The commanding officer of a San Diego-based Marine Corps fighter squadron was removed from command due to concerns of poor judgment, the Marines said in a statement Thursday.

Lt. Col. Ralph Featherstone took command of Marine All Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 225 in April 2019. He was fired Jan. 24.

According to the 3rd Marine Air Wing's statement, Featherstone was "relieved for cause following concerns of poor judgment."

"The relief came as a surprise from an otherwise exceptionally performing commander with a long and distinguished career," the statement says. "It is a necessity to enforce standards and is vital that 3rd MAW provides strong and effective leadership to promote operational excellence, trust, and combat readiness."

Reached by phone Thursday, Air Wing Spokesman 1st Lt. Fredrick Walker told the Union-Tribune Featherstone is an "honorable Marine who upholds the values of the Marine Corps," but declined to go into detail about what the causal

factors were in the firing.

The squadron flies F/A-18s but is transitioning to the new F-35C Lightning II aircraft. An earlier 3rd Marine Air Wing statement said Featherstone's squadron was set to celebrate its final F/A-18 flight on Jan. 23.

According to the Marine Corps Times, at that event, an F/A-18D, with Featherstone in its rear seat, flew lower and faster than approved.

An interim officer-in-charge was assigned to finalize the squadron's transition, the Marine Corps' Thursday statement says.

Air Force colonel gets 5 years for child porn

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — A decorated colonel in the U.S. Air Force was sentenced Friday to five years in prison for receiving child pornography, a mandatory minimum.

Mark Visconi, 48, has two Bronze Star Medals from combat in Iraq and several more medals for air missions in the Middle East, Europe and South America. He studied Arabic and trained Iraqi pilots. He was set to take command at Joint Base Andrews in suburban Maryland when the investigation into his online activity began in 2015.

Defense attorney Sean Marvin said in a court filing that Visconi was abused at a young age and "has struggled to balance his service to his country with addictive behaviors." Along with downloading child sex abuse videos online, Visconi admitted taking clandestine photographs of girls in public.

In court, Visconi, of suburban Fairfax, Va., apologized for not seeking help for his problems earlier, saying he did not want to jeopardize his career. Judge T. S. Ellis handed down the sentence in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, in suburban Alexandria, Va.

Iraqi factions select new PM-designate

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Former communications minister Mohammed Allawi was named prime minister-designate by rival Iraqi factions Saturday after weeks of political deadlock, three officials said.

The choice comes as the country weathers troubled times including ongoing anti-government protests and the constant threat of being ensnared by festering U.S.-Iran tensions.

The selection of Allawi, 66, to replace outgoing Prime Minis-

ter Adel Abdul-Mahdi was the product of many back-room talks over months between rival parties.

On Wednesday, President Barham Saleh gave parliamentary blocs until Feb. 1 to select a premier candidate or said he would exercise his constitutional powers and choose one himself.

In a pre-recorded statement posted online, Allawi called on protesters to continue with their uprising against corruption and said he would quit if the blocs insist on imposing names of ministers.

Allawi was born in Baghdad and served as communications minister first in 2006 and again between 2010-2012. He resigned from his post after a dispute with former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Parliament is expected to put his candidacy to a vote in the next session, after which point he has 30 days to formulate a government program and select a cabinet of ministers.

If elected by parliament, Allawi will have to contend with navigating Iraq through brewing regional tensions between Tehran and Washington.

Navy to test drinking water near base for contamination

Associated Press

BREMERTON, Wash. — The Navy will test the drinking water of residents whose homes border Naval Base-Kitsap to determine whether there are dangerous levels of contamination from firefighting foam once used at Bangor.

The Kitsap Sun reports that if any homes in areas border-

ing the base are found to have what are commonly called PFAS in dangerous concentrations, they will receive bottled water indefinitely.

The Navy will pay for testing for homes on their own wells and is informing more than 1,000 addresses via letters sent Thursday. Water districts that serve the area, including Sil-

verdale and the Kitsap Public Utilities District, have already begun testing after being notified by the Navy last week.

Capt. Richard Rhinehart, Naval Base Kitsap's commanding officer, told the newspaper the Navy is taking a "proactive approach to test the water from these unregulated compounds."

"We are working closely with our local community to identify if there is contaminated well water and, if found, to take appropriate action to protect the resident's health," Rhinehart said. "We deeply care about our community and are working with them to address this important and emerging health issue."

6 nations added to travel ban

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration announced Friday that it was restricting immigrants from six additional countries that officials said failed to meet minimum security standards, as part of an election-year push to further clamp down immigration.

Officials said immigrants from Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Eritrea, Nigeria, Sudan and Tanzania will face new restrictions in obtaining certain visas to come to the United States. But it is not a total travel ban, unlike President Donald Trump's earlier effort that generated outrage around the world for targeting Muslims.

Trump signed a proclamation on the restrictions Friday; they go into effect Feb. 21.

The announcement came as Trump tries to promote his crackdown on immigration, highlighting a signature issue that motivated supporters in 2016 and hoping it has

the same effect this November. The administration recently announced birth tourism restrictions, is touting the sharp decline in crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border and citing progress on building the wall.

"It is fundamental to national security, and the height of common sense, that if a foreign nation wishes to receive the benefits of immigration and travel to the United States, it must satisfy basic security conditions outlined by America's law enforcement and intelligence professionals," the White House said in a statement.

Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Eritrea and Nigeria would have all immigrant visas suspended; those are applicants seeking to live in the U.S. permanently. They include visas for people sponsored by family members or employers as well as the diversity visa program that made up to 55,000 visas available in the most recent lottery. In December, for example, 40,666 immigrant visas were granted worldwide.

Sudan and Tanzania will have diversity visas suspended. The State Department uses a computer drawing to select people from around the world for up to 55,000 diversity visas. Nigeria is already excluded from the lottery along with other countries that had more than 50,000 natives immigrate to the U.S. in the previous five years.

Nonimmigrant visas were not affected — awarded to those traveling to the U.S. for a temporary stay. They include visas for tourists, those doing business or people seeking medical treatment.

The new restrictions were met with criticism from immigrant advocates who slammed them as a new Muslim ban.

Sudan and Kyrgyzstan are majority-Muslim countries. Nigeria, the seventh-most populous nation in the world with more than 200 million people, is about evenly split between Christians and Muslims but has the world's fifth-largest population of Muslims, according to the Pew Research Center.

Trump to promote US 'comeback' at the SOTU

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump will use next week's State of the Union to promote what he calls the "Great American comeback," according to a senior administration official.

The speech comes at a moment when Trump is hoping to put his Senate impeachment trial behind him. White House officials say Trump wants to use the nationally televised address to highlight his administration's efforts to bolster the economy, tighten immigration rules and lower prescription drug costs just as his reelection effort accelerates.

"I think it's safe to say the speech will celebrate American economic and military strength and present an optimistic vision of America's future," said the senior administration official, who briefed reporters on the broad outlines of the speech that Trump is scheduled to deliver before a joint session of Congress Tuesday.

But for the second straight year, Trump will deliver his speech with a cloud over his presidency as his Senate impeachment edges to a rancorous close. Last year, Trump was forced to postpone his speech because of the longest government shutdown in the nation's history.

White House officials stressed Friday that the president was determined to offer an "optimistic" message with his address and believe that he could strike a chord with Americans by highlighting the strength of the economy under his watch.

Trump has invited U.S. Army veteran Tony Rankins, who has battled post-traumatic stress disorder and battled drug addiction, and Raul Ortiz, a deputy chief of the U.S. Border Patrol, to be two of his guests at the speech, the official added.

Candidates set for frenzied Iowa finish

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — Democratic presidential candidates kicked off a final, frenetic week-end of campaigning ahead of the Iowa caucuses, which will begin the battle to take on President Donald Trump in November.

Former Vice President Joe Biden and Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Ind., returned to the campaign trail a day after knocking each other and progressive rival Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders.

Sanders, along with Sens. Elizabeth Warren, Amy Klobuchar and Michael Bennet, who were stuck in Washington for Trump's impeachment trial, can finally get back to wooing voters after the Senate pushed final voting on the president's fate until Wednesday.

Warren, a Massachusetts senator, missed her scheduled events but flew to Iowa late Friday night, after impeachment wrapped up for the week, and headed straight to a packed Des Moines brewery to briefly address a cheering crowd before lining up to take "selfies." That came hours after her husband, Bruce Mann, spoke to about 700 supporters in her stead and invited anyone interested to cross the street and have a late-night beer with her.

Warren also began airing television and online ads arguing she's the most electable candidate in a crowded primary field — capable of uniting the party and defeating Trump while silencing doubts that sexism could prevent a woman from winning the White House.

Sanders' campaign, meanwhile, hosted a concert featuring music from the band Bon Iver as part of his effort to energize young voters, and he called into the event from Washington. He has predicted that, if turnout is high during Monday's caucus, he will win.

Speaking on Capitol Hill before the impeachment trial wrapped up for the week, Klobuchar said her campaign would move forward even if she couldn't be in Iowa on the day of the caucuses.

"I just say bring it on," Klobuchar, a Minnesota senator, said. "Because I just have faith in the people of the country to actually want someone with the experience of standing up."

All face a competition that is exceedingly fluid. Sanders, Biden, Buttigieg and Warren are bunched at the top of most Iowa polls, and Klobuchar has shown signs of strength in recent weeks. Everyone is looking for a strong finish here that could lift them heading into later contests that will help decide the Democratic nomination.

It's official: Britain exits European Union

Associated Press

LONDON — So long, farewell, auf wiedersehen, adieu.

With little fanfare, Britain left the European Union on Friday after 47 years of membership, taking a leap into the unknown in a historic blow to the bloc.

The U.K.'s departure became official at 11 p.m. local time, midnight in Brussels, where the EU is headquartered. Thousands of enthusiastic Brexit supporters gathered outside Britain's Parliament to welcome the moment they'd longed for since Britain's 52%-48% vote in June 2016 to walk

away from the club it had joined in 1973. The flag-waving crowd erupted in cheers as Big Ben bonged 11 times — on a recording. Parliament's real bell has been silenced for repairs.

In a message from nearby 10 Downing St., Prime Minister Boris Johnson called Britain's departure "a moment of real national renewal and change."

But many Britons mourned the loss of their EU identity, and some marked the passing with tearful vigils. There was also sadness in Brussels as British flags were quietly removed from the bloc's many buildings.

Whether Brexit makes Britain a proud nation that has reclaimed its sovereignty, or a diminished presence in Europe and the world, will be debated for years to come.

While Britain's exit is a historic moment, it only marks the end of the first stage of the Brexit saga. When Britons wake up on Saturday, they will notice very little change. The U.K. and the EU have given themselves an 11-month "transition period" — in which the U.K. will continue to follow the bloc's rules — to strike new agreements on trade, security and a host of other areas.

The now 27-member EU will have to bounce back from one of its biggest setbacks in its 62-year history to confront an ever more complicated world as its former member becomes a competitor, just across the English Channel.

In the many EU buildings of Brussels on Friday, British flags were quietly lowered, folded and taken away. This is the first time a country has left the EU, and many in the bloc rued the day. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen lamented that "as the sun rises tomorrow, a new chapter for our union of 27 will start."

IG: Many Afghans may go hungry this year

BY J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Food bought by the U.S. and other United Nations donors was distributed to thousands of people on the outskirts of Kabul, ahead of a Friday report by a U.S. watchdog agency that a third of Afghanistan's population might go hungry this year.

Hundreds of people lined up Thursday morning — men on one side, women on the other — and waited for their names to be called so they could receive food for their families.

One girl in line, Lena, 7, clung to her mother, Nadia, 30.

As Lena waited, her father, a day laborer, was at the market trying to find work. Most days he comes home empty-handed, Nadia said, and the family of eight has been hungry all winter.

They are among more than 11 million people who will struggle to afford food this

year, the report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction said.

The U.S. has allotted \$87 million to the U.N. World Food Program for upcoming emergency food distribution and fighting child malnutrition.

This funding buys items like wheat, cooking oil and split peas, which was distributed to about 14,000 people in the Afghan capital area Thursday, said Zlatan Milisic, country director for WFP in Afghanistan.

The goal is to help 6.7 million people throughout 2020, a joint report by WFP and other humanitarian groups said.

"Conflict and last year's drought continue to affect many rural communities," Milisic said, "and often poor families in the cities struggle to (get) by as day laborers, or by sending their children to beg or collect trash in the streets."

Unemployment and high food prices also contribute to hunger in the country, the SIGAR

report said.

The U.S. has provided \$2.3 billion in agricultural aid since 2002 to help Afghan farmers grow more food and help the country become less dependent on foreign funding, SIGAR said.

Despite these efforts, hunger has increased in recent years. For the first time in a decade, the majority of Afghans said they were struggling to afford food in 2018, a Gallup survey said in August.

The U.S. "clearly failed to deliver on its objectives," wrote Adam Pain, professor from the Swedish University of Agricultural Science, Uppsala, in a report last year.

U.S. efforts need to "move beyond a focus on production" for farmers and address how poverty means few in Afghanistan can afford the food grown there, the report said.

Zubair Babakarkhail contributed to this report.

Peanut allergy treatment OK'd

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The first treatment for peanut allergies is about to hit the market, a big step toward better care for all kinds of food allergies — but still a long way from a cure.

Friday's approval by the Food and Drug Administration promises to bring some relief to families who've lived in fear of an accidental bite of peanuts at birthday parties and play dates, school cafeterias and restaurants. Named Palforzia, it was developed by Aimmune Therapeutics.

The treatment is a special peanut powder swallowed daily in tiny amounts that are gradually increased over months. It trains children's bodies to better tolerate peanut so that an accidental bite is less likely to cause a serious reaction, or even kill in severe cases.

Palforzia users still must avoid peanuts just like they always have.

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49ers run old-school offense with twist

Associated Press

MIAMI — The San Francisco 49ers play old-school football with a twist.

Coach Kyle Shanahan's offense is run-oriented, but the Niners don't just line up and play power football. Shanahan designed a creative scheme featuring a variety of motions, jet sweeps and play action that takes pressure off quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo.

"The more you see how people try to defend you and how people stop you, the more things you try to put in to counteract that," Shanahan said.

San Francisco had the league's No. 2 rushing offense in the regular season and it has been even better in the playoffs. Garoppolo threw only eight passes in the NFC championship game against Green Bay because he didn't have to do much. Raheem Mostert ran for 220 yards and the Niners totaled 285 on the ground. They had 186 yards rushing in

a playoff win over Minnesota.

"It's more exotic smash-mouth because they don't go right at you the entire time but they still want to pound you into submission," Hall of Fame running back Jerome Bettis said.

Shanahan borrowed some of his dad's ideas, adding his own flavor to the zone blocking system. Mike Shanahan won two Super Bowls with John Elway and Terrell Davis in Denver in the 1990s. Davis combined for 3,758 yards rushing and 36 touchdowns in those two seasons. The Niners don't have one guy like Davis so they relied on Mostert, Tevin Coleman and Matt Breida. They also give the ball to some wide receivers more than other teams.

"They use deceptions with all kinds of motions, smokes, behinds and arounds to create backside issues," Hall of Fame running back Marshall Faulk said. "They basically use old-school zone plays that his dad ran in Denver. I like the creativeness and the way

he's doing it and it doesn't matter which back is back there, they'll gouge you."

The younger Shanahan has grown as a playcaller since he first arrived in San Francisco in 2017. He uses two backs often, including a fullback. But he'll also call passes out of that formation to create deception.

"Our offense from my rookie year against Carolina is much different than what it is now," tight end George Kittle said. "And, it's really fun, too. Just being part of the evolution, how it's grown and how it's changed is really fun because you can look back, 'Wow, man,' that's what we were doing and now we're doing this stuff, and it was so much more fun."

"Just the fact we basically install new plays every single week, we have a whole new playbook every single week, it makes football really fun. You get to learn every single week techniques, how to block guys. The similarities always carry over, but the difference is what

makes it exciting."

The success of San Francisco's rushing attack begins with the offensive line, led by left tackle Joe Staley and left guard Laken Tomlinson. The unit's cohesiveness allows Shanahan to be more creative.

"Playing with a group of guys, especially on the O-Line for going into our third year, I think helps guys execute all the stuff," Shanahan said. "You can put in some new stuff and it doesn't overwhelm the guys, and then just add in some of the speed element with all of our backs, a number of our receivers who have helped in the run game, not just blocking, but also that they're a threat to get the ball out a lot of times. I think all that ties together."

If the Niners can dominate on the ground against Kansas City and keep Patrick Mahomes on the sideline, that will boost their chances of winning the Super Bowl.

Kickers Gould, Butker could decide Super Bowl winner

Associated Press

MIAMI — Robbie Gould wasn't sure he'd ever be in this position again, this close to a Super Bowl title.

Heck, he didn't even know a few months ago if he'd still be with the San Francisco 49ers.

"Yeah, it's been," Gould said with a pause. "It's been interesting."

The veteran kicker was coming off another outstanding season a year ago when the 49ers placed the franchise tag on him last February. Frustrated with stagnant contract talks, Gould requested a trade. He wanted out — to be closer to his wife and three children in Chicago, where he played his first 11 NFL seasons.

But, in mid-July, Gould ended his holdout as he and the 49ers agreed on a four-year, \$19 million contract extension. Now, he has a chance to cap a hectic 12 months with an elusive — and,

at one time, seemingly unlikely — championship.

"I think it's been a year where I've been able to learn more and grow as a player and a person," Gould said. "The ultimate goal that I've always had was to win a Super Bowl and we have that opportunity this weekend."

Not only that, Gould could end up playing a key role in whether the 49ers get the franchise's sixth title. Same for Kansas City's Harrison Butker, who could help deliver the Chiefs their first Super Bowl win since 1970.

In a game for which the betting line has been just 1 or 1½ points in the Chiefs' favor since the odds came out almost two weeks ago, the big legs on either sideline could make the difference.

"That's part of the position," Butker said. "I think that's what makes it fun. I mean, I don't think anybody would want to be playing this position if it didn't come down to big moments.

You know, I think those pressure moments are really where you can shine and show off kind of all that hard work that you've been putting in."

Four times in Super Bowl history, a kicker has decided in the closing moments which team was hoisting the Lombardi Trophy in a shower of confetti — and which team was back in the locker room wondering what could have been.

Jim O'Brien's 32-yard field goal for Baltimore with 5 seconds remaining led the Colts to a 16-13 win over Dallas in 1971 in Miami. Adam Vinatieri bootied New England to two titles: His 48-yarder as time expired beat the then-St. Louis Rams in 2002, and his 41-yarder defeated Carolina in 2004.

Then, of course, there's Buffalo's Scott Norwood, whose 47-yard attempt sailed wide right in 1991 and sent the New York Giants home with a championship.

"We approach every kick like

it's the game-winning kick," Gould said, "no matter whether it's Week 1 or the Super Bowl, whether it's the first quarter or the fourth quarter."

The 37-year-old Gould has had lots of big kicks fly off his right foot over the years. But this is only the second time they will come on the NFL's biggest stage.

He was in his second season with Chicago when the Bears lost 29-17 to Peyton Manning and the Colts in Miami in 2007. Gould, who made his only field goal try in that game, figured there would be plenty more opportunities. Instead, 13 years and two teams — he played for the Giants in 2016 — later, Gould is finally back.

"I was 23 and I didn't know any better, you know what I mean?" he said. "I think a big part of it this time around is just really enjoying it and soaking it up and taking every moment to appreciate the significance of what this is."

Australian Open

US' Kenin claims first Grand Slam title

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — This, essentially, was where Sofia Kenin was going to win or lose the Australian Open final: She was down love-40 while serving at 2-all in the third set against two-time major champion Garbine Muguruza.

Kenin sensed this was the moment that would matter. Up in the stands of Rod Laver Arena, so did her father, Alex, who's also her coach.

"I knew I had to take my chance," Kenin said. "I had to be brave."

Sure was. The 21-year-old American won the next five points, each with a winner — one an ace, the others clean groundstrokes to cap exchanges of 11 shots or more — and was on her way to becoming a Grand Slam champion.

Demonstrative as can be — whether spiking a ball, dropping her red-white-and-blue racket or slapping her thigh — and at her best when necessary, the 14th-seeded Kenin won the first major final of her career Saturday by coming back to

beat a fading Muguruza 4-6, 6-2, 6-2 at Melbourne Park.

"That's the game I feel, like, changed things. I had to play some (of my) best tennis. I did," Kenin said. "After that, I was on fire. I was ready to take the beautiful trophy."

Kenin was so magnificent when it mattered the most, saving 10 of 12 break points she faced, while converting 5 of 6 that she earned.

"I'm not very happy about my performance. ... At the important moments, I didn't find my shots," Muguruza said. "I think she found her shots. I didn't."

Muguruza was visited by a trainer after the second set and her movement wasn't ideal down the stretch. Nor was her serving: She double-faulted eight times, including three in the last game, one on championship point.

"A little bit lack of energy," Muguruza said.

For quite some time, Kenin was overlooked and underappreciated, drawing much less attention than other young tennis players from the U.S.,

such as 15-year-old Coco Gauff — Kenin beat her in the fourth round this week — and 18-year-old Amanda Anisimova.

Maybe it was because Kenin is only 5-foot-7. Maybe it was because she went into last season with this résumé: ranked outside the top 50, yet to get past the third round of a major, yet to win a tour-level title.

Kenin will be taken more seriously now. By everyone. She is the youngest Australian Open champion since 2008, when Maria Sharapova won the hard-court tournament at age 20.

Kenin, who eliminated No. 1 Ash Barty in the semifinals, is expected to rise to No. 7 in Monday's WTA rankings, the youngest American to make her debut in the top 10 since Serena Williams in 1999.

"Those people that didn't believe in her, they had very valid reasons not to, because she's always been the smallest one," Alex Kenin said the day before the final. "But I guess, thank God, I saw something that they didn't. Because I know her bet-

ter. I feel pretty happy. I guess I was right."

In the men's final on Sunday, defending champion Novak Djokovic will face Dominic Thiem, a 26-year-old Austrian who was the runner-up to Rafael Nadal at the French Open the past two years. Djokovic seeks a record-extending eighth title at Melbourne Park and 17th major trophy overall; Thiem is trying to become the first man born in the 1990s to win a Grand Slam title.

Kenin was born in 1998 in Moscow to Russian parents; they had moved to New York in the 1980s, but returned to be with family for the birth of their daughter. A few months later, they went back to the U.S. for good; Kenin grew up in Florida and still makes her home there.

Muguruza came into the day with a far more formidable record. She has been ranked No. 1 and won the French Open in 2016 and Wimbledon in 2017 — the only woman to beat each Williams sister in a Grand Slam final.

Stewart headlines NASCAR's latest Hall of Fame class

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Tony Stewart, the throwback, blue-collar "People's Champion" of NASCAR, is once again the headline act.

Stewart was one of five inductees Friday night into the 11th class of NASCAR's Hall of Fame — a group that is essentially a celebration of Joe Gibbs Racing. The three-time NASCAR champion was inducted alongside Joe Gibbs, his former team owner, and Bobby Labonte, his first NASCAR teammate.

Also inducted was Waddell Wilson, an engine builder and crew chief who coincidentally was team manager of Stewart's first foray into NASCAR. The late Buddy Baker, who raced 33 years before transitioning

into a broadcast role, was also inducted and Stewart has early ties to him, too.

Stewart first tried to drive a stock car at Buck Baker Driving School in Rockingham and Buddy Baker turned up to watch "Smoke" turn laps at North Carolina Speedway.

"To have a connection to every member of this NASCAR Hall of Fame class is very, very special, as all of them had an influence early in my NASCAR career that allows me to stand in this spot right now," Stewart said. "Twelve of my 21 years in NASCAR came driving for Joe Gibbs. 'You win with people,' is what Joe always said. Joe surrounded me with some of the best people in racing, and it's why we were able to win two championships and a lot of races together."

"When I joined Joe Gibbs Racing back in 1997, Bobby spent the most time with me because that's when I needed the most help. The transition from sprint cars, midgets and Indy cars was not easy, and the time Bobby invested in me made the learning curve a little less steep."

The induction into the Hall of Fame has come with mixed emotions for Stewart, who has not slowed his racing one bit since retiring from NASCAR competition after the 2016 season. He runs sprint car races all over the country every week and squeezes in his responsibilities as co-owner of Stewart-Haas Racing, Eldora Speedway and the All Star Circuit of Champions. In fact, a day before his induction, Stewart an-

nounced a deal with FloSports to livestream all Eldora championship events and the All Star Circuit of Champions.

Stewart turns 49 this May and figures he's too young to be in a Hall of Fame, and hasn't been entirely comfortable with all the attention that has come with his induction. But as the calendar crept closer to the ceremony, Stewart has finally embraced this next chapter.

"Back in May, when I was voted into this year's Hall of Fame class, I was honored. But I was also conflicted," Stewart said. "I'm not old. Or, at least, I don't feel old. I'm still racing. In fact, I'm racing now more than I ever have in the past. And in my mind, the NASCAR Hall of Fame is there to honor the completion of one's career."

NBA roundup

Lakers drop 1st game since Bryant's death

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles Lakers dried their eyes and took the Staples Center court for the first time since Kobe Bryant's death with a resolve that would have made him proud.

Damian Lillard played through the basketball world's collective heartbreak with his own remarkable effort.

Lillard scored 48 points and the Portland Trail Blazers beat Los Angeles 127-119 on Friday night in the Lakers' first game since Bryant, his daughter Gianna and seven others died in a helicopter crash.

Lillard hit seven 3-pointers and added 10 assists and nine rebounds in a phenomenal performance that sent the Blazers to a win over an opponent still dealing with the trauma of the crash five days earlier.

LeBron James had 22 points, 10 assists and eight rebounds, and Anthony Davis had 37 points and 15 boards in the Lakers' first game since last Saturday.

Nets 133, Bulls 118: Kyrie Irving scored a season-high 54 points, making all 10 shots in the first half and 19 of 23 for the game, to lead host Brooklyn to a win over Chicago.

Irving's previous season high was 50 against the Minnesota Timberwolves in the season-opening 127-126 loss on Oct. 23. Irving is the first player in Nets history to score 45 points in three games in a single season.

The Nets never trailed in their second straight win, and their third in their last four games, with Irving playing the lead role.

Pelicans 139, Grizzlies 111: Zion Williamson scored 24 points in a little less than 29 minutes, and New Orleans beat visiting Memphis in the first matchup this season between the NBA's top two draft picks.

Newly selected All-Star

Brandon Ingram scored 20 and Lonzo Ball hit five three-pointers on seven attempts in his 19-point night for the Pelicans, who won their third straight while ending Memphis' four-game win streak.

Grizzlies rookie Ja Morant, taken second overall behind Williamson, scored 16 points.

Raptors 105, Pistons 92: Pascal Siakam scored 30 points and Serge Ibaka added 21 to lift visiting Toronto past Detroit for its 10th straight victory.

The victory clinched a trip to the All-Star Game for Raptors coach Nick Nurse and his staff, who will coach Team Giannis. The Raptors (35-14) are assured the best record in the Eastern Conference among teams with an eligible head coach through this Sunday's deadline.

Nuggets 127, Bucks 115: Will Barton had 24 points and eight assists as tired and short-handed Denver snapped Milwaukee's nine-game winning streak and handed the NBA-leading team just its third home loss this season.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 31 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists for Milwaukee, finishing just shy of his fifth triple-double this season.

Rockets 128, Mavericks 121: James Harden scored 35 points, Russell Westbrook added 32 and Houston built a big lead and held on for a win over visiting Dallas.

The Rockets led by 16 points entering the fourth quarter on a night when Mavericks star Luka Doncic sat out with a sprained right ankle that is expected to keep him out at least six games.

Thunder 111, Suns 107: Danilo Gallinari scored 27 points, Dennis Schroder added 24 and Oklahoma City rallied in the final minutes to top host Phoenix.

Phoenix was led by Devin Booker and Kelly Oubre Jr., who both scored 27 points.

NHL roundup

Pens top Flyers in OT

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Sidney Crosby is well versed in what happens during the second half of an NHL season. How the intensity ramps up. The speed and the stakes, too.

No wonder the Pittsburgh Penguins captain looks so comfortable. Crosby's wrist shot beat Brian Elliott 55 seconds into overtime to give the Penguins a 4-3 victory over Philadelphia on Friday night. Crosby's ninth goal of the season took some of the sting out of a dismal shutout loss to the Flyers on the eve of the All-Star break.

Given nine days to stew, Crosby promised his team would be ready for the rematch. Though the Penguins needed goaltender Tristan Jarry to bail them out after blowing a two-goal lead, Crosby's winner gave Pittsburgh's sprint to the playoffs a jolt.

"I think you always look at this time of year, when your team has to elevate your game, everyone else is doing the same," said Crosby, who finished with a goal and two assists. "We're going to try and do that, to come off the break and get those first two points there and build off of that is important."

Evgeni Malkin also had a goal and two assists for the Penguins, who picked up their NHL-leading 19th home victory.

Capitals 5, Senators 3: Crowds seldom give loud ovations to opposing players. Alex Ovechkin isn't just a regular opponent.

Ovechkin scored two goals and moved into eighth place on the NHL's career goals list, leading the Washington Capitals to a 5-3 win over the Ottawa Senators on Friday night.

Ovechkin's second-period goal, his 36th of the season and the 694th of his career, tied him with Mark Messier on the goals list. He added an empty-net goal with seconds remaining and moved into the eighth spot.

Ottawa fans gave Ovechkin

a hearty cheer, and when he moved into eighth place, responded with a cheer of: "Ovi! Ovi! Ovi!"

Rangers 4, Red Wings 2: Mika Zibanejad had a goal and two assists, and Artemi Panarin and Chris Kreider each added a goal and an assist to help host New York beat Detroit.

Pavel Buchnevich also scored to start the Rangers' three-goal second period, and rookie Igor Shesterkin stopped 23 shots.

Robby Fabbri had a goal and an assist and Valtteri Filppula also scored in the third period for the Red Wings, who lost their seventh straight (0-6-1).

Golden Knights 4, Hurricanes 3: Alex Tuch scored a tiebreaking power-play goal with 2:28 remaining in the third period to lift visiting Vegas over Carolina.

The Golden Knights improved to 2-1-1 since Peter DeBoer replaced the fired Gerard Gallant as coach.

Bruins 2, Jets 1: Patrice Bergeron and Jake DeBrusk scored power-play goals and visiting Boston dealt Winnipeg its fifth straight loss.

David Pastrnak had two assists for Boston. Tuukka Rask, returning for the first time since suffering a concussion on Jan. 14, made 37 saves.

Oilers 4, Blues 2: Leon Draisaitl scored twice and host Edmonton beat defending champion St. Louis.

Caleb Jones and Josh Archibald also scored to help the Oilers improve to 7-1-2 in their last 10 games. Mikko Koskinen stopped 30 shots.

Lightning 4, Ducks 3: Nikita Kucherov had a goal and an assist for his fifth straight multi-point game, goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy picked up his 150th career NHL win and visiting Tampa Bay defeated Anaheim.

Vasilevskiy — who has 13 straight wins in regulation — stopped 23 shots. He is the fourth goalie in league history to get 150 victories in less than 250 games played (246). The others are Ken Dryden (241), Andy Moog (245) and Braden Holtby (246).