

Survey: Military families wary of vaccine

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Members of military families are less likely than the general population to take the coronavirus vaccine when they are eligible, according to a survey conducted by the military nonprofit Blue Star Families.

In December, 33% of the 674 survey respondents said they would take a coronavirus vaccine approved by the Food and Drug Administration should it become available at no cost. Meanwhile, a Gallup survey of the general U.S. population found 58% of respondents were willing to take the vaccine.

"What we've seen is that military families are expressing a lot of concern about the vaccine," said Kathy Roth-Douquet, CEO of Blue Star Families, a nonprofit that provides resources to military families while also conducting research to better understand the challenges they face. "We're seeing that people don't have a sense of trust about the vaccine. They have strong concerns about the development process and timeline."

Among the 53% of military families who responded to the survey that they would not take the vaccine, nearly three-quarters cit-

ed a distrust of the development process or timeline.

"Trust is really at the root of this issue," said Roth-Douquet, whose husband served 30 years in the Marine Corps. "Trust can be hard for military families because of the rate that we move around from place to place. You don't really have those trusted networks in your community that you've got a deep history with or that you feel like you can really rely on."

About 14% of families said they remain undecided, with most saying they would like more information of side effects to make that decision. For that reason, Blue Star Families coordinated a virtual town hall Thursday to allow families to ask questions directly to health experts and military leadership.

In the lead up to the town hall, more than 1,000 questions were submitted. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, jumped straight into addressing what the survey found to be the most common concern: the vaccine's timeline and approval process.

"The speed is completely related to the extraordinary advances in scientific platform technology for vaccines. There were no corners cut. We did not sacrifice safety,

nor did we sacrifice scientific integrity," Fauci said. "That's the reason why many of you hear me every day in media saying, 'When your turn comes up, please get the vaccine. Both for your own safety, for that of your family and that for the American community in general.'"

Severe side effects have been rare, just about one to six people per 1 million, Fauci said. Even if someone has a history of allergic reactions, he said he still recommends they get the vaccine, so long as they do so in a place that can manage an adverse reaction.

"If you look at the safety of vaccines in general, the risk-to-benefit ratio of safety is about as good as you can get with any medical intervention that you give to anyone. The safety record for this, even though it's just been one year, is actually quite good," Fauci said.

As of Thursday, the Defense Department has administered at least one of the two doses required of the vaccine to more than 424,000 people, according to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Defense Department has its own tiered approach for the order in which it will vaccinate service members, families and beneficiaries.

US coronavirus deaths top 450K; daily toll still high

Associated Press

Coronavirus deaths in the United States surpassed 450,000 on Thursday, and daily deaths remain stubbornly high at more than 3,000 a day, despite falling infections and the arrival of multiple vaccines.

Infectious disease specialists expect deaths to start dropping soon, after new cases hit a peak right around the beginning of the year. New COVID-19 deaths could ebb as early as next week, said the new director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But there's also the risk that improving trends in infections and hospitalizations could be offset by people relaxing and coming together — including this Sunday, to watch football, she added.

"I'm worried about Super Bowl Sunday, quite honestly," Dr. Rochelle Walensky said Thursday in an interview with The Associated Press.

Walensky said one reason cases and hospitalizations are not rising as dramatically as they were weeks ago is that the effect of holiday gatherings has faded.

The effect on deaths is delayed. The daily toll amounts to 50,000 new fatalities in the last two weeks alone.

"We're still in quite a bad place," she said.

The nation reported 3,912 COVID-19 deaths Wednesday, down from the pandemic peak of 4,466 deaths on Jan. 12.

The biggest driver to the U.S. death toll over the past month has been California,

which has averaged more than 500 deaths per day in recent weeks.

California's experience has mirrored many of the inequalities that have been exposed since the pandemic began nearly a year ago, with people of color being hit especially hard.

For example, Latinos make up 46% of California's overall death toll, despite being 39% of the state's population. The situation has worsened in recent months. In November, the daily number of Latino deaths was 3.5 per 100,000 residents, but that rate shot up to 40 deaths per 100,000 last week.

Alabama is another hot spot. The seven-day rolling average of deaths there has risen over the past two weeks, from 74 to 147 deaths per day.

Sailor based in Ga. dies of COVID

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A sailor based in Georgia died Thursday from the coronavirus, the Navy announced, a day after the Pentagon reported two service members with the National Guard had also recently died from the disease.

The sailor was assigned to the USS Tennessee, a ballistic-missile submarine based in Kings Bay, Ga., according to a statement from Submarine Forces. The sailor was admitted to the hospital at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla., on Saturday and then transferred Sunday to the intensive care unit at the University of Florida Health Shands Hospital in Gainesville where the individual tested positive. The sailor died in the ICU from complications related to the virus.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with the family, shipmates and friends of the sailor during this extremely difficult time,” according to the service statement.

The sailor’s name is being withheld until 24 hours after next-of-kin notification is complete.

The sailor is the 20th service member added to the Pentagon’s official list of coronavirus deaths since the pandemic began last year and the second active-duty sailor to die from the disease. Chief Petty Officer Charles Robert Thacker Jr., 41, was a sailor assigned to the USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier when he died April 13 at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Guam.

On Wednesday, the Pentagon reported in its online case chart that two other service members had recently died due to complica-

tions related to the coronavirus.

Master Sgt. Darryl Lovell, 58, a member of the Alabama Air National Guard, died Jan. 28 of coronavirus-related causes, Maj. Jacqueline Whitt, a spokeswoman for the Alabama National Guard, wrote Thursday in an email. He was assigned to the 117th Logistics Readiness Squadron, where he worked as a material management craftsman and was not on a duty status when he died, Whitt said.

The other service member who died recently from the virus was Sgt. Goran Dimovski, 40, a California Army National Guard member assigned to the 640th Aviation Support Battalion, 40th Combat Aviation Brigade based in Los Alamitos, Lt. Col. Jonathan Shiro, a spokesman for the California National Guard, wrote Thursday in an email. He died Jan. 31.

Use of Guard to secure DC to cost \$500M

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The cost of deploying about 26,000 National Guard troops to secure the U.S. Capitol in the wake of the deadly Jan. 6 riot is nearly \$500 million, U.S. military officials said Thursday.

The deployment brought troops in from all 50 states and four territories as law enforcement agencies tried to lock down the Capitol for the inauguration of the President Joe Biden. Thousands of Guard mem-

bers poured into the nation’s capital and were stationed across the city to block traffic and protect lawmakers and landmarks.

Officials said the nearly \$500 million includes the costs of transporting Guard troops from their states to Washington, their salaries and benefits, as well as housing and other essentials. The officials were not authorized to publicly discuss internal figures and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Because the troops were activated by the federal government for more than 30 days, their health benefits are also covered, adding to the price of the deployment.

Officials say the money is expected to cover the costs of the Guard through mid-March, when the troops are expected to leave. Between 5,000 and 7,000 troops are scheduled to stay in Washington through March 14.

DOD to deploy over 1K troops in vaccine effort

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon will deploy more than 1,000 active-duty troops to support coronavirus vaccination efforts at multiple locations throughout the United States, the Defense Department announced Friday.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin approved the deployment of five teams of service members — in total 1,110 troops — to deploy in the coming weeks to vaccination centers run by Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Pentagon said in a statement. The Defense Department did

not immediately identify where those five active-duty teams would deploy, saying it was “dependent on FEMA requirements.”

Jeffrey Zients, the White House coronavirus czar, also declined to provide information about the planned deployment in a briefing with reporters Friday morning. He said the Pentagon was expected to release more information later Friday.

Pentagon officials have said FEMA has requested about 10,000 troops for 100 locations across the United States as President Joe Biden’s administration works to ramp up vaccination efforts. The Pentagon is continuing work to fulfill that request, officials

said Friday.

The initial group of teams deploying consists of 222 troops each. Two of the teams will come from the Army and one each will come from the Air Force, the Navy and the Marine Corps, according to the Pentagon announcement.

Each team will include 80 people to conduct vaccinations, meaning those troops will be putting shots in arms, officials said. Each team will also include 15 command-and-control service members, 15 registered nurses, 57 clinical staff and another 55 troops to do other tasks needed at the vaccination sites.

Senate OKs budget bill; VP breaks tie

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate early Friday approved a budget resolution that's a key step toward fast-track passage of President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief plan without support from Republicans. Vice President Kamala Harris was in the chair to cast the tiebreaking vote, her first.

Democrats in the chamber applauded after Harris announced the 51-50 vote at around 5:30 a.m. The action came after a grueling all-night session, where senators voted on amendments that could define the contours of the event-

al COVID-19 aid bill.

The budget now returns to the House, where it will have to be approved again due to the changes made by the Senate.

Final passage will unlock the next phase in drafting of the virus relief bill, with the work divided among several congressional committees.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer D-N.Y., called passage of the resolution the "first big step to putting our country back on the road to recovery."

By moving on a fast track, the goal for Democrats is to have COVID relief approved

by March, when extra unemployment assistance and other pandemic aid expires. It's an aggressive timeline that will test the ability of the new administration and Congress to deliver.

Biden, who has been meeting with lawmakers in recent days to discuss the package, will talk Friday with the House committee chairs who will be assembling the bill under the budget process known as "reconciliation."

The marathon session brought test votes on several Democratic priorities, including a \$15 minimum wage.

The Senate by voice vote adopted an amendment from Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, opposed to raising the wage during the pandemic. Ernst said a wage hike at this time would be "devastating" for small businesses.

None of the amendments to the budget are binding on Democrats as they draft their COVID plan, but passage of a wage increase could prove difficult. Even if a \$15 wage can get past procedural challenges in the final bill, passage will require the support from every Democrat in the 50-50 Senate, which could be a tall order.

Biden strikes tougher public tone with Russia

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden says the days of the U.S. "rolling over" to Russian President Vladimir Putin are gone as he called for the immediate release of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

During his first visit to the State Department as president on Thursday, Biden issued his strongest condemnation of Putin as large protests have broken out throughout Russia following the jailing of Navalny. Thousands of protesters have been arrested.

The new American president was also seeking to make clear to the world that he's making a dramatic turn away from Putin following the presidency of Republican Donald Trump, who avoided direct confrontation and often sought to downplay the Russian leader's malign actions.

Navalny, an anti-corruption campaigner and Putin's most determined political foe, was arrested Jan. 17 upon returning from a five-month convalescence in Germany from a nerve agent poisoning, which he has

blamed on the Kremlin.

"I made it clear to President Putin, in a manner very different from my predecessor, that the days of the United States rolling over in the face of Russia's aggressive actions — interfering with our election, cyber attacks, poisoning its citizens — are over," said Biden, who last week spoke to Putin in what White House officials called a tense first exchange. "We will not hesitate to raise the cost on Russia and defend our vital interests and our people."

Using the visit to outline how his foreign policy would differ from that of his predecessor, Biden called for a return to the "grounding wire of our global power." He sought to buck up the diplomatic corps, many of whom were discouraged by Trump's policies and tone.

"America is back. Diplomacy is back," Biden told State Department staff before delivering his foreign policy speech. "You are the center of all that I intend to do. You are the heart of it. We're going to rebuild our alliances."

Lawyer: American accused in British teen's death was working for US agency

The Washington Post

LONDON — Anne Sacoolas, the woman accused of killing British teenager Harry Dunn while driving on the wrong side of the road in England, has been referred to as "the wife of a U.S. diplomat" in reports on the 2019 incident, but her lawyer told a Virginia court on Wednesday that she was working for U.S. intelligence.

The assertion reopens questions about whether Sacoolas had diplomatic immunity when she fled Britain for her home in Virginia in August 2019 — though the Trump administration denied Britain's request to extradite Sacoolas, and last week the Biden administration said it considered that decision final.

She has been charged in Britain with causing death by dangerous driving.

The family of Dunn, 19, who was driving a motorcycle when he was hit, has also launched a U.S. federal lawsuit claiming wrongful death and seeking fi-

nancial damages from Sacoolas.

At the U.S. District Court in Alexandria on Wednesday, Sacoolas' lawyer, John McGavin, said, "Mr. and Mrs. Sacoolas were employed by an intelligence agency of the United States, and that's why she left," according to the Press Association, which was listening to the court case via an audio link.

McGavin told the court that he was unable to "completely candidly" explain the family's departure. "I know the answer, but I cannot disclose it," he said, according to the Press Association.

Previously, it had been public only that her husband, Jonathan Sacoolas, was working for the U.S. government at a Royal Air Force base in Croughton, England — a base known to be used by U.S. intelligence agencies.

The prime minister's spokesman told reporters on Thursday the British government had been told Anne Sacoolas was a "spouse with no official role."

House kicks Greene off 2 committees

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A fiercely divided House has tossed Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene off both her committees, an unprecedented punishment that Democrats said she'd earned by spreading hateful and violent conspiracy theories.

Underscoring the political vise her inflammatory commentary has clamped her party into, nearly all Republicans voted against the Democratic move Thursday but none defended her lengthy history of outrageous social media posts.

Yet in a riveting moment, the freshman Republican from a deep-red corner of Georgia took to the House floor on her own behalf. She offered a mixture of backpedaling and finger-pointing as she wore a dark mask emblazoned with the words "FREE SPEECH."

The chamber's near party-line 230-199 vote was the latest instance of conspiracy theories becoming pitched political battlefields, an increasingly familiar occurrence during Donald Trump's presidency. He faces a Senate trial next week for his House impeachment for inciting insurrection after

a mob he fueled with his false narrative of a stolen election attacked the Capitol.

Thursday's fight also underscored the uproar and political complexities that Greene — a master of provoking Democrats, promoting herself and raising campaign money — has prompted since becoming a House candidate last year.

Eleven Republicans joined 219 Democrats in backing Greene's ejection from her committees, while 199 GOP lawmakers voted "no."

Addressing her colleagues, Greene tried to dissociate herself from her "words of the past." Contradicting past social media posts, she said she believes the 9/11 attacks and mass school shootings were real and no longer believes QAnon conspiracy theories, which include lies about Democratic-run pedophile rings.

But she didn't explicitly apologize for supportive online remarks she's made on other subjects, as when she mulled about House Speaker Nancy Pelosi being assassinated or the possibility of Jewish-controlled space rays causing wildfires. And she portrayed herself as the victim of unscrupulous

"big media companies."

News organizations "can take teeny, tiny pieces of words that I've said, that you have said, any of us, and can portray us as someone that we're not," she said. She added that "we're in a real big problem" if the House punished her but tolerated "members that condone riots that have hurt American people" — a clear reference to last summer's social justice protests that in some instances became violent.

Greene was on the Education and Labor committee and the Budget committee. Democrats were especially aghast about her assignment to the education panel, considering the past doubt she cast on school shootings in Florida and Connecticut.

The political imperative for Democrats was clear: Greene's support for violence and fictions were dangerous and merited punishment.

"If any of our members threatened the safety of other members, we'd be the first ones to take them off a committee," Pelosi told reporters. She said she was "profoundly concerned" about GOP leaders' acceptance of an "extreme conspiracy theorist."

Trump rejects call to testify at impeachment trial

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Democrats on Thursday asked Donald Trump to testify under oath for his Senate impeachment trial, challenging him to respond to their charge that he incited a violent mob to storm the Capitol. A Trump adviser said the former president won't testify.

Although Democrats might not have the power to force Trump's testimony, the request from House impeachment managers is part of their overall effort to put the violent events of Jan. 6 on the record for history and hold him accountable for his words. Democrats will look to use his refusal to testify against him as they argue that the ex-president has avoided responsibility for his actions.

Hours after the Democrats' request was revealed, Trump adviser Jason Miller dismissed

the trial as "an unconstitutional proceeding" and said the former president would not testify. Separately, Trump's lawyers denounced the request as a "public relations stunt."

The impeachment trial starts Feb. 9. Trump, the first president to be impeached twice, is charged with inciting an insurrection on Jan. 6, when a mob of his supporters broke into the Capitol to interrupt the electoral vote count. Five people died. Before the riot, Trump had told his supporters to "fight like hell" to overturn his election defeat.

Democrats have said a trial is necessary to provide a final measure of accountability for the attack. If Trump is convicted, the Senate could hold a second vote to disqualify him from seeking office again.

In the letter to the former president and his attorneys,

Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin, one of the impeachment managers, asked that Trump explain why he and his team have disputed key factual allegations at the center of their case. He asked that Trump provide testimony about his conduct "either before or during the Senate impeachment trial," and under cross-examination, as early as Monday, Feb. 8, and not later than Thursday, Feb. 11.

The request from Raskin cites the words of Trump's own attorneys, who in a legal brief earlier this week not only denied that Trump had incited the riot but also asserted that he had "performed admirably in his role as president, at all times doing what he thought was in the best interests of the American people."

With that argument, Raskin said, Trump had questioned critical facts in the case "not-

withstanding the clear and overwhelming evidence of your constitutional offense." He said Trump should be able to testify now that he is no longer president.

Trump attorneys Bruce Castor and David Schoen responded hours later that the letter proves that Democrats "cannot prove your allegations" and that an impeachment trial is too serious "to try to play these games."

The back-and-forth continued Thursday evening when Raskin said Trump's refusal to testify "speaks volumes and plainly establishes an adverse inference supporting his guilt."

Defense lawyers, and many Senate Republicans, have argued that the trial is unconstitutional because Trump is no longer in office, even though he was impeached while he was still president.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Boa constrictor stuck in car dashboard freed

NC ALBEMARLE — A pet boa constrictor that became stuck behind the dashboard of a car in North Carolina needed the help of some animal control officers to wriggle free. But the snake believed to measure about 5 feet in length was ultimately released unharmed from its owner's vehicle — after some car parts were removed.

Officers with Stanly County Animal Protective Services were dispatched Tuesday to free the snake after it became trapped, The Charlotte Observer reported. A photo shared by the agency on its Facebook page showed some pieces of the dashboard had been dismantled to reach the snake and let it slither out.

County worker Jamie Parker, who helped in the rescue, joked on Facebook that the team “just talked nice” to the snake and it backed itself out. How the snake got into the dashboard is not known.

Couple plead guilty to trying to buy infant

KY BOWLING GREEN — A Kentucky couple has pleaded guilty to trying to buy a 1-month-old baby from the child's mother.

Catarina Jose Felipe, 39, and Pascual Jose Manuel, 46, both of Bowling Green, agreed to plead guilty in exchange for the charge being reduced to a misdemeanor, the Bowling Green Daily News reported.

Felipe and Manuel pleaded guilty Tuesday to attempting to sell or purchase a child for the purpose of adoption and were

sentenced to two years of conditional discharge each.

Police: Man revving engine killed in fire

NJ LITTLE FERRY — A man revving his sport utility vehicle's engine over and over in an effort to get out of a snowbank in New Jersey was killed when the vehicle caught fire, police said.

Little Ferry police say a public works employee called shortly after 9 a.m. Wednesday to report a car had gone down a slight embankment and became stuck in the snow.

Capt. Ronald Klein said arriving officers found the man repeatedly revving the engine and rocking the small SUV back and forth to try to get out of the snow. He said officers went back to their vehicle to call for a tow truck, but then heard a popping noise and spotted flames coming from under the vehicle.

Five people arrested in vandalism at church

MO TEBBETTS — Five suspects have been charged with burglary and property damage after a historically Black church in central Missouri was vandalized, Callaway County Sheriff Clay Chism said.

The Oakley Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Tebbetts was damaged on Jan. 23. The church, which was founded by Black residents in 1878, has been rarely used for years.

Chism said the investigation so far has not uncovered evidence of a hate crime but the inquiry is continuing. He noted two abandoned homes in the same area also were vandalized

Jan. 23, The Jefferson City News-Tribune reported.

Bradyn Holzhauser, 18, and Dylan Smith and Matthew Myers, both 17, all of Jefferson City, were arrested, along with a 16-year-old from Jefferson City and a 16-year-old Tebbetts resident.

The three older suspects were released from the Callaway County Jail pending court appearances, while the juveniles were placed under juvenile supervision.

2 teens charged as adults in house fire

CO DENVER — Two of the three teenagers arrested in connection with a house fire in Denver that killed five recent immigrants from Senegal, including two children, have been charged as adults, prosecutors said Tuesday.

Kevin Bui and Gavin Seymour, both 16, were charged with 60 felony counts, including first-degree murder, attempted murder, arson and burglary in the Aug. 5, 2020, fire that killed Djibril and Adja Diol, along with their 22-month-old daughter Khadija, as well as relative Hassan Diol and her infant daughter Hawa Baye, the Denver District Attorney's Office said.

Three other people who escaped the home in the Green Valley Ranch neighborhood near Denver International Airport by jumping from the second story were hospitalized with non-life-threatening injuries.

According to court records, Bui and Seymour are both represented by public defenders, who do not comment on cases.

Prosecutors will also seek to charge a 15-year-old boy arrested in connection with the fire as

an adult but a judge would need to approve that first because of his age.

Woman who tried to fake death gets more prison

WV CHARLESTON — A West Virginia woman who tried to fake her death to avoid being sentenced for health care fraud has received an additional year in prison.

Julie M. Wheeler, of Beaver, was sentenced Wednesday in federal court in Charleston for conspiring to obstruct justice.

Prosecutors said Wheeler admitted to conspiring with her husband to keep her out of prison. Rodney Wheeler told authorities on May 31 that she had fallen from an overlook at the New River Gorge, prompting a massive search. State Police found Julie Wheeler two days later hiding in a closet at her home. She was sentenced in June to 42 months in prison for health care fraud related to overbilling.

Woman accused of theft from storage units

AZ MESA — A woman has been arrested for allegedly breaking into numerous locked units at a storage facility in Mesa, according to authorities.

Mesa police said Cyndal Despain, 33, has been booked into jail on suspicion of three felony counts of burglary.

According to Phoenix TV station KTVK, Despain told police detectives that she picked the locks and burglarized storage units to support her drug habit.

Police said Despain and her husband had rented a unit, which allowed her to get into the facility.

— From wire reports

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RBs Fournette, Bell winners in the end

Associated Press

Leonard Fournette predicted this day would come. He surely had no idea this is how he'd get here.

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers running back doesn't remember writing the prophetic Twitter post seven years ago, but someone unearthed it last week and sent social media buzzing.

"Can't wait til I play in that Super Bowl," Fournette wrote on Feb. 2, 2014 — punctuating it with a grin emoji.

Fournette is smiling plenty now.

"This tweet from my senior year in high school nothing but Gods plan..... Playoff Lenny," Fournette wrote last Friday in a quote tweet.

A lot has happened since that day — an outstanding three-year career at LSU, being the No. 4 overall pick by Jacksonville in the 2017 NFL Draft, two 1,000-yard rushing seasons, and eventually a falling out with the Jaguars, who cut him after training camp in August.

"It's crazy how you manifest on things and speak it into existence," Fournette said. "I'm just blessed with the opportunity I have now to play in this big game with a lot of other great players on this team and the other team."

"I feel good, man."

As well he should, especially considering where he's at: with the NFC champion Buccaneers, who'll square off Sunday against the Kansas City Chiefs.

And consider where he could've been: with the 1-15 Jaguars and as far from the Super Bowl as you can get.

Buccaneers teammate Steve McLendon knows the feeling, having been traded by the New York Jets in the middle of a 2-14 season. Same for Chiefs running back Le'Veon Bell, who was released by the then 0-5 Jets.

"It's been an interesting season, to say the least for me — one of my more intriguing seasons," Bell said. "When I first started the season, I was with New York and I was kind of fighting an uphill battle with everything that was going on over there. It didn't work out for whatever reason. I ended up coming over here and the first day here, I loved it right away."

And what's not to like? It's not often a player goes from losers to winners — and maybe winning it all — in the same season.

The hope in Jacksonville just a few years ago was that Fournette would lead the Jaguars to this moment.

Instead, he fell out of favor during a stint that included an arrest for driving with a sus-

pended license and speeding, and a suspension for fighting in a game. There were also health concerns and doubts as to whether he could be the consistent playmaker he was expected to be.

The Jaguars declined the fifth-year option on Fournette's contract, a sign he was no longer a part of their future. He became a part of their past when they waived him after unsuccessfully trying to trade him.

"It was a terrible feeling," Fournette said. "I took a week off and had to get my mind right and also try to understand why this was going on."

He ended up signing a one-year deal with the Buccaneers, who didn't need Fournette to be the star. Instead, he has complemented Ronald Jones in the backfield.

"Once he accepted that, he's been just a trooper, man," Bucs running backs coach Todd McNair said. "He's been a soldier."

Fournette rushed for just 367 yards and six touchdowns during the regular season, but has 211 yards and two TDs in three postseason games.

"I just told him: 'This team is special and you're a huge part of it. Embrace your role. You never know when your role is going to change,'" coach Bruce Ar-

rians said. "I'm really, really proud of Leonard and the way he's handled it."

Fournette acknowledged he's not used to sitting on the sideline for chunks at a time, and wants to feel as though he's participating in helping the Bucs win. And that's exactly what he's been doing the last month.

"Everything wound up working out in my favor in the end," Fournette said.

Bell is also a complementary piece for the Chiefs, backing up rookie Clyde Edwards-Helaire and splitting carries with Darrel Williams. He had a career-low 328 yards rushing and two TDs in 11 games, nine with Kansas City.

"I really like him — I like him as a kid, I like him as a player," coach Andy Reid said. "He brings that veteran experience. He's been the best in the business at what he's done. He's handled this role well."

After playing just two games for the Jets and being released when they couldn't deal him, Bell had a difficult choice. Miami wanted him, but so did Kansas City.

"I made the decision to come here, to play with a lot of great players and coach Andy Reid," he said. "It probably was tougher than my free-agency decision, for real."

Goodell: Lessons learned in 2020 will carry forward

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — The many lessons learned from 2020 will be needed as the NFL moves forward, Commissioner Roger Goodell noted Thursday in his annual state of the league news conference ahead of the Super Bowl.

Held before both in-person and virtual audiences and staged outside of the arena that is home to the NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning, Goodell said developments ranging from dealing with the coronavirus pandemic to minority coaching hires to scheduling to the NFL's working relationship with the players' union all will carry forward as major topics.

"I don't know when normal will occur again or if normal will occur again," he said. "I know we have learned to work in a very difficult environment, and we will do it again. That is one of the things we learned ... hearing clubs and the NFLPA saying our relationship has never been stronger. I interpret that as a trust that has been built here that will take us forward and will be the long-lasting legacy of this season."

That legacy, on the positive side, includes something the other major sports leagues and organizations couldn't manage: playing a full season, uninterrupted, with the championship game on time de-

spite COVID-19 issues.

But the negative part of the legacy, one that has plagued a league made up of 70% minority players, has been the head coach hiring cycle. Goodell said the league is not satisfied with only two minorities hired for seven head coach openings: The New York Jets hired Robert Saleh, the first NFL coach who is known to be Muslim and the son of Lebanese immigrants, and Houston hired David Culley, making him only the league's third Black current head coach.

"We had two minority coaches hired and it was not what we expected," the commissioner said, "and not what we expect going forward."

Oubre, undersized Warriors beat Mavs

Associated Press

DALLAS — Kelly Oubre Jr. scored a career-high 40 points, Stephen Curry had 28 and the Golden State Warriors went small in a runaway win, beating the Dallas Mavericks 147-116 on Thursday night.

Draymond Green had 11 points and a season-high 15 assists as a makeshift center, helping Golden State get by without using any player taller than 6-foot-7 forward Andrew Wiggins due to injuries. The Warriors outscored Dallas 54-36 in the paint and outrebounded the Mavs 45-42.

Golden State took control late in the third quarter after a floater by Tim Hardaway Jr. pulled the Mavericks within 93-91 with 5:52 left in the period. The Warriors went on a 17-4 run mixing outside shooting and attacks on the rim and led 110-96 after three.

Luka Doncic led the Mavericks with 27 points. Kristaps Porzingis had 25, Hardaway added 19 and Jalen Brunson 18 off the bench.

Lakers 114, Nuggets 93: LeBron James had 27 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists, Dennis Schröder added 21 points and Los Angeles roared away in the second half for a victory over visiting Denver.

Talen Horton-Tucker scored 12 of his 17 points during that inspired second-half effort by the defending NBA champions, who returned from a strong seven-game road trip and improved their surprisingly unimpressive home record to 5-4 by winning this rematch of the Western Conference finals in the bubble.

James moved into third place on the NBA's career field goals list while recording his 96th career triple-double and his second of the season, helping the Lakers open a five-game homestand with their 11th win in 14 games.

Jamal Murray scored 20 points and Monte Morris added 16 for the Nuggets, who struggled down the stretch of their second loss in eight games.

Jazz 112, Hawks 91: Jordan

Clarkson sank five three-pointers while scoring 23 points and Utah protected the NBA's best record with a runaway win over host Atlanta.

Bojan Bogdanovic had 21 points and Donovan Mitchell added 18 for Utah (17-5).

Atlanta point guard Trae Young was held out with a bruised right calf. Rajon Rondo made his second start of the season and did not score. Another starter, forward De'Andre Hunter (right knee), missed his third consecutive game.

John Collins led Atlanta with 17 points. The Hawks suffered their third consecutive loss.

Trail Blazers 121, 76ers 105: Gary Trent Jr. scored 24 points and Enes Kanter had 17 points and 18 rebounds to lead undermanned Portland over host Philadelphia.

Carmelo Anthony had 22 points for the Trail Blazers. Joel Embiid scored 37 points for the Sixers. Tobias Harris added 12 points and 11 boards.

Embiid puffed-up his All-Star game credentials in a game that

otherwise lacked star power. Sixers guard Ben Simmons sat out with tightness in his left calf. Portland played without Damian Lillard (abdominal strain) and Derrick Jones Jr. (left foot sprain). Throw in four players already out with injuries — including CJ McCollum (left foot) — and the Trail Blazers were down to nine players.

Without Lillard or McCollum, Trent hit two threes and Portland outscored the 76ers 40-19 in the third.

Rockets 115, Grizzlies 103: John Wall scored 22 points, Eric Gordon added 20 and Houston beat host Memphis.

Jae'Sean Tate had a season-high 19 points for Houston, while Christian Wood scored 17 points on 7-of-10 shooting before rolling his right ankle in the third quarter. He did not return.

Rookie Desmond Bane led the Grizzlies with 16 points, while Ja Morant added 15.

Tyus Jones and Brandon Clarke finished with 13 each as Memphis lost its second straight.

Top-ranked Gonzaga gets past persistent Pacific

Associated Press

STOCKTON, Calif. — Gonzaga coach Mark Few didn't mind another shuffling of the schedule. That's become the norm around college basketball this season, particularly in the West Coast Conference.

It was the way the No. 1 Bulldogs got pushed around during their rescheduled game against Pacific that bothered Few.

Drew Timme scored 21 points after a sluggish start and top-ranked Gonzaga overcame a sloppy performance to beat Pacific 76-58 on Thursday night.

"We had to dig deep and find some toughness because we didn't have it there in the first half," Few said. "They took the fight to us for pretty much that whole first half. We just weren't playing very smart. Plan A wasn't working, plan B wasn't working and we had to hang with it and we finally figured it out with plan C."

The Bulldogs (18-0, 9-0 West Coast Conference) trailed at halftime for only the second time this season and didn't pull away

until midway through the second half, extending the nation's longest active winning streak to 22 games dating to 2019-20.

This one tested Gonzaga's will as much as its talent. The Bulldogs were pushed around and played timidly on offense until Timme made back-to-back dunks early in the second half.

"We kind of got together in our little huddle and just said let's go," freshman Jalen Suggs said. "Drew made a big play on that dunk and got us fired up. From then on we played with really good fire. We went out and we attacked them. We stopped being victims."

WCC leading scorer Corey Kispert had an off night. He was held to two points in the first half and spent much of the second half on the bench in foul trouble, but he scored 11 points in a two-minute burst and finished with 14.

Timme, the second-leading scorer in the conference behind his teammate, had eight points as part of a 15-2 run that gave the

Bulldogs breathing room.

Suggs had 19 points and nine rebounds.

"It's really hard when everybody around them nationally and everything just thinks you're going to breeze through stuff, but it's not reality," Few said. "Teams are going to try different things and (Pacific) mucked it up a little bit and we probably didn't handle that as well as we could have."

Daniss Jenkins scored 13 points for Pacific (5-5, 2-4).

No. 7 Ohio State 89, No. 8 Iowa 85: E.J. Liddell, Kyle Young and Duane Washington Jr. each had 16 points as the visiting Buckeyes beat Hawkeyes.

Ohio State (15-4, 9-4 Big Ten) trailed 61-50 with 14:29 to play, but rallied with a 17-5 run.

The Buckeyes held Iowa's Luka Garza, the nation's leading scorer at 26.5 points per game, to 16 points.

Jack Nunge and Jordan Bohannon each scored 18 points for Iowa (13-5, 7-4). Joe Wieskamp had 17 points and 10 rebounds.

Senators snap 9-game losing streak

Associated Press

MONTREAL — Rookie Tim Stutzle had a goal and two assists, and the Ottawa Senators snapped a nine-game losing skid with a 3-2 victory over the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday night.

The Senators had not won since their season opener against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Jan. 13.

Thomas Chabot had a goal and an assist, and Connor Brown also scored for Ottawa.

Brendan Gallagher and Josh Anderson scored for Montreal.

Canadiens goalie Carey Price stopped 19 of 22 shots. Matt Murray had 36 saves for the Senators.

Rangers 4, Capitals 2: Ryan Strome scored twice to help host New York beat Alex Ovechkin and Washington.

Ovechkin scored career goal No. 709 to pass Mike Gartner for sole possession of seventh place on the NHL list.

Maple Leafs 7, Canucks 3: Jason Spezza recorded the eighth hat trick of his career and first in nearly five years as host Toronto routed Vancouver.

Auston Matthews scored twice, Mitch Marner added a goal and a pair of assists, and John Tavares scored for Toronto, which got 16 saves from Frederik Andersen.

Predators 6, Panthers 5 (OT): Filip Forsberg scored in regulation and overtime, and visiting Nashville beat Florida.

Forsberg also had three assists as Nashville stopped a two-game slide. Matt Duchene scored twice, and Roman Josi and Calle Jarnkrok added goals

for the Predators.

Blue Jackets 4, Stars 3: Patrik Laine and Jack Roslovic scored for the first time since being traded to Columbus last month, leading their new teams past visiting Dallas to earn a split of the two-game series.

Oliver Bjorkstrand had a goal and an assist, Cam Atkinson also scored and Joonas Korpihalo had 24 saves as the Blue Jackets stopped a two-game skid.

Coyotes 4, Blues 3: Antti Raanta made 40 saves, Tyler Pitlick and Nick Schmaltz scored first-period goals and Arizona beat St. Louis.

Arizona got its first road win of the season in four tries. St. Louis, which had a four-game winning streak snapped, beat Arizona 4-3 on Tuesday.

Jets 4, Flames 1: Mason Appleton scored two goals and host Winnipeg beat Calgary for the second straight game.

Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele also scored for Winnipeg, which outscored Calgary 3-0 in the second period. Connor Hellebuyck stopped 23 shots for his team-record 153rd career victory.

Blackhawks 6, Hurricanes 4: Alex DeBrincat scored two goals in the third period, helping host Chicago edge Carolina.

Patrick Kane had a goal and three assists for the Blackhawks, who bounced back nicely after losing 4-3 to the Hurricanes in a shootout Tuesday night. Dominik Kubalik had a goal and two assists, Mattias Janmark finished with a goal and an assist and Andrew Shaw also scored.

Osaka, Williams in same half of Australian Open draw

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Majors are what matters at this stage for Serena Williams.

After agreeing Friday to the notion that she could consider her next Grand Slam title to be her favorite, she withdrew from a scheduled semifinal match against top-ranked Ash Barty in a tuneup event — citing an injured right shoulder — not long after the draw for the Australian Open was made.

For her latest bid to equal Margaret Court's all-time record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles, Williams was drawn in the same quarter as second-ranked Simona Halep and the same half as No. 3 Naomi Osaka, the U.S. Open champion.

Osaka will face Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova in the first round and has major champions Angelique Kerber, Garbine Muguruza, Venus Williams and Bianca Andreescu in her quarter.

"I saw the projected draw

(for) me, and I, actually, I'm kind of excited," said Osaka, who has a 2-1 record against Serena Williams, including a memorable major breakthrough in the 2018 U.S. Open final. "I like playing tough people, especially in Slams."

But she wasn't getting ahead of herself.

"Honestly, I've never seen a projected draw come true, so I guess it will be interesting for all of us," Osaka said.

Defending champion Sofia Kenin is in the top half of the women's draw along with Barty, and they could potentially meet in the semifinals again. Two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka, Johanna Konta and Elina Svitolina are also in Kenin's quarter.

First up for Williams will be Laura Siegemund of Germany, and that could be either Monday or Tuesday depending on how the schedule is worked out. Williams already has won seven

Australian Open titles and her 23 major titles is a record in the Open era. She hasn't added to that tally since her win in Australia in 2017, when she was pregnant with her daughter, Olympia.

Williams didn't mention any injuries or pain during her post-match interview after beating Danielle Collins on Friday. She said she feels much younger than her 39 years and took a bit of inspiration from Tampa Bay quarterback Tom Brady, who at 43 is playing in his 10th Super Bowl.

"I feel good. I look at Tom Brady, it's so inspiring," Williams said. "I think with all the new things, all the new technology, all the new physical treatments, rehab, things that you can do, I don't know what that age means anymore."

She was asked about Brady's theory that his next champion-ship would be his favorite.

"Yeah, I mean, that would ab-

solutely be my answer. It's a great way to think," she said. "Because otherwise you're living off of what you already did."

Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal are also chasing records.

The second-ranked Nadal, aiming to win a men's record 21st major singles title — he moved equal with Roger Federer by winning last year's French Open — will open against Laslo Djere and could face fifth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas in the quarterfinals.

In the top half, Djokovic's bid for a third consecutive Australian title — and ninth overall — could get tricky. The top-ranked Serb has an opener against Jerome Chardy and three-time major champion Stan Wawrinka, Milos Raonic and Alexander Zverev are in his quarter.

Wawrinka beat Djokovic in the finals of the 2015 French Open and the 2016 U.S. Open, and has won their last two matches.