

NATO rallies despite Putin's expectations

The Washington Post

AMARI AIR BASE, Estonia — With roaring engines flashing orange against the snowy sky, two U.S. F-15 fighter jets on Tuesday streaked into the icy air above this former Soviet air base, where they have become part of the effort to reinforce NATO's eastern flank in response to Russia's military buildup around Ukraine.

The jets are among a contingent of six F-15 Strike Eagle warplanes that arrived in Estonia last week from their base in Britain, initially to participate in a scheduled NATO exercise. Now the planes will remain indefinitely, said Lt. Col. Taylor Gifford, director of operations for the 336th Fighter Squadron, to bolster the small Baltic air policing mission patrolling the only sliver of NATO airspace directly bordering Russia.

Their immediate role will be to supplement the four Belgian F-16s that were already policing Baltic airspace alongside the Estonian air force. But their

presence marks the first time U.S. warplanes have been attached to the mission in Estonia, and the deployment takes on added significance at a time when President Vladimir Putin has made it clear the goal of Russia's military buildup around Ukraine is to push NATO away from Russia's border.

Putin's demands to effectively dismantle NATO in its current form as a condition for Russian de-escalation appear to have had the opposite effect. In the Dec. 17 ultimatum presented by the Kremlin to the United States, Russia said it wanted commitments that NATO would withdraw troops from countries that joined the alliance after 1997 — meaning all of Eastern Europe — and for NATO to agree to admit no further members, including Ukraine.

Instead, the often fractious NATO alliance has rallied to defend its mission and its principles, responding to the threat against Ukraine by sending reinforcements to the area Putin

wants them to vacate.

In addition to the U.S. warplanes in Estonia, Danish F-16 fighter jets are being sent to beef up the Baltic air policing mission in nearby Lithuania. Denmark is also sending a frigate to the Baltic Sea.

Britain has said it will double the number of ground troops serving with NATO in Estonia, and President Joe Biden said he has readied 8,500 U.S. troops to be deployed at short notice to join NATO forces in Europe. The Netherlands is sending F-35 fighter jets to Bulgaria, and Spain is sending warships, all aimed at strengthening NATO's presence in Eastern Europe.

"Putin's goal was to have less NATO close to his borders and he's produced the exact opposite — he's getting more NATO on his borders," said Lauren Speranzo, director of the Transatlantic Defense and Security at the Center for European Policy Analysis.

For NATO, the moment has brought about a rejuvenation af-

ter decades of drift. In the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO troops have strayed far from their original theater of operations in Europe, embarking on missions to train local forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, counter piracy off Somalia and escort food aid through the Gulf of Aden.

More recently, the alliance has been squabbling over whether it should be engaged in countering the expansion of China, or perhaps getting involved in addressing climate change, all in an effort to remain relevant in the post-Soviet era.

But faced with Putin's challenge, the NATO alliance has been reminded of why it was created in the first place — to defend Europe.

"The latest flare-up has brought NATO back to basics," Speranza said. "It's a reminder for the United States and other NATO members that Russia is very much still a threat, and we still need to be thinking in terms of tanks on the battlefield."

Over 3K US troops moving to Eastern Europe

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Over 3,000 U.S. troops will move to ally countries in Eastern Europe amid rising tensions as Russia continues massing troops along the Ukrainian border, chief Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said.

The United States will send about 1,000 service members from bases in Germany to Romania and about 2,000 troops from Fort Bragg, N.C., to Poland and Germany in the coming days, Kirby said Wednesday.

The troops moving to Romania

are part of the 2nd Calvary Regiment from Vilseck, Germany, according to a Pentagon statement. They will join about 900 U.S. troops already in Romania on regular rotational deployments.

The move comes after President Joe Biden said Friday night that he soon intended to send a small amount of troops into Eastern Europe as tensions increase with Russia over its buildup of troops around Ukraine.

Kirby said Monday that Biden was referring to potential agreements with individual ally countries for more forces, which could

be separate from the roughly 8,500 U.S. troops recently placed on alert for a possible deployment in Europe with the NATO Response Force, which has not yet been activated.

"We are making it clear that we're going to be prepared to defend our NATO allies if it comes to that," he said. "Hopefully, it won't come to that."

Biden's announcement Friday came the same week Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin placed the troops in the U.S. on high alert to be ready to deploy to Europe.

Affected troops must be ready

to deploy within five days should they be called upon to support U.S. allies and the NATO Response Force, which consists of about 40,000 troops from multiple countries in the alliance that can quickly respond to threats by sea, air and land, Kirby said last week.

Forces moved to Europe from Fort Bragg would be among the 8,500 tapped for a heightened alert status last week. At the time, Kirby said elements of the 18th Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg, including the 82nd Airborne Division, were among those who could be deployed.

Study: Troops fear racism, shun some posts

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

Military personnel who are minorities or have family members of color can face an agonizing decision when they receive assignments to places where they think they will face racial discrimination, a study commissioned by a military family advocacy group found.

And numerous respondents said that turning down a duty assignment over concerns of how they would be treated had harmed their military careers.

The results of the survey, which polled 2,731 respondents who identified as nonwhite, were published Wednesday. It was designed by Blue Star Families and Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families.

The sample included 303 active-duty troops as well as veterans and military family members who identified as Black, Asian, Latino or Hispanic.

Some 42% of active-duty troops of color said concerns about racism at certain bases and

surrounding communities led them to reject assignments there, the report said.

"We have had good people across all branches leave because of negative experiences with either being sent somewhere where they were not safe or did not feel safe, or where they were harassed," Tonya Murphy, a fellow with Blue Star Families who participated in the study, told Stars and Stripes on Tuesday.

Murphy, who is Black, said she and her Navy submariner husband Scotty, who is white, balked at an assignment to Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay in Georgia and a stint at Naval Support Activity Mid-South in Tennessee out of concern for the safety of their sons, ages 15, 13 and 9.

Other troops and their families made similar decisions knowing that their career advancement could be adversely affected, the report said.

Approximately two-thirds of troops of color who turned down orders said they were given a less attractive assignment, saw less

opportunity for promotion, received a poorer evaluation or had their careers ended, the Blue Star Families report said.

Troops and their families specifically expressed concerns about discrimination and racial profiling by police in much of the U.S., including the Midwest, South and West.

More than half of surveyed active-duty personnel or their family members living in these regions said they feared for their safety at least once since the start of 2020 because of their race or ethnicity, the poll said.

In the Northeast, 43% of respondents said the same.

One in three Black family members of active-duty personnel reported being racially profiled by police, the report said.

Respondents reported higher levels of trust in military law enforcement than for civilian police.

Nearly 70% of the surveyed active-duty troops of color agreed that they were regarded as valued members of their military community, and 79% said the

military positively influenced their professional growth.

But 41% also said they had experienced racial or ethnic discrimination or harassment by their peers at some point in their career.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, a Black former Army general, has vowed to rid racists and extremists from the ranks.

Some of Austin's efforts have drawn criticism from U.S. Sen. Tom Cotton, a former Army officer who said diversity campaigns are creating mistrust and not "something that our military needs to constantly obsess about."

But not talking about the experiences of troops of color and their families won't make the issues affecting them go away, Murphy said.

"We have to take the conversations from being whispered about in small circles and quiet talks, and they need to be had out loud," Murphy said. "How are we a more ready force if our service members are worrying about the safety of their families at home?"

Army judge requires unanimous conviction in 2nd case

By NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — An Army judge has ruled in a second case that a unanimous guilty verdict is required to convict a soldier facing a court-martial for alleged sexual assault, putting the trial on hold while the determination is reviewed.

Judge Col. Charles Pritchard's latest ruling, on Jan. 13, caused the Army Court of Criminal Appeals this week to order postponement of the court-martial of Master Sgt. Keith Ferreira. His case is to be tried in Vicenza, Italy.

The appellate court previously ordered a stay in the proceedings against Lt. Col. Andrew Dial, who

is slated to be tried in Kaiserslautern, Germany, on three counts of sexual assault.

Pritchard, a judge in the Army's 5th Judicial Circuit in Europe, appears to be the sole military trial judge to have set the higher threshold for conviction. For decades, military law has allowed for majority verdicts.

"I haven't heard of any other judges who have ruled this way, but I'm certain the defense counsel are raising this every trial now," said Don Christensen, a former Air Force prosecutor and current head of the military sexual assault victim advocacy group Protect Our Defenders.

Several military law experts

have said they expect that the Army appellate court will overturn Pritchard's rulings. But it's unclear when the court will decide the matter and any decision could be further appealed.

Pritchard held that allowing a split guilty verdict would violate the defendants' Fifth Amendment rights to due process and equal protection under the law.

In essence, he said the military must accord defendants the same right to a unanimous criminal jury guilty verdict as civilian defendants have long been afforded in federal courts, and also in state courts since 2020. That was the year the Supreme Court decided in *Ramos v. Louisiana* that juries

in state courts must reach unanimous guilty verdicts. Louisiana and Oregon were the last remaining states to allow jury verdicts that were not unanimous.

The decision left the military as the sole jurisdiction allowing split guilty verdicts, a situation ripe for defense lawyers to litigate. The Supreme Court has deferred to Congress to decide military law and regulations, including those involving jury rights, even when they deviate from civilian law.

In the Dial case, Pritchard found that there is "no rational basis" for permitting court-martial convictions that aren't unanimous; his ruling stated a split verdict would result in an acquittal.

Navy's top enlisted sporting flame-resistant khakis as test

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

The Navy's top enlisted member has been sporting a new khaki working uniform that has spurred a mix of confusion, excitement and apprehension among sailors on social media.

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith was seen wearing the outfit in photos from a visit to Navy facilities in Virginia late last month that were shared on his official Instagram and Facebook accounts.

"What uniform is MCPON wearing?" Instagram user @o.livxrr asked in response to a post Monday, a question echoed in other comments on the official accounts and threads on the Navy forum of Reddit.

Known as the two-piece, flame-resistant organizational clothing variant, it was being worn as part of a test, Smith's Instagram account said in response to a question.

The chief of naval operations approved the garment in late 2020, bringing sailors one step

closer to wearing it after rounds of wear-testing and fleet feedback in 2018 and 2019, said Lt. Cmdr. Madisyn Hansen, U.S. Fleet Forces Command spokeswoman. The Navy chose 40 "ambassadors" at East Coast units to begin wearing it in October to "showcase the new garment and answer sailors' questions" about it, Hansen said in an email to Stars and Stripes.

Several social media users were asking whether this was yet another uniform sailors would be required to buy.

But Hansen said the two-piece set, popularly known as 2POC, is an optional uniform that will be provided at no cost.

It's meant to be worn on ship and at operational commands ashore in place of flame-resistant coveralls or flight deck pants, she said.

It was patterned after the green camouflage Type III working uniform that became official in late 2019, when the Navy retired the blue camouflage Type I uniforms. Derided as "blueberries," that uniform had been banned from

wear as a working uniform at sea because they were highly flammable.

The two-piece variant was inspired by sailor feedback after the 2017 release of the improved flame-resistant variant coverall, or IFRV, Hansen said.

The new organizational clothing combines the flame-resistance of the Navy's coveralls with the "travel flexibility" of the Type III uniform, Smith said in a statement Hansen provided. It's approved for wear on base and off, in port and underway. But for the 2POC, the service adopted "traditional Navy uniform colors" — blue for enlisted sailors below the rank of chief and khaki for chiefs and officers — Fleet Forces Command said in a 2019 statement.

"Straight flexin that new uni!" commenter @jays wrote on Smith's Instagram post this week. "When will the blues and khakis roll out to us?"

The Navy is in the process of contracting procurement of the 2POC, but there's no firm date for a wider rollout, Hansen said.

Biden aims to cut down deaths from cancer 50%

Associated Press

President Joe Biden is committing to reduce the cancer death rate by 50% — a new goal for the "moonshot" initiative against the disease that was announced in 2016 when he was vice president.

Biden has set a 25-year timeline for achieving that goal, part of his broader effort to end cancer as we know it, according to senior administration officials who previewed Wednesday's announcement on the condition of anonymity.

The issue is deeply personal for Biden: He lost his eldest son, Beau, to brain cancer in 2015.

The pain experienced by the president is shared by many Americans. The American Cancer Society estimates that there will be 1,918,030 new cancer cases and 609,360 cancer deaths this year. What Biden is aiming to do is essentially save more than 300,000 lives annually from the disease, something the administration believes is possible because the age-adjusted death rate has already fallen by roughly 25% over the past two decades.

Biden was scheduled to give remarks Wednesday from the East Room of the White House, along with his wife, Jill, Vice President Kamala Harris, and about 100 members of the cancer community.

As part of the moonshot, Biden will assemble a "cancer Cabinet" that includes 18 federal departments, agencies and offices, including leaders from the Departments of Health and Human Services, Veterans Affairs, Defense, Energy and Agriculture.

There were no plans to announce new funding commitments on Wednesday.

4 Marines accused in Calif. ride prank that trapped 100 in midair

The Charlotte Observer

Four men accused of causing a San Diego Zoo aerial ride to shut down, stranding more than 100 people in midair, are U.S. Marines, military officials said.

The four men, all in their 20s, face vandalism charges in the Jan. 29 mishap on the Skyfari Aerial Tram, McClatchy News reported.

The men are stationed in Yuma, Ariz., but are in San Diego for training, a 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing spokesperson said in a statement to McClatchy News.

The 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing has launched its own investigation into the incident, which it called "contrary to our core values," the statement said.

The men are accused of rocking a gondola on the ride, causing an automatic shutdown at about

2 p.m. Pacific time which left riders hanging in midair for up to two hours, McClatchy News reported.

"We were just hoping that we were going to get down soon," rider Hussein Alhamadami told KSWB.

San Diego firefighters reported at 4:30 p.m. that all of the people trapped on the ride had reached the ground after it was restarted. No injuries were reported.

The ride, which has 28 gondolas holding up to four people each, gives riders "an airborne shortcut over the treetops to the other end of the Zoo, and ... spectacular views of the Zoo and surrounding Balboa Park," according to the zoo's website.

The men rocked the gondola so hard it came off the track, stopping the ride, police told KFMB.

Many Afghan refugees still in 'legal limbo'

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Roughly 36,000 Afghans who were evacuated from their country after its collapse in August lack a direct pathway to permanent residency in the United States, according to a new Department of Homeland Security report to Congress.

The evacuees, who have mostly been relocated to the U.S., include extended family members of Afghans in line for special immigrant visas, reserved for Afghans who directly assisted the U.S. military and diplomatic mission during the 20-year conflict. The group also includes vulnerable Afghans who are likely to face risk under Taliban rule but who don't qualify for special immigrant visas under the narrow parameters of the program.

These evacuees received temporary humanitarian parole when they entered the

U.S. — a status granted to immigrants without visas for pressing humanitarian reasons — but can only attain legal permanent residency if they apply for asylum through the traditional system, which is beset by backlogs.

Congress ordered the Jan. 28 report in a September supplemental government funding law that provided billions for the government's resettlement effort, dubbed "Operation Allies Welcome." A copy of the report was released by the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, a major resettlement group.

LIRS has pushed Congress to pass legislation to make Afghans living in the U.S. under humanitarian parole eligible for lawful permanent residency.

"The report highlights the troubling reality that tens of thousands of Afghans find them-

selves in legal limbo, lacking a direct path to permanent residency in the U.S.," Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president of LIRS, said in a statement. "The broad use of humanitarian parole and its temporary nature underscore the need for legislative action to provide a pathway to permanent protection."

The report details the immigration statuses of more than 80,000 Afghans flown out of the country during the chaotic military withdrawal, including those without a direct pathway to permanent protection. Another group of nearly 37,000 are in line for special immigrant visas, a complex application process that can take months.

Lawful permanent residents, special immigrant visa holders and Afghans who have been referred for the traditional U.S. refugee admissions program make up smaller groups within that total.

Pfizer asks FDA to authorize vaccine for kids under 5

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pfizer on Tuesday asked the U.S. to authorize extra-low doses of its COVID-19 vaccine for children under 5, potentially opening the way for the very youngest Americans to start receiving shots as early as March.

In an extraordinary move, the Food and Drug Administration had urged Pfizer and its partner BioNTech to apply earlier than the companies had planned — and before it's settled if the youngsters will need two shots or three.

The nation's 19 million children under 5 are the only group not yet eligible for

vaccination against the coronavirus. Many parents have been pushing for an expansion of shots to toddlers and preschoolers, especially as the omicron variant sent record numbers of youngsters to the hospital.

"I would say the parents in my office are desperate" to get young kids vaccinated, said Dr. Dyan Hes, who runs a pediatric practice in New York City, where vaccination rates are high. For many, "that's the first thing they ask when they walk through the door: 'When do you think the shot is going to come out?'"

Pfizer aims to give children as young as

6 months shots that contain one-tenth of the dose given to adults. The company said it had started submitting its data to the FDA and expects to complete the process in a few days.

An open question is how many shots those children will need. Two of the extra-low doses turned out to be strong enough for babies but not for preschoolers in early testing. Pfizer now is testing a third shot, data that's expected in late March.

That means the FDA may consider whether to authorize two shots for now, with potentially a third shot being cleared later if the study supports it.

Major winter storm is affecting a wide swath of US

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — A major winter storm with millions of Americans in its path brought a mix of rain, freezing rain and snow to the middle section of the United States on Wednesday as airlines canceled hundreds of flights, governors urged residents to stay off roads and schools closed campuses.

The blast of frigid weather, which began arriving Tuesday night, put a long stretch of states from New Mexico and Colorado to Maine under winter storm warnings and watches. On Wednesday morning, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan saw freezing rain, sleet and snow.

More than a foot of snow was possible in parts of Kansas, Missouri, Illinois and Michigan by the time the storm moves through, on the heels of a vicious nor'easter last weekend that brought blizzard conditions to many parts of the East Coast.

"It will be a very messy system and will make travel very difficult," said Marty Rausch, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in College Park, Md.

The footprint of the storm extended as far south as Texas, where nearly a year after a catastrophic freeze buckled the state's power grid in one of the worst blackouts in U.S. history, Gov. Greg Abbott defended the

state's readiness. The forecast did not call for the same prolonged and frigid temperatures as the February 2021 storm and the National Weather Service said the system would, generally, not be as bad this time for Texas.

Abbott, whose handling of last year's blackouts is a top line of attack for Democrats as the Republican seeks a third term in 2022, said thousands of miles of roads in Texas will become "extraordinarily dangerous" over the coming days. Energy experts said the forecast this week, although below freezing, should not pose a challenge for Texas' grid.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man, grandson reel in 2 rifles magnet fishing

FL MIAMI — A man and his 11-year-old grandson found a little more than they were looking for during a weekend fishing trip. The pair pulled two .50-caliber Barrett sniper rifles out of a canal near Miami.

Duane Smith told the Miami Herald he saw a YouTube video on magnet fishing and decided to give it a try. They dropped a 5-pound magnet in the C-102 canal in southern Miami-Dade County.

“We ended up with two pounds of scrap metal and 40 pounds of gun,” Smith told the newspaper.

Smith told the newspaper he was concerned because the serial numbers on the lower receivers of the weapons and the bolt of one of the rifles were filed off.

“Whoever did this is not your run-of-the-mill criminal,” said Smith, a former Army infantry officer.

Teen accused of firing airsoft gun in theater

KS WICHITA — Authorities arrested a 15-year-old boy who is suspected of firing an airsoft gun in a Wichita movie theater.

KAKE reported that officers responded to the AMC theater. Wichita Police Department spokesperson Trevor Macy said the suspect was located running in the area and taken into custody.

Authorities recovered two airsoft guns, which are commonly used to shoot BBs.

Officials said one victim reported getting into a physical altercation with the suspect, who then punched the victim in the

face, dropped the airsoft gun and fled the scene. One victim was shot by an airsoft gun but only received minor injuries.

Museum to feature beer line memorabilia

WI ASHWAUBENON — The National Railroad Museum in Ashwaubenon unveiled an exhibit featuring memorabilia from a freight train that delivered beer supplies.

The Milwaukee Beer Line ran north of Milwaukee’s downtown area in 1952. Its three main distributors were Pabst, Blatz and Schlitz.

The exhibit is called “The Milwaukee Beer Line: From Grain to Glass.” It features photos of the line taken by Wallace W. Abbey. Visitors can also view beer memorabilia from the 1950s through 1970s, such as vintage beer cans and other collectibles. The exhibit runs through the rest of the year.

Vandalized Robinson plaque to be displayed

MO KANSAS CITY — A plaque honoring baseball legend Jackie Robinson that was vandalized in Georgia is coming to Kansas City’s Negro Leagues Baseball Museum to be put on display.

The sign was erected in 2001 outside the birthplace of Robinson near Cairo, Ga. Community members there discovered last year that someone had shot the plaque multiple times.

The damaged marker was replaced, with help from the league. Robinson broke Major League Baseball’s color barrier in 1947 when he became the league’s first Black player.

The vandalized marker is slated to go on display around mid-April to coincide with the museum’s celebration of the 75th anniversary of Robinson’s debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

City mulls changes to St. Patrick’s Day party

GA SAVANNAH — Officials in Savannah are considering some big changes to the city’s sprawling St. Patrick’s Day celebration, hoping to curb public drunkenness and littering while boosting business at local bars and restaurants.

Mayor Van Johnson said organizers are moving forward with plans to bring back the South’s largest St. Patrick’s Day parade this March 17 after City Hall forced them to pull the plug each of the past two years amid fears of spreading the coronavirus.

An advisory committee has recommended changes to how the city regulates the sprawling, boozy street party surrounding the parade.

Proposals include ending a multi-day St. Patrick’s festival with outdoor concerts on Savannah’s riverfront. Outdoor beer and food vendors would no longer be allowed. And party buses from out of town would be denied permits for parking.

Some not happy about Scout camp tree cutting

IL RURAL FAIRMOUNT — A plan to cut more than 1,400 trees from a Boy Scouts of America campground in central Illinois is causing disagreement among Scout officials and residents.

Scout Executive Jared White said the executive board of the

Prairiелands Council for the Champaign-based Scouts made the decision months ago to harvest the trees. White said some Scout officials only raised objections recently.

Tiffany Armas, scoutmaster of Troop 2119, is among those concerned about the logging plan. She said work isn’t following proper forestry practice and leaders were told fewer trees would be harvested than the plan calls for.

The logging is expected to earn at least \$200,000 to be put toward construction of a shower house and bathroom facility that can also serve as a storm shelter.

Dogs taken from kennel, owner faces violations

NC MOYOCK — The owner of a northeastern North Carolina kennel was accused of dozens of animal welfare violations after authorities seized over 60 dogs from what were called “inhumane” living conditions.

Currituck County officials collected 47 adult dogs and 14 puppies, while one adult dog discovered had died, news outlets reported. Several dogs required immediate medical care.

Tim Warren, the owner of Bentwood Labradors, was charged with 61 counts of failure to provide animals with adequate food and water, medical care and sanitary living conditions, according to the news outlets.

He was also charged with violating the county’s restraint ordinance, allowing animals to create a nuisance and failing to provide veterinarian care to an animal, resulting in its death.

— From wire reports

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All eyes on Shiffrin for skiing events

Associated Press

After her first Winter Games triumph as a teenager in 2014, Mikaela Shiffrin gushed about “dreaming of the next Olympics (and) winning five gold medals” — which not only didn’t happen, of course, but wasn’t even possible because the American ended up not competing in every Alpine event four years later.

Now a veteran of 26, and well-established as the world’s top all-around ski racer, Shiffrin aims to be in the starting gate at the Beijing Olympics for the slalom, giant slalom, super-G, downhill and combined, along with maybe even the mixed team parallel, according to her coach.

She knows, though, that just entering everything will be a challenge in itself, let alone claiming a haul of medals to add to the two golds and one silver she has from past Olympics, which go along with a half-dozen world championship golds and a trio of World Cup overall titles.

“I have to do a lot more preparation, like, mentally — just understanding how that is going to affect me mentally and physically throughout, essentially, the three weeks that we’re there,” said Shiffrin, the 2014 Olympic champion in slalom and 2018 champ in giant

slalom.

“So it definitely takes a lot of my focus to think: What are the boxes we have to check even totally outside of, like, skiing and technique and tactics and the physical side of things?” she said. “What are the boxes we need to check to make sure that I have some comfort level staying in a place that I’ve never been before for three weeks and dealing with the jet lag and getting over that as fast as possible?”

Shiffrin, who is from Colorado, frequently talks about what it will take to avoid feeling uncomfortable on, or even between, race days.

There is a lot wrapped up in that area as she heads to her third Olympics, from the back spasms that limited her preparation in November, to the bout with COVID-19 she experienced in late December, to her first “did not finish” in a slalom in four years that came in January, to the many stress factors she sounds at ease discussing and dissecting.

There’s more, too, that comes with any Winter Games, of course, but will be of particular concern at these, including a new and unseen course that no elite racer will try until Feb. 3, just three days before the men’s downhill begins the Alpine sched-

ule.

There’s also the ever-present element of COVID-19 and all of the unusual arrangements and uncertainties that brings.

“It’s going to be a mess,” U.S. racer Travis Ganong said, “but we’ll figure it out.”

Other story lines to follow in Alpine skiing at the Beijing Olympics:

Surprise!

Usually, test events are held on an Olympic hill a year or more ahead of time, giving ski racers a chance to check out the site and train and compete on the course. Thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, those were scrapped.

So everything will be a bit of a surprise when coaches and athletes get their first look at the artificial snow on the slopes of the National Alpine Skiing Center in Yanqing zone, about 55 miles northwest of Beijing’s city center.

“Everybody’s in the same situation. They have to adapt as quickly as possible,” International Ski Federation race director Markus Waldner said. “It’s a very challenging hill. Demanding.”

The favorites

If the casual fan knows current World Cup overall leader

Shiffrin’s name the best — thanks to years of success and her prominence in TV ads for these Olympics — anyone who follows ski racing closely is aware of two prominent challengers: Petra Vlhova, a 26-year-old from Slovakia, and Sofia Goggia, a 29-year-old from Italy.

Vlhova is the reigning overall World Cup champion and won five of this season’s first six slaloms, a race Shiffrin used to dominate; Goggia had a streak of seven consecutive victories in World Cup downhills she entered and was a big favorite to repeat her Olympic gold in that event before she sprained her left knee in a crash two weeks before ski racing begins in Beijing.

Men to watch

Marco Odermatt, a 24-year-old from Switzerland, will head to his first Olympics as a potential star-in-the-making. A winner of five golds at the 2018 junior world championships, Odermatt leads the World Cup standings and has five victories plus three runner-up finishes this season. Second in the overall is 2019-20 champion Aleksander Aamodt Kilde, a 29-year-old from Norway who is dating Shiffrin and skiing well after returning from a knee injury.

Flores says he won’t drop NFL lawsuit even if hired

Associated Press

Brian Flores says his lawsuit against the NFL over alleged racist hiring practices will continue even if he becomes a head coach again this offseason because the league needs change.

Flores has interviewed with the Houston Texans and New Orleans Saints for their coaching vacancies. If they call, Flores said he will listen, but the suit will go on.

“This is about changing the hiring practices in the National Football League, and that’s what this lawsuit is about,” Flores said Wednesday on CNN. “I want to coach football — that’s what I’m called to do.”

Flores’ lawsuit was filed Tuesday in Manhattan federal court. It is seeking class-action status and unspecified damages from the league, the Miami Dolphins, the Denver Broncos

and the New York Giants, along with unidentified individuals.

Flores, 40, was fired last month by Miami after leading the Dolphins to a 24-25 record over three years. They went 9-8 in their second straight winning season, but failed to make the playoffs during his tenure.

According to the lawsuit, Miami owner Stephen Ross told Flores he would pay him \$100,000 for every loss during

the coach’s first season because he wanted the club to “tank” so it could get the draft’s top pick.

The lawsuit alleged that Ross then pressured Flores to recruit a prominent quarterback in violation of the league’s tampering rules. When Flores refused, he was cast as the “angry Black man” who is difficult to work with and was derided until he was fired, the suit said.

Booker, Bridges lead Suns past Nets

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Devin Booker scored 35 points, Mikal Bridges added a season-high 27 and the NBA-leading Phoenix Suns extended their winning streak to 11 games by beating the Brooklyn Nets 121-111 on Tuesday night.

The Suns (41-9) continued their best start to a season in franchise history and have two double-digit winning streaks this season. They won 18 games in a row from Oct. 30 to Dec. 2.

Bridges scored a season high for a second straight game. The lanky 6-foot-6 forward had 26 points against the Spurs on Sunday and was arguably even better against the Nets, shooting 10-for-14 from the field and adding eight rebounds and four assists.

Phoenix took a 91-82 lead into the fourth quarter and never

trailed. Chris Paul finished with 20 points and 14 assists. Cam Johnson had 16 points off the bench.

Warriors 124, Spurs 120: Jordan Poole had 31 points, including a go-ahead three-pointer with 17.9 seconds remaining, and short-handed Golden State beat host San Antonio for its seventh straight victory.

The Warriors rallied from a 17-point deficit despite being without Stephen Curry, Klay Thompson, Draymond Green and Andrew Wiggins on the second night of a back-to-back.

Raptors 110, Heat 106: Gary Trent Jr. scored 33 points, Pascal Siakam had 16 points and 14 rebounds and host Toronto won its third straight game, beating Miami.

Trent matched DeMar DeRozan's franchise record and extended his personal career best

by reaching 30 points for the fifth consecutive game.

Bucks 112, Wizards 98: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 33 points, 15 rebounds and 11 assists for his fourth triple-double of the season as host Milwaukee handed Washington its sixth straight loss.

The Wizards were playing without star guard Bradley Beal due to a sprained left wrist. They had announced Monday that Beal would miss at least the rest of this trip, which ended Wednesday at Philadelphia.

Timberwolves 130, Nuggets 115: Jarred Vanderbilt scored 18 points against his former team, Taurean Prince had 23 and Minnesota's bench led the way in a victory over visiting Denver.

Karl-Anthony Towns added 24 points and 10 rebounds for the Timberwolves, whose re-

serves outscored the Nuggets' 68-49. Minnesota's second unit took advantage when Denver star Nikola Jokic rested in the first half to take a commanding lead the Timberwolves didn't relinquish.

Bulls 126, Magic 115: DeMar DeRozan scored 29 points, and Zach LaVine added 24, and host Chicago beat Orlando.

DeRozan scored 20 of his points in the first half, and then the Bulls survived a frantic rally by the Magic midway through the fourth quarter.

Pelicans 111, Pistons 101: Brandon Ingram scored 26 points, Jonas Valanciunas added 13 points and 13 rebounds, and New Orleans overcame a 15-point deficit to win at Detroit.

Nickeil Alexander-Walker had 14 of the Pelicans' 54 bench points as they ended a four-game losing streak.

No. 14 Texas Tech tops former coach, No. 23 Texas

Associated Press

LUBBOCK, Texas — Kevin Obanor had 17 points with five three-pointers and 14th-ranked Texas Tech beat No. 23 Texas 77-64 on Tuesday night in Chris Beard's return to an emotionally charged arena packed with fans who used to love the coach who took the Red Raiders to the national championship game only three years ago.

When Beard left the South Plains 10 months ago to become coach at his alma mater, and their most-hated rival, Red Raiders fans immediately started pointing to this chance to let him hear how they felt. It was raucous in the arena long before tipoff in the game to wrap up the first half of the Big 12 schedule, and stayed that way through the end of the victory that kept them undefeated at home.

Kevin McCullar had 19 points, including 12 made free

throws, while Bryson Williams added 16 points and Davion Warren 10 for the Red Raiders (17-5, 6-3 Big 12).

Marcus Carr had 16 points to lead Texas (16-6, 5-4).

No. 1 Auburn 100, Alabama 81: Wendell Green Jr. scored a season-high 23 points off the bench as the host Tigers cruised past the rival Crimson Tide.

Green led Auburn in scoring while also recording eight rebounds and six assists with only one turnover. Jabari Smith added 17 points as the Tigers (21-1, 9-0 Southeastern Conference) extended the nation's longest winning streak to 18.

No. 10 Kansas 70, No. 21 Iowa State 61: David McCormack scored 14 points, Jalen Wilson had 13 rebounds, and the visiting Jayhawks defeated the Cyclones.

McCormack made all seven of his shots and had 13 rebounds for Kansas (18-3, 7-1 Big 12),

which was without Ochai Agbaji. The Big 12's leading scorer at 20.9 points per game, Agbaji didn't play due to COVID-19 protocols.

No. 13 Michigan State 65, Maryland 63: Malik Hall made a driving layup with 1.9 seconds left, and the visiting Spartans survived a second-half rally by the Terrapins.

Hall led Michigan State (17-4, 8-2 Big Ten) with 16 points, and Joey Hauser and Marcus Bingham Jr. had 10 apiece.

No. 15 Providence 86, St. John's 82: Jared Bynum scored 19 points and Al Durham made eight straight free throws in the final 27 seconds as the visiting Friars held off the Red Storm for their sixth straight victory.

Nate Watson scored 15 of his 16 points in the second half for surprising Providence (19-2, 9-1 Big East), which holds sole possession of first place in the conference standings.

Creighton 59, No. 17 Connecticut 55: Ryan Hawkins scored 23 points and the visiting Bluejays upset the Huskies.

Hawkins hit eight of his 12 shots, including 4 of 5 from three-point range for Creighton (13-7, 5-4 Big East).

No. 22 Tennessee 90 Texas A&M 80: Kennedy Chandler scored 16 points, Olivier Nkamhoua added 15 and the host Volunteers beat the Aggies.

Mississippi 76, No. 25 LSU 72: Daeshun Ruffin scored 19 points before leaving the game in the second half because of an apparent leg injury, and the visiting Rebels held off the Tigers.

Utah State 73, Air Force 46: Justin Bean and Brandon Horvath scored 17 points apiece as the host Aggies easily beat the Falcons.

Nik Jackson and Joseph Octave scored nine points apiece for Air Force (10-10, 3-6).

Coyotes end Avs' home win streak at 18 games

Associated Press

DENVER—Alex Galchenyuk was the only scorer in the shootout, and the Arizona Coyotes rallied to beat Colorado 3-2 on Tuesday night, snapping the Avalanche's 18-game home winning streak.

Galchenyuk had a second-period goal and Lawson Crouse also scored for the Coyotes. Scott Wedgewood stopped 38 shots in regulation and overtime. He made a game-sealing save on Nazem Kadri on Colorado's last shootout try.

"I was confident in myself. I think that's one thing I've been working on," Wedgewood said. "I need to go up against the best to prove I can be one of the best."

The Avalanche had won 10 in a row since an overtime loss in Nashville on Jan. 11. Two of those wins came against Arizona, including a shootout victory in Denver to start the 10-game winning streak.

Colorado is a legitimate Stanley Cup contender. The Coyotes are rebuilding, but they have played the Western Conference leaders tough this season.

"We mentioned many times this year that we have a group with a lot of pride, a lot of character and a lot of leadership," Arizona coach Andre Tourigny said. "The boys take pride in the way they play, the way they bounce back. They know the Avs are a really good team, they were on a roll. They arrived here with a lot of pride, they played with a lot of passion, and they battled all the way through."

Darcy Kuemper had 22 saves, and Mikko Rantanen and Nazem Kadri scored for Colorado, which lost its first home game since Nov. 3 against Columbus. Their last regulation loss at home came on Oct. 26 against Vegas.

"First period was kind of weird, but the last two periods we didn't give up a lot until they tied it up," Rantanen said.

Spring training delay likely as MLB talks turn contentious

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Whatever little chance there was of an on-time start to spring training all but vanished Tuesday during a contentious 90-minute negotiating session between locked out players and Major League Baseball.

Players made two slight moves during the first meeting in a week.

The union lowered its proposed pool of money for pre-arbitration-eligible players from \$105 million to \$100 million. The union also cut the number of players it wants credited with an additional year of major league service to the top 20 at each position in each league by WAR, or the top seven, depending on position, down from 30 and 10.

Players and owners did not attend the session Tuesday but participated by video.

A session on noneconomic issues is set for Wednesday and there is no date for the resumption of talks on the core matters, such as luxury tax thresholds. Owners are scheduled to meet from Feb. 8-10 in Orlando, Fla., making it less likely there could be negotiations over those days.

Given the lack of urgency in talks to end a work stoppage that began Dec. 2, both sides are behaving as if it is a foregone conclusion that spring training workouts will not start as scheduled on Feb. 16.

Players don't start accruing salaries until the regular season, scheduled to start on March 31, making it unlikely there will be great movement until mid- to late February at the earliest.

A minimum of three weeks of training and exhibition games are needed to start the season, with additional time beforehand for players to report to training camps and undergo COVID-19 protocols.

In a sign of the lack of progress, the players' association is making \$5,000 stipends available to its members. The union had \$178.5 million in cash, U.S. Treasury securities and investments on Dec. 31, 2020, according to its latest financial disclosure form filed with the U.S. Department of Labor.

Baseball's ninth work stoppage and first since 1995 started when the five-year collective bargaining agreement expired on Dec. 1.

Kreider, Rangers down Panthers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Chris Kreider had two power-play goals and an assist and the New York Rangers beat the NHL-leading Florida Panthers 5-2 on Tuesday.

Artemi Panarin had a goal and two assists, Mika Zibanejad had a goal and an assist, and Alexis Lafrenière also scored for the Rangers. Igor Shesterkin stopped 34 shots to help give coach Gerard Gallant his 300th career victory. New York heads into the All-Star break with four wins in its last six overall, and seven of eight at home.

Lightning 3, Sharks 2 (OT): Victor Hedman scored from the left circle with 2:15 left in overtime, and host Tampa Bay beat San Jose. Hedman's goal came 39 seconds after Lightning defenseman Ryan McDonagh was called for tripping, but the Sharks' power play was negated when Timo Meier was sent off for embellishment.

Bruins 3, Kraken 2: David Pastrnak scored twice, including a tiebreaking power-play goal in the third period, to lift host Boston over Seattle.

Taylor Hall added a goal and an assist to help the Bruins win for the second time in three games heading into the All-Star break. Linus Ullmark had 25 saves for Bos-

ton.

Maple Leafs 7, Devils 1: Mitchell Marner had two goals and an assist, Jack Campbell had 31 saves and Toronto rolled at New Jersey.

Capitals 4, Penguins 3 (OT): Dmitry Orlov scored his second goal of the game in the final minute of overtime to give Washington the win at Pittsburgh.

Islanders 4, Senators 1: Oliver Wahlstrom and Mathew Barzal scored in the second period, Ilya Sorokin stopped 26 of 27 shots and host New York beat Ottawa.

Predators 4, Canucks 2: Filip Forsberg scored twice and Juuse Saros made 30 saves in the 100th win of his NHL career, leading host Nashville past Vancouver.

Flyers 3, Jets 1: James van Riemsdyk snapped a tie game when he scored off a rebound with 4:09 left to lift host Philadelphia over Winnipeg for its second straight win.

Flames 4, Stars 3: Oliver Kylington exited the penalty box, joined a rush and scored to cap a three-goal rally in the third period as Calgary won at Dallas.

Golden Knights 5, Sabres 2: Mark Stone, Jonathan Marchessault and Brett Howden each had a goal and an assist and Vegas beat visiting Buffalo.