

## Omicron drives death toll in US to 900K

*Associated Press*

Propelled in part by the wildly contagious omicron variant, the U.S. death toll from COVID-19 hit 900,000 on Friday, less than two months after eclipsing 800,000.

The two-year total, as compiled by Johns Hopkins University, is greater than the population of Indianapolis, San Francisco, or Charlotte, N.C.

The milestone comes more than 13 months into a vaccination drive that has been beset by misinformation and political and legal strife, though the shots have proved safe and highly effective at preventing serious illness and death.

"It is an astronomically high number. If you had told most Americans two years ago as this pandemic was getting going that 900,000 Americans would die over the next few years, I think most people would not have believed it," said Dr. Ashish K. Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health.

He lamented that most of the deaths happened after the vaccine gained authorization.

"We got the medical science right. We

failed on the social science. We failed on how to help people get vaccinated, to combat disinformation, to not politicize this," Jha said. "Those are the places where we have failed as America."

President Joe Biden lamented the milestone in a statement Friday night, saying, "After nearly two years, I know that the emotional, physical, and psychological weight of this pandemic has been incredibly difficult to bear."

He again urged Americans to get vaccinations and booster shots. "Two hundred and fifty million Americans have stepped up to protect themselves, their families, and their communities by getting at least one shot — and we have saved more than one million American lives as a result," Biden said.

Just 64% of the population is fully vaccinated, or about 212 million Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Nor is COVID-19 finished with the United States: Jha said the U.S. could reach 1 million deaths by April.

Among the dead is Susan Glister-Berg, 53, of Sterling Heights, Mich., whose chil-

dren had to take her off a ventilator just before Thanksgiving after COVID-19 ravaged her lungs and kidneys.

"She's always cared more about people than she did herself. She always took care of everyone," said a daughter, Hali Fortuna. "That's how we all describe her: She cared for everyone. Very selfless."

Glister-Berg, a smoker, was in poor health, and was apparently unvaccinated, according to her daughter. Fortuna just got the booster herself.

"We all want it to go away. I personally don't see it going away anytime soon," she said. "I guess it's about learning to live with it and hoping we all learn to take care of each other better."

The latest bleak milestone came as omicron is loosening its grip on the country.

New cases per day have plunged by almost a half-million since mid-January, when they hit a record-shattering peak of more than 800,000. Cases have been declining in 49 states in the last two weeks, by Johns Hopkins' count, and the 50th, Maine, reported that confirmed infections are falling there, too, dropping sharply over the past week.

## Pentagon says Kabul airport blast was unstoppable

**BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS**

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The suicide bombing in August at the Kabul airport that killed 11 Marines, a sailor and a soldier in the final days of the U.S. war in Afghanistan was not supported by terrorist gunfire and the attack could not have been prevented, the top general in charge of military operations in the Middle East said Friday.

A lone fighter for Afghanistan branch of the Islamic State, known as ISIS-Khorasan, set off a single bomb at about 5:36 p.m. that day, which is counter to initial reports that multiple terrorists fired shots on the crowd immediately following the blast, Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie said during a news briefing at the Pentagon.

The new information comes after a team of military leaders conducted an investigation that included expert analysis and testi-

mony from more than 100 people, he said.

"While nothing can bring back the 11 Marines, the soldier and the sailor that we tragically lost in this attack, it's important that we fully understand what happened," said McKenzie, the commander of U.S. Central Command. "Their sacrifice demands nothing less."

The bomb blast "direct[ed] ball bearings through a packed crowd and into our men and women at [the] Abbey Gate" of Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, he said.

"The disturbing lethality of this device was confirmed by the 58 U.S. service members who were killed and wounded despite the universal wear of body armor and helmets that did stop ball bearings that impacted them but could not prevent catastrophic injuries to areas not covered," McKenzie said.

The attack also killed 170 Afghan civilians.

McKenzie told reporters in August after the attack that U.S. troops returned fire at enemy fighters shooting into the crowds following the explosion. Investigators later found this was untrue by reviewing witness accounts, video and "findings and analysis of medical examiners and explosive experts," he said Friday.

"The best information we had in the immediate aftermath of the attack indicated that it was a complex attack by both a suicide bomber and ISIS-K gunman," McKenzie said. "The investigation found no definitive proof that anyone was ever hit or killed by gunfire, either U.S. or Afghan."

The initial false reports partially stemmed from "instant chaos and sensory overload" in the immediate aftermath of the attack, said Marine Corps Col. C.J. Douglas, who assisted with the investigation.

# US drawn in as Mideast wars push on UAE

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The wars of the wider Middle East that long surrounded the United Arab Emirates now have encroached into daily life in this U.S.-allied nation, threatening to draw America further into a

## ANALYSIS

region inflamed by tensions with Iran.

Yemen's Houthi rebels have launched missile and drone attacks since January targeting the Emirates, a federation of seven sheikhdoms home to oil-rich Abu Dhabi and the skyscrapers and beaches of Dubai. American forces at Al-Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi, home to some 2,000 U.S. troops, twice have opened fire with their own Patriot missiles to help intercept the air assaults by the Iranian-backed Houthis.

The two incidents represent the first time since 2003 that the U.S. has fired the Patriot in combat — a nearly 20-year span. It also comes after the Biden administration's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan and its declared end to the American combat mission in Iraq.

Though overshadowed by the Ukraine crisis, the U.S. now says it is committing more advanced fighter jets to the Emirates, as well as sending the USS Cole on a mission there. This spillover of Yemen's yearslong war into the UAE puts American troops in the crosshairs of the Houthi attacks — and raises the risk of a regional escalation at a crucial moment of talks in Vienna to potentially restore Iran's nuclear deal with world powers.

The Emirates since its founding in 1971 has been an otherwise safe corner of the Mideast. During the bloody

1980s war between Iran and Iraq, Dubai's massive Jebel Ali port repaired ships damaged in the so-called Tanker War. The 1991 Gulf War saw Kuwaitis flee into the Emirates and gave birth to the close military ties America has with the country today.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that followed again saw Dubai take in the money and families of wealthy emigres. But the Emirates always seemed to remain out of bounds amid its neighbors' wars. Part of that came from the centrist foreign policy of its founders whose oil wealth built cities from the sand, the other from its economic importance. Dubai, for instance, has been a major trade outlet for Iran even as it faced cycles of international sanctions.

Under Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi's crown prince and the country's de facto ruler since 2014, the Emirates has taken a much more muscular approach. Nowhere is that more evident than in Yemen, where it joined a Saudi-led coalition in 2015 in support of the country's exiled government against the Houthis.

It largely withdrew its ground forces from the conflict in 2019 as the war stalemated and the coalition faced widespread international criticism for airstrikes killing civilians. But in recent weeks, Emirati-backed Yemeni militias made major advances in the war, sparking the Houthi counterattacks deep into the Emirates.

Now, wedged between sunny commodities reports and morning banter, state-owned Dubai talk radio opens newscasts with the latest attacks. A new message in some commercial segments urges the public not to share "rumors" — a re-

minder of how this autocratic nation that already tightly restricts speech has criminalized sharing any videos showing an attack or missile interception.

The U.S. State Department has urged Americans to "reconsider travel due to the threat of missile or drone attacks." The British Foreign Office starkly warned Wednesday that "further attacks are very likely." France meanwhile will send Rafale fighter jets based in the UAE on "surveillance, detection and interception missions if necessary," French ambassador Xavier Chatel said.

Yet bars and hotels in Dubai remain busy as the city-state welcomes travelers and business after conducting a major vaccination campaign amid the coronavirus pandemic.

But keeping business going requires the UAE to remain safe for all. State-linked media has praised the country's armed forces and air defense corps. And the Emirates has invested heavily in that defense. It uses both the Patriot missile and the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, which it acquired at a cost of over \$1 billion.

The Emirates used the THAAD in two interceptions, the first time the system has ever been fired in combat, said Gen. Frank McKenzie, the head of the U.S. military's Central Command. The U.S. announced a possible \$65 million sale of parts for HAWK, Patriot and THAAD missile systems to the UAE on Thursday.

However, the Patriot missiles visible on the outskirts of Dubai simply have pointed north for years toward Iran, seen by Sheikh Mohammed as its greatest threat. The attacks from the Houthis have come from the southwest. And on

Wednesday, the UAE's military acknowledged intercepting drones claimed to have been launched by a shadowy group that earlier conducted an attack targeting a palace in Saudi Arabia from Iraq.

That widens the area that needs to be protected by air defenses, putting an additional burden on them and risking the chance that a complex attack could break through.

Such an attack could be catastrophic, like a 2019 assault that saw cruise missiles and drones successfully penetrate Saudi Arabia and strike the heart of its oil industry in Abqaiq. That attack temporarily halved the kingdom's production and spiked global energy prices by the biggest percentage since the 1991 Gulf War.

While the Houthis claimed the Abqaiq attack, the U.S., Saudi Arabia and analysts blamed Iran. U.N. experts similarly said it was "unlikely" the Houthis carried out the assault, though Tehran denied being involved.

Already, the Houthis have described Al-Dhafra Air Base, home to a major American presence, as a legitimate target. Any attack harming U.S. troops likely would bring a response from Washington, even with President Joe Biden hoping to refocus on China and Russia. And a promised deployment of the Cole and the advanced fighter jets means more American equipment soon will be in the Emirates.

"They're going to demonstrate ... our commitment to our Emirati partners but also to be prepared to deal with very real threats that the Emiratis are under," Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said Wednesday. "And quite frankly, it's not just the Emiratis, it's our people there at Al-Dhafra too."

# Report: Hurdles to hypersonic weapons

*Bloomberg News*

The Pentagon doesn't have enough wide-open spaces on its missile test ranges to thoroughly evaluate new hypersonic weapons for the U.S., according to the military's testing office.

It also lacks key capabilities to adequately test the threat from incoming versions that adversaries including China and Russia are developing.

The hypersonics evaluation, contained in the non-public version of the Pentagon test office's annual report obtained by Bloomberg News, is a reality check on the Defense Department's plans to boost spending and speed development of the new weapons that

can travel five times the speed of sound and maneuver in flight like cruise missiles.

The report comes as Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and his deputy, Kathleen Hicks, are scheduled to meet virtually Thursday with about 14 defense contractor CEOs for a discussion "on hypersonic development" and other issues, according to spokesman John Kirby. "It is part of a regular drumbeat."

The report flags a range of other bottlenecks in U.S. efforts to prepare for the next-generation weapons.

Existing U.S. test ranges from Hawaii to Virginia that have corridors clear of civilians and commercial air traffic will be over-

whelmed by an increase of more than 50% in demand by 2025 unless they're expanded, according to the assessment labeled "Controlled Unclassified Information."

In addition, the report found that the Defense Department must improve modeling and simulation of attacks by adversaries because it's unable to adequately show that it could achieve the necessary "early detection of incoming missiles and effective tracking" and interception.

Nor, the testing office said, can the Pentagon "adequately represent" in testing that it could successfully stage hypersonic strikes against targets on land and sea that are protected by "radar and other sensors."

## Pence: Trump 'wrong' on overturning election

*Associated Press*

Former Vice President Mike Pence has directly rebutted Donald Trump's false claims that he somehow could have overturned the results of the 2020 election, saying that the former president was simply "wrong."

In a speech to a gathering of the conservative Federalist Society in Florida Friday, Pence addressed Trump's intensifying efforts to advance the false narrative that, as vice president, he had the unilateral power to prevent President Joe Biden from taking office.

"President Trump is wrong," Pence said. "I had no right to

overturn the election."

Pence's declaration marked his most forceful response yet to Trump, who has spent his post-presidency fueling the lie that the 2020 campaign was stolen from him. And it comes as Pence begins laying the groundwork for a potential run for president in 2024, which could put him in direct competition with his former boss, who is also teasing a comeback run. The relationship between the two men took on a new dynamic as Trump escalated his attacks on Pence.

In a statement Tuesday, Trump said the committee investigating the deadly Jan. 6 attack

on the Capitol should instead probe "why Mike Pence did not send back the votes for recertification or approval." And on Sunday, he blasted Pence, falsely declaring that "he could have overturned the Election!"

Vice presidents play only a ceremonial role in the counting of Electoral College votes, and any attempt to interfere in the count would have represented an extraordinary violation of the law and an assault on the democratic process.

Pence, in his remarks Friday to the group of lawyers in Lake Buena Vista, described Jan. 6, 2021 as "a dark day in the history of the

United States Capitol" and framed his actions that day as in line with his duty as a constitutional conservative.

"The American people must know that we will always keep our oath to the Constitution, even when it would be politically expedient to do otherwise," he told the group Friday. He noted that, under Article II Section One of the Constitution, "elections are conducted at the state level, not by the Congress" and that "the only role of Congress with respect to the Electoral College is to open and count votes submitted and certified by the states. No more, no less."

## North Carolina court strikes down partisan redistricting maps

*Associated Press*

RALEIGH, N.C. — A divided North Carolina Supreme Court struck down the state's new maps for congressional and General Assembly seats Friday, declaring that state courts had authority to throw out lines engineered to secure a long-term Republican advantage in an otherwise closely divided state.

By a 4-3 decision — with the justices who are registered Democrats making up the majority — the state's highest court directed the GOP-controlled legislature to redraw the plans by Feb. 18 and provide an explanation of how they calculated the partisan fair-

ness of the new boundaries. Any replacement maps would still be used for the May 17 primaries.

The court's decision reversed a ruling last month from a panel of three trial judges that let the maps stand, and declared partisan gerrymandering found in the redistricting approved by the legislature in November violated several provisions in the North Carolina Constitution. They include the right to free elections, freedom of speech and equal protections of citizens.

The legislature violates the constitution "when it deprives a voter of his or her right to substantially equal voting power on the

basis of partisan affiliation," read the order of the court's majority, signed by senior Associate Justice Robin Hudson. "Achieving partisan advantage incommensurate with a political party's level of statewide voter support is neither a compelling nor a legitimate governmental interest."

The trial judges had found ample evidence that the legislature approved maps that were "a result of intentional, pro-Republican partisan redistricting." But they declared it wasn't the judiciary's place to intervene in mapmaking — a duty left to the legislature — when partisan fairness in those plans was challenged.



# Northeast grapples with icy road hazards

Associated Press

Northeast residents were urged to stay off the roads with temperatures beginning to drop Friday evening as a major winter storm turned already slippery roads and sidewalks into ice-covered hazards.

The storm spread misery from the Deep South, where tree limbs snapped and a tornado claimed a life, to the nation's northeastern tip where snow and ice made travel treacherous Friday.

Massachusetts State Police responded to more than 200 crashes with property damage or inju-

ries, including one fatal crash, starting Thursday evening, officials said. New Hampshire State Police reported at least 70 crashes Friday morning.

"This number is most definitely low because reports are still being written and entered," state police in Massachusetts tweeted.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul warned residents as the snow blew out to sea late Friday and Saturday to stay home if possible to avoid ice-coated roadways and the threat of falling tree limbs in the Hudson Valley and Capital regions.

"We're not out of the danger zone yet," Hochul said. "The weather is wildly unpredictable."

More than a foot of snow fell in parts of Pennsylvania, New York and New England. Utility crews were making progress in an area stretching from Texas to Ohio after about 350,000 homes and businesses were in the dark at one point.

One of the hardest-hit places was Memphis, where more than 100,000 customers remained without power Friday night in Shelby County alone, according

to poweroutage.us, which tracks utility reports.

Crews worked to remove trees and downed power lines from city streets, while those who lost electricity spent a cold night at home, or sought refuge at hotels or homes of friends and family. Utility officials said it could take days for power to be restored.

It's also going to take days to clear 225 downed trees on city streets, and crews were working 16-hour shifts to get it done, Robert Knecht, Memphis' public works director, said Thursday night.

## Iranian official: US sanctions relief 'not sufficient'

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's foreign minister on Saturday welcomed U.S. sanctions relief intended to entice Iran back to the 2015 nuclear deal, but called it insufficient.

On Friday, the Biden administration restored some sanctions relief to Iran's atomic program as world powers and the Islamic Republic continue talks aimed at salvaging the languishing agreement.

"Lifting some sanctions in a real and objective manner could be interpreted as the good will that Americans talk about," Foreign

Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian told reporters.

However, he said the move "is not sufficient."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken signed several sanctions waivers related to Iran's civilian nuclear activities. The move reverses the Trump administration's decision to rescind them. It comes as U.S. negotiators return to Vienna for what could be a make-or-break session.

The waivers are ultimately intended to attract Iran back to the 2015 deal that it has been violating since former President Donald Trump withdrew from the

agreement in 2018 and re-imposed U.S. sanctions.

In the short term, the waivers will exempt foreign countries and companies that work in Iran's civilian nuclear sector from American penalties. The Trump administration rescinded them in May 2020.

Iran has gradually distanced itself from the terms of the nuclear deal with world powers after the U.S. pulled out of it. Iran has demanded the restoration of all sanctions relief it was promised under the deal before it returns to compliance.

"Good will, in our viewpoint,

means that something tangible happens on the ground," Amirabdollahian said.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh on Saturday also called the U.S. sanctions relief insufficient, saying Tehran expects the lifting of sanctions outlined under the nuclear deal.

"Everyone knows that is not sufficient," Khatibzadeh was quoted as saying by the Iranian Jamaran news website. "Indeed, the Islamic Republic of Iran is waiting for the U.S. to implement its duties and commitments according to the nuclear deal dimensions."

## Yacht, reportedly for Bezos, too big for Dutch bridge

Associated Press

ROTTERDAM, Netherlands — A giant, \$500 million yacht reportedly being built for Amazon founder Jeff Bezos faces a delivery problem: It may require dismantling a beloved, historic bridge in Rotterdam that is blocking its passage to the sea.

Reports last week that the Dutch city had already agreed to take apart the recently renovated Koningshaven Bridge, known locally as De Hef, sparked anger. On Facebook, locals are proposing to pelt the yacht with rotten eggs when it passes through.

However, a spokeswoman for Mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb told The Associated

Press on Friday that while a shipbuilder has requested temporarily taking apart the bridge this summer, no permit has yet been sought or granted.

"I think it's easy to understand why it's so controversial because this is a very beautiful, recently restored old bridge," said Lizette Touber. "It really is our heritage. And I think that if the rich can pay for it to be opened, which normally nobody else could do, then you get controversy."

In a written statement, Aboutaleb, who is on a visit to Colombia, said that once a request for a permit is submitted it will be assessed based on factors including economic

impact, environmental nuisance and possible risks to the "monumental structure" of the bridge.

"When the permit has been applied for, the municipality can make a decision about this, details can be further elaborated and a plan can be made in the event of a positive decision," the statement said.

The municipality declined to comment on who owns the yacht in question or identify the shipbuilder. An email sent to Amazon seeking comment went unanswered. A report by Bloomberg in May 2021 said the yacht was being built for Bezos by Oceanco at a cost of "upwards of \$500 million."

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Ice carving festival postponed over snow**

**MI** ST. JOSEPH — A Michigan winter festival for ice carvings has been postponed for a few weeks because of too much winter.

Organizers said the St. Joseph Ice Fest, scheduled for Feb. 4-6 has been moved to Feb. 25-27.

“Our ice carvers are coming from all over the country. With current and predicted road conditions, carvers are unable to make the drive,” officials said.

More than a foot of snow has fallen in some areas of southwestern Michigan and more was predicted. Crews “may not be able to keep up with the snow removal as needed for the placement of sculptures and prepare our city streets in the best way,” officials said.

**Supposed hit man turns in would-be employer**

**LA** COVINGTON — A supposed hit man turned in a man who wanted his business partner killed, Louisiana authorities said.

Ahmad Slyyeh, 30, of Metairie, turned himself in while detectives were searching for him, and was booked on one count of solicitation for murder, the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff’s office said. The man he tried to hire told authorities and the business partner.

The news release did not identify the business but said it was in the Slidell area.

**Church sues after city limits homeless meals**

**OR** BROOKINGS — A church is suing a

small city along the southern Oregon coast after an ordinance was passed barring churches in residential areas from serving more than two free meals a week to people experiencing homelessness.

“We have no intention of stopping now and we’re prepared to hold fast to our beliefs,” Rev. Bernie Lindley of St. Timothy’s Episcopal Church in Brookings said in a news release.

The ordinance against serving more than two free meals a week came in response to a petition from people living near the church, who said the church’s programs were creating public safety problems, Jefferson Public Radio reported.

The Episcopal Diocese of Oregon and St. Timothy’s are asking a federal court in Oregon to declare the ordinance invalid.

**3 fishermen saved after boat sinks in cold water**

**MA** SCITUATE — Three fishermen who clung to debris in the frigid waters off the coast of Massachusetts for nearly an hour after their boat sank survived thanks to a sharp-eyed woman on shore who called 911.

The 55-foot Bing Bing went down so fast about a mile from shore that the crew didn’t have time to don survival suits or even make a distress call.

“The whole boat flipped over; I was thrown in the water,” crew member Joe Roderick told WCVB-TV from his hospital bed, where he was recovering from hypothermia and from swallowing saltwater and diesel fuel. The other two crew members also required hospitalization.

They were in the 42-degree F water for about 45 minutes, clinging to a piece of hose, officials said.

The men had about 5 minutes left to live by the time they were rescued, officials told the caller.

**Killing over mayonnaise ends in life sentence**

**IA** LOGAN — A fatal hit-and-run that stemmed from a fight between acquaintances over mayonnaise has ended with a western Iowa man being sentenced to life in prison.

Kristofer Erlbacher, 29, of Woodbine, was sentenced to a mandatory life sentence after being convicted in December of first-degree murder in the 2020 killing of 30-year-old Caleb Solberg, of Moorhead, the Des Moines Register reported.

Investigators have said the men were eating and drinking at a Moorhead bar the night of Dec. 17, 2020, when Erlbacher put mayonnaise on Solberg’s food. A fist fight between the two men ensued, and Erlbacher left in his truck, making threats to hurt Solberg and others.

Prosecutors say later that night, Erlbacher spotted Solberg outside a cafe in nearby Pisgah and ran him down with his truck. He doubled back and ran over Solberg twice more to make sure Solberg was dead, officials said.

**16 markers disturbed in historic Black cemetery**

**NC** SALISBURY — More than a dozen gravestones were either broken or toppled in a historic Black cemetery in North Carolina where the oldest headstone is

said to date back more than 170 years, officials said.

It’s not clear when or why the Dixonville Cemetery was vandalized, but Dixonville-Lincoln Memorial Task Force Chair Emily Perry said it was heartbreaking to see vandalism affecting a project she has worked on for 11 years, the Salisbury Post reported.

One of the city’s oldest Black cemeteries, Dixonville Cemetery was deeded to the city of Salisbury in 1874. There are more than 500 documented burials that have occurred at the Dixonville site since 1914. However, many took place before there was official record-keeping and are unmarked.

The task force has been working to identify those names and connections since 2010.

**Fire sweeps barn, killing dozens of cattle**

**IN** WAKARUSA — A fire that swept a northern Indiana barn, killing up to about 90 cattle, may have been started by machinery parked inside the building, officials said.

Harrison Township Fire Chief Culvin Martin said firefighters battled the blaze, east of the Elkhart County town of Wakarusa, for about an hour before getting it under control, and the barn was left heavily damaged, The Elkhart Truth reported.

He said the fire is believed to have been started by a skid loader that was parked inside the barn.

Dennis Martin, the owner of the 160-acre property, said he believed that between 80 and 90 cattle perished in the fire, although some were rescued.

— From Associated Press



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# White says he's done after these Games

Associated Press

ZHANGJIAKOU, China — This really is it for Shaun White.

The three-time gold medalist made it clear that not only will the Beijing Games be his last Olympics, they'll mark his final contest, too.

During a reflective, sometimes emotional news conference Saturday, not far from the halfpipe where he'll take his last competitive ride, the 35-year-old said that, yes, he'll be hanging 'em up for good after the medal round next week.

"In my mind, I've decided this will be my last competition," he said.

It's a decision that's been building since a rough-and-tumble training stop in Austria in November. He was dealing with nagging remnants from injuries to his knee ... and back ... and ankle. He got lost on the mountain with the sun going down. It was one of those rare times when snowboarding didn't feel fun anymore.

"A sad and surreal moment," he called it. "But joyous, as well. I kind of reflected on things I've done and looked at the sun going down and went, 'Wow, next time I'm here, I won't be stressed about learning tricks or worried about some competition

thing.'"

White traditionally has taken a break for a season, sometimes two seasons, in the aftermath of an Olympics, so to hear him say he'd be checking out for good after Beijing was not a big shock. Still, it's not uncommon for some of the greats to make a curtain call. Usain Bolt, for example, competed in the 2017 world championships the year after going 3-for-3 in the Olympic sprints for the third straight time.

But White won't be going that route.

He is soaking in every moment on this fifth trip to the Games, and over his 45-minute session with the media, he fielded an equal number of questions about his past as about what's to come over the next seven days and beyond.

"I have some runs in my head that I'd like to do," he said. "And it's all about visualizing and making that happen the 'day of.'"

Though he refused to take it off the table, those runs probably will not include a triple cork — the three-flip trick that Ayumu Hirano of Japan has landed twice in competition this season, but has not won with, because he could not link another trick to it.

Back in 2013, White worked

on that trick for a time. Then, a different jump — the double cork 1440 — became the hottest thing in the halfpipe, so he abandoned the triple to work on that. The rest is history: The 1440 was not enough for him to win in Sochi, but four years ago in Pyeongchang, he linked two of them back to back and took his third gold medal.

"I'd never done that combination of tricks before and just put it down to win," White said. "I mean, it's a legacy performance."

His legacy goes well beyond that.

By making a choice that was unpopular in many circles — embracing competition, and embracing the Olympics — he took the entire sport with him and made the whole endeavor more mass-marketable, in large part because every sport needs a star.

He also set the bar in a game that treasures progression above all else. In 2006, he was the first man to land back-to-back 1080s in a contest. In 2010, he landed his patented Double McTwist 1260 — "The Tomahawk," he calls it — in a victory lap in Vancouver; it's a trick that's still relevant today.

Though others started landing the 1440 and linking two together before him, White did

it best — and did it when the stakes were the highest.

But when asked what would suffice as a "good" Olympics this time around, he wasn't talking about 1440s or triple corks or gold medals.

This has been a rough season for him — including an ankle injury, a bout with COVID-19, a late unscheduled trip to Switzerland to secure his Olympic spot and, most recently, a training plan that got thrown off schedule during his stay in Colorado in January.

"I approach every competition as, you've got to be content with your own riding," White said. "And as long as you can go out there and put down your best, and lay it out there, then you can walk away, and in your mind, be good with that."

White says he's toggling between trying to enjoy every moment of the last big contest week of his life and knowing there is work to do when the halfpipe opens for training Sunday.

But it's hard not to look back. He told about how when he was a kid, everything he did, day in and day out, was wrapped around snowboarding. "I don't know how many kids out there aspire to be a cowboy and then really get to be a cowboy," he said.

## Knight, Hensley help lead US women to rout of ROC

Associated Press

BEIJING — Hilary Knight had a goal and an assist, Nicole Hensley stopped 12 shots and the United States women's hockey team beat the Russians 5-0 Saturday night in a preliminary-round game at the Beijing Olympics.

Savannah Harmon had a goal and two assists for the defending Olympic champions, who improved to 2-0 and next play Switzerland (0-2) on Sunday.

The Americans outshot the

ROC 62-12 but had difficulty finishing with top-line center Brianna Decker watching on crutches after breaking her ankle in a tournament-opening win over Finland.

ROC's Maria Sorokina was exceptional in stopping 37 of the first 39 shots she faced, and 38 overall, before the U.S. finally broke the game open by scoring three times over a five-minute span. The run was capped by Alex Carpenter scoring with 11:16 remaining and led to Sorokina being yanked in favor of Daria Gredzen, who stopped 19 shots.

Grace Zumwinkle and Jesse Compher also scored for the U.S. in a game played before a small but vocally pro-Russian crowd.

The U.S. has yet to allow a goal in three Olympic meetings against a Russia-based team. Add in world championship matchups, and the U.S. extended its string to eight consecutive shutouts.

The last goal the U.S. allowed to a Russian team came in a 13-1 win at the 2015 world championships.

Decker was hurt while being tripped from behind in a 5-2 win Thursday. The three-time Olympian remains with the team, and tests showed no structural damage to her knee, which bent awkwardly as she went down.

Abby Roque took her spot on a line featuring wings Carpenter and Amanda Kessel.



# Norway's Johaug wins first gold of Games

Associated Press

ZHANGJIAKOU, China — Therese Johaug won the first gold medal of the Beijing Olympics on Saturday, finishing first in the women's 15-kilometer cross-country skiathlon.

The Norwegian fought wind and frigid temperatures to ski away from a chase group of four, winning in 44 minutes, 13.7 seconds.

"I've trained thousands of hours for this and been away from home a lot over the years. So it's beautiful to reach this goal," Johaug said. "I've never had an Olympic gold medal. It's my first one."

The skiathlon is a mass-start race that began with 7.5 kilometers of classic skiing. After two laps around the 3.75-kilometer course, racers came through the stadium and quickly switched to skate skis before heading out for another two laps.

Johaug led through the first skate lap, opened a gap on the second lap and crossed the line with a comfortable lead.

Russian athlete Natalia Nepryaeva, the current overall World Cup leader, pulled away from the group on the last climb to take silver, 30.2 seconds behind Johaug. Nepryaeva is competing in her second Olympics. She won bronze in a relay race at the Pyeongchang Games.

Teresa Stadlober of Austria followed just behind for the bronze medal. She's competing in her third Winter Games and won her first medal, having just missed out in Pyeongchang.

Kerttu Niskanen of Finland finished fourth and Frida Karlsson of Sweden was fifth, just ahead of Jessie Diggins of the United States in sixth.

## Biathlon

Norway won gold in the biathlon mixed relay, beating France and the Russian team in the first biathlon event of the Games.

Johannes Thingnes Boe of Norway, Quentin Fillon Maillet of France and Eduard Latypov of the Russian team left the range close together after the last round of shooting and raced for position until the final stretch, when Boe sprinted for the win.

Norway, which came into the relay as the World Cup leader, also got strong performances from Marte Olsbu Røiseland and Tarjei Boe. But they trailed early in the race when Tiril Eckhoff struggled.

## Men's moguls

Walter Wallberg of Sweden dethroned the so-called King of Moguls to take home the gold in the freestyle skiing men's moguls.

The Swede looked almost in shock when his score of 83.23 flashed on the scoreboard, edging that of defending Olympic champion Mikael Kingsbury of Canada late Saturday night. Wallberg picked up points for his speed over the smooth and technical skiing style of Kingsbury, who ended up with silver.

Ikuma Horishima of Japan took home the bronze.

Wallberg's surprise victory interrupts the men's moguls dominance of Team Canada, which had won the event in the last three Winter Games. This was the 21-year-old's first major win.

## Short-track speedskating

China won its first gold of the Beijing

Games, emerging victorious in the mixed team relay at short track speedskating in the event's Olympic debut.

Wu Dajing edged Italy's Pietro Sighel by .016 seconds — or half a skate blade — to claim gold on Saturday night. Hungary earned bronze.

Qu Chunyu, Fan Kexin and Ren Ziwei joined Wu for the historic victory. China was the favorite coming in, having led the World Cup standings this season.

## Ski jumping

Slovenia's Ursa Bogataj took Olympic gold in women's ski jumping, floating 100 meters (328 feet) with 121 points on the final jump.

Katharina Althaus of Germany earned silver for the second straight Olympics and Bogataj's fellow Slovenian Nika Kriznar took bronze. Japan's Sara Takanashi had entered as one of the favorites, but finished fourth.

This was the third time women had jumped for gold in the Winter Olympics.

## Speedskating

Irene Schouten gave the mighty Dutch a gold in the first speedskating event of the Games, breaking a 20-year-old Olympic record in the women's 3,000 meters. Skating in the last of 10 pairs, Schouten turned in a blazing final lap to post a winning time of 3 minutes, 56.93 seconds.

That broke the previous Olympic mark of 3:57.70, set by Germany's Claudia Pechstein at the 2002 Salt Lake City Games. Italy's Francesca Lollobrigida held on for the silver in 3:58.06. The bronze went to Canada's Isabelle Weidemann in 3:58.64.

# Great Wall doesn't stop wind, cold for slopestyle

Associated Press

ZHANGJIAKOU, China — Not even "The Great Wall" could stave off a piercing, bone-chilling wind.

The snow replica of China's iconic monument lined the top of the Olympic slopestyle course to cut down on the blustery conditions. All it really did Saturday was provide an eye-catching backdrop.

In gusty conditions that led to arctic-feeling wind chills, two-time defending Olympic champion Jamie Anderson and the rest of the women's snowboarders glided through the rails and jumps — albeit a little chilled — during the qualifying round in the

mountains above Beijing.

Some riders wore hand and feet warmers to protect against the elements. Others donned facemasks or neck sleeves to keep the whipping wind at bay.

Nothing fully worked. Not even the protection of "The Great Wall."

"I like the Great Wall. I do think it's helping a little bit, for sure," said Anderson, who finished fifth in qualifying to make Sunday's 12-woman final.

Then, she jokingly added: "They need a bigger wall."

The temperature hovered around 5 degrees and felt like minus-12 during the com-

petition. The wind was listed at 13 mph, but the more telling sight may have been a wind sleeve next to the final jump: It was blowing straight out, then sideways, then straight out again.

"It's cold," Anderson said. "It's hard to, like, keep your core temperature warm and then doing tricks feels a little bit more intimidating."

Zoi Sadowski Synnott of New Zealand navigated the extreme conditions to turn in qualifying's top score of 86.75. Synnott might just be the biggest challenger to Anderson. She beat Anderson last month at the Winter X Games.

# Players reject offer of federal mediation

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The start of spring training likely will be a casualty of Major League Baseball's lockout, which will threaten opening day unless the drawn-out talks lead to a deal in less than a month.

After a half-year of bickering over the sport's economics, baseball's warring factions couldn't even agree on whether to have a mediator.

The Major League Baseball Players Association on Friday ruled out a third party intervening, one day after MLB asked for help from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service.

"Two months after implementing their lockout, and just two days after committing to players that a counterproposal would be made, the owners refused to make a counter, and instead requested mediation," the union said in a statement.

"After consultation with our executive board, and taking into account a variety of factors, we have declined this request. The clearest path to a fair and timely agreement is to get back to the table. Players stand ready to negotiate."

Owners locked out players on Dec. 2, im-

mediately following the expiration of a five-year collective bargaining agreement. There have been just three in-person negotiating sessions on core economics since, on Jan. 24-25 and this past Tuesday, plus a digital session on Jan. 13. The sides are still far apart.

"With camps scheduled to open in less than two weeks, it is time to get immediate assistance from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service to help us work through our differences and break the deadlock," MLB said in a statement.

"It is clear the most productive path forward would be the involvement of an impartial third party to help bridge gaps and facilitate an agreement," the league said. "It is hard to understand why a party that wants to make an agreement would reject mediation from the federal agency specifically tasked with resolving these disputes, including many successes in professional sports."

No negotiating sessions are scheduled on the primary economic issues. The sides met three times this week on non-core topics.

"We don't need mediation because what we are offering to MLB is fair for both

sides," tweeted pitcher Max Scherzer, who agreed to a \$130 million, three-year contract with the New York Mets on the day prior to the lockout.

"We want a system where threshold and penalties don't function as caps, allows younger players to realize more of their market value, makes service time manipulation a thing of the past, and eliminate tanking as a winning strategy," Scherzer wrote.

George H. Cohen, director of the FMCS from 2009-13 after many years as an outside lawyer for the baseball players' association, mediated disputes involving the NFL, NBA and Major League Soccer.

"A mediator's objective is to try to persuade the parties that it's in their best interests to try to resolve their problem directly — namely to control their own destinies," he said. "In the end, it's the parties that reach an agreement. All I did was to provide them a forum and an opportunity and some thinking that goes into it."

Players blame owners for the lockout. Commissioner Rob Manfred said his side was being proactive, not wanting to risk a late-season strike similar to the one that wiped out the 1994 World Series.

# Vucevic leads Bulls to victory over Pacers

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Nikola Vucevic scored a season-high 36 points and had 17 rebounds, DeMar DeRozan added 31 points and the Chicago Bulls beat the Indiana Pacers 122-115 on Friday night.

Vucevic went 16-for-21 from the field and had four assists and three blocks to help Eastern Conference-leading Chicago win for the fourth time in six games. All-Star Zach LaVine sat out because of back spasms.

**Jazz 125, Nets 102:** Donovan Mitchell scored 27 points in his return from a concussion that sidelined him for eight games, Bojan Bogdanovic added 19 points and host Utah sent Brooklyn to a seventh straight loss.

The Nets were without James Harden (hamstring), Kevin Durant (knee), LaMarcus Aldridge (ankle) and Joe Harris (ankle).

**Cavaliers 102, Hornets 101:** Kevin Love made two free throws with 1.2 seconds left and scored 25 points and visiting Cleveland held on to beat Charlotte.

Terry Rozier scored 24 points for Char-

lotte.

**Mavericks 107, 76ers 98:** Luka Dončić had 33 points, 13 rebounds and 15 assists for his 44th career triple-double as Dallas rallied from a 16-point, second-quarter deficit to beat host Philadelphia.

Joel Embiid had 27 points and 13 rebounds for the 76ers, who have lost two straight games for the first time since a three-game skid in mid-December. Dallas native Tyrese Maxey added 18 points.

**Raptors 125, Hawks 114:** Pascal Siakam matched his season high with 33 points, Fred VanVleet had 26 points and 11 assists and Toronto beat visiting Atlanta for its fifth straight victory.

Trae Young had 22 points and 13 assists for the Hawks. Atlanta is 8-2 in its last 10, losing only to Toronto.

**Spurs 131, Rockets 106:** Keldon Johnson had 28 points and host San Antonio punctuated Zach Collins' return from a nearly two-year absence with a victory over Houston.

Collins had 10 points to help San Antonio snap a three-game skid. The 7-foot former Gonzaga star had not played an NBA game since Aug. 15, 2020, with the Portland Trail

Blazers. He had two operations on his left foot over the 10 months and signed with the Spurs in the offseason.

**Celtics 102, Pistons 93:** Jayson Tatum scored 24 points in 28 minutes and visiting Boston beat Detroit for its fourth straight victory and sixth in seven games.

Hamidou Diallo had 21 points and 14 rebounds for Detroit. The Pistons lost for the seventh time in eight games.

**Thunder 96, Trail Blazers 93:** Luguentz Dort had 23 points and Oklahoma City held off host Portland for its first three-game winning streak since December.

Portland was short-handed after trading Norman Powell and Robert Covington to the Los Angeles Clippers earlier Friday for Eric Bledsoe, Justise Winslow, rookie Keon Johnson and a 2025 second-round pick.

**Pelicans 113, Nuggets 105:** Herbert Jones scored 18 of his 25 points in the fourth quarter, and visiting New Orleans sent Denver to its third straight loss.

Denver's Nikola Jokic returned after a one-game absence with a sore toe with 25 points, 12 boards and nine assists but was limited to 10 shots.