

US aims to build on UAE security promises

The Washington Post

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates — The head of U.S. Central Command arrived in the United Arab Emirates on Sunday to build on recent measures announced by the Pentagon to help reinforce the UAE's defenses after attacks by Iranian-affiliated rebels in Yemen.

U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Kenneth McKenzie Jr. is expected to meet with UAE leaders and offer a plan to enhance information-sharing on air defenses and to hear out requests for any additional assistance the Emirates might need. Last week, the Pentagon said it would send the guided missile destroyer USS Cole and a squadron of advanced F-22 fighters to the UAE, where recent missile attacks have fueled alarm and triggered a response from U.S. troops who are stationed here.

"The purpose of my visit is assurance," McKenzie said in an interview, and to "make sure that they know we're a reliable partner."

The United Arab Emirates is part of a coalition led by Saudi Arabia that for years has been conducting airstrikes against the Houthi rebels in a bid to restore Yemen's internationally recognized government. The Houthis control large parts of the country — including Sanaa, the capital — and are thought to be supported by Iran.

"The equipment they are firing is certainly Iranian," McKenzie said of the Houthis. "If Iran didn't approve this specific attack, they're certainly morally responsible for it."

The Houthis and the UAE have long been on opposite sides of the fighting in Yemen, but the strikes on UAE soil mark

a dramatic change in tactics.

U.S. troops stationed here at Al-Dhafra Air Base have fired Patriot missiles to intercept Houthi-launched missiles on at least two occasions in recent weeks. The attacks forced the Americans to scramble for cover in reinforced bunkers.

McKenzie, who moved up his trip to Abu Dhabi in light of the attacks, surmised that a "confluence" of factors had precipitated this turn of events — but that the key development was Iran's loss of influence in Iraq and a need for new fronts in its bid for regional dominance.

"The Iranians have accused the UAE of being involved in the Iraqi election. Iran needs culprits because the election didn't go well for them," McKenzie said. "In Iraq in particular, Iran thought they had a political way forward to eject the United

States from Iraq ... now I think they're grasping at alternatives, and some of those alternatives may be kinetic and violent."

The general stated during a forum last week sponsored by the Middle East Institute that he was bracing for further attacks. The hardware being sent to the UAE is intended to help stave off that threat.

McKenzie said in the interview that the USS Cole, with its "great radar," and the superior "look-down capabilities" of the F-22s are intended to improve the tracking of and response to shipments of contraband heading toward Yemen, including potential shipments of missiles. The USS Cole will hover in the waters around the Emirates, he noted, and the F-22s will be housed at Al-Dhafra, where no U.S. fighter jets are currently based.

Navy confirms authenticity of leaked F-35 crash video

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

Leaked video footage posted on social media over the weekend shows an F-35C Lightning II crashing aboard an aircraft carrier and falling into the South China Sea, a Navy spokesman confirmed to Stars and Stripes on Monday.

The footage began circulating Sunday on Reddit and Twitter. The \$103 million advanced stealth fighter is seen hitting the USS Carl Vinson's flight deck and bursting into flames. It then skids across the flight deck before splashing into the ocean.

"We are aware that there has been an unauthorized release of video footage from flight deck cameras onboard USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) of the F-35C Lightning II crash that occurred Jan. 24, in the South China Sea," Naval Air Forces Pacific spokesman Cmdr. Zachary Harrell said in an email. "There is an ongoing investiga-

tion into both the crash and the unauthorized release of the shipboard video footage."

A mobile phone was apparently used to film the 1-minute, 2-second clip from footage playing on a desktop computer likely taken from the Pilot's Landing Aid television system — a closed-circuit system on the carrier that records takeoffs and landings.

In the video, a landing signal officer can be heard screaming "wave off, wave off," an order for the pilot to abort the landing before the aircraft crashes into the deck. The pilot appears to eject at an angle while the burning jet is skidding along its side.

The timestamp on the footage shows 4:31 p.m. on Jan. 24.

The leaked footage isn't the first to come out of the incident. In late January, photos appeared on social media of the F-35 in the water, along with a shorter video showing

the aircraft approaching the carrier before passing overhead and disappearing from view. The Navy also confirmed the authenticity of those leaks.

The crash left the pilot and six other sailors injured. Three were flown to a hospital in Manila, the Philippines; the others were treated aboard the Carl Vinson. The three sailors have been released from the hospital.

The Japan Coast Guard issued a maritime navigational alert Jan. 29 for salvage operations in the South China Sea, indicating that 7th Fleet is moving forward to recover the \$103 million aircraft.

Footage leaked in November showed a British F-35B taking off from the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth and then crashing into the Mediterranean Sea. The leak resulted in the arrest of a male sailor aboard the Queen Elizabeth, according to a Dec. 7 report from the UK Defence Journal.

US treaty, Italy rules hurt spouse careers

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Samara Sloan turned down a shot at a lucrative investment banking job because a U.S.-NATO military treaty first written in 1951 makes no provision for her to legally work while her husband serves in the Navy.

“That was a huge opportunity that I had to turn down with a very good salary,” said Sloan, who received the potential offer after moving to Naval Support Activity Naples in 2020. “It was a huge financial hit to my family.”

Sloan didn’t have much choice. Italian law makes it practically impossible in most cases for military spouses and children living in the country under the NATO Status of Forces Agreement to work anywhere except on base — and many of the jobs there aren’t open to them.

The agreement was written in an era when women were largely expected to stay home.

As time went on, supplemental agreements between the United States and NATO’s member countries addressed taxes, driving privileges and other issues related to U.S. military personnel in a foreign country. But they generally avoided rules on military dependent employment.

The last time the U.S. and Italy agreed on a supplement to the SOFA was 27 years ago, again without addressing employment.

Military spouse unemployment has been acknowledged as a problem by the services for decades, due in part to the nature of two- and three-year tours.

The problem affects many dependents, regardless of age or gender. But it disproportionately affects women, who make up 92% of the military spouse community, a July 2020 Deloitte Insights report stated.

And among the larger overseas military communities, Italy is arguably the toughest place for a spouse to be legally employed. Even teleworking for a U.S. company is technically illegal, if sometimes overlooked.

Italian law requires military dependents to give up their SOFA rights and protections if they want to work for a private American, Italian or other employer while living in Italy. Had Sloan taken the job, she would have been forced to give up her SOFA status, return to the U.S., wait for an Italian work visa and permit, and then pay Italian income taxes.

“The agreement does not exempt family members of ‘the Force’ (DOD civilians and active-duty service members) from Italian work visa requirements and paying taxes in the host nation to which they’re assigned when they are involved in non-duty related employment,” Morgan Gilliam, U.S. Navy Europe Africa Central spokeswoman, said in a statement.

For Sloan and other military dependents, the fallout from that inability to work is acute, ranging from under- or unemployment to résumé gaps, financial instability, mental health issues and other impacts that negatively affect their lives and the well-being of their families, experts say.

Financial insecurity and unfulfilled career or personal aspirations for spouses have “a direct impact on the retention of

skilled service members,” the 2020 Deloitte report said.

“If the military is to retain its most skilled service members, it needs to find ways to improve the military spouse experience, which includes ensuring military spouses are fully employed with meaningful careers,” the report stated.

It’s difficult to determine how many people like Sloan are impacted by NATO SOFA-related employment restrictions. But with a U.S. military community of 15,020 active-duty service members, reservists and Defense Department civilians in Italy, advocates have said it’s a common problem.

The Defense Department doesn’t track spouse employment outside of the continental U.S. separately, said Jennifer Goodall, director of Military Family Policy and Spouse Programs for the government relations team of the Alexandria, Va.-based Military Officers Association of America.

But unemployment for military spouses continues to hover around 22-24% and likely increased following the COVID-19 pandemic, Goodall said.

Goodall and others would like to see the NATO SOFA and supplemental agreements reviewed and revised to accommodate more job options, such as telecommuting for a U.S. employer. But that process could open an entire document for review, resulting in changes that extend beyond the employment issue.

“Because there are so many potential ramifications, this needs to be done thoughtfully and deliberately,” Goodall said.

Navy ID’s SEAL trainee who died after ‘Hell Week’

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — A Navy SEAL candidate who died just hours after completing the grueling Hell Week test was identified Sunday as a 24-year-old sailor who joined the military last year.

Seaman Kyle Mullen died at a San Diego area hospital on Friday after he and another SEAL trainee reported experi-

encing symptoms of an unknown illness, the Navy said.

The other sailor, whose name has not been released, was hospitalized in stable condition, the San Diego Union-Tribune reported Sunday.

The cause of death is unknown and under investigation. Both men fell ill just hours after they successfully completed the test that ends the first phase

of assessment and selection for the elite Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) class.

The Navy said neither one had experienced an accident or unusual incident during the five-and-a-half-day Hell Week.

Rear Adm. H.W. Howard III, the commander of Naval Special Warfare Command in Coronado, Calif., offered his sym-

pathies to Mullen’s family in a statement.

“We are extending every form of support we can to the Mullen family and Kyle’s BUD/S classmates,” Howard said.

Mullen joined the Navy in March 2021, according to his Navy biography. He reported to SEAL training in Coronado in July, the Union-Tribune said.

Japanese resort denies entry to foreigners

By JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — At least one ski resort in Hiroshima prefecture is turning away foreigners, specifically anyone affiliated with the U.S. military, apparently due to COVID-19 risks.

Utopia Saito, a ski area about 60 miles north of MCAS Iwakuni, is refusing service to anyone in a vehicle with license plates bearing a Y, A or E that indicate it's registered under the status of forces agreement. SOFA outlines the rules and responsibilities for anyone in Japan with the U.S. Defense Department.

"International numbers are not allowed to use the service," reads a sign in the resort parking lot that specifies SOFA plate numbers are not welcome.

Being denied entry is "extremely disappointing" for Hope

Carter, a spouse at MCAS Iwakuni who is a regular visitor to Utopia Saito along with her family.

"We called around and had trouble finding a place to go," she told Stars and Stripes over Facebook Messenger on Thursday. "The only two that will allow us in currently are Mizuho and Osarakan."

Utopia Saito is also discouraging Japanese skiers from outside Hiroshima prefecture from coming, as other resorts among the half-dozen in the prefecture are apparently doing, according to a manager for the MCAS Iwakuni outdoor recreation office.

"They are currently not accepting any tours, even local Japanese tour buses," Outdoor recreation manager Masahiko Hiromoto said Thursday. "We heard an individual went to a ski resort and was refused, so after we heard that we started calling all the ski

resorts, because we don't want to issue the equipment to the customer and they drive two to three hours to the ski resort only to be refused. That's sad."

U.S. service members, DOD civilian employees and their families emerged Jan. 31 after being confined for three weeks to their installations or their off base homes at the Japanese government's request. The stay-at-home order, with exceptions for essential services, arose after reports in December of SOFA members arriving in Japan and immediately testing positive for COVID-19. After three weeks of no outside travel, except for essential services, many Americans turned to Japan's renowned ski slopes for outdoor recreation. Instead, they ran into Japan's recently imposed public health measures as coronavirus case numbers surpassed previous records.

The Carters drove almost two hours to Utopia on Feb. 1 only to have an employee signal an "X" with their arms and point to the sign, said Hope Carter, whose husband, Marty Carter, works for Marine Corps Community Services at MCAS Iwakuni.

Hiroshima and neighboring Yamaguchi prefecture are under a quasi-emergency until Feb. 20 that encourages businesses to take measures to quell the spread of COVID-19. The omicron phase, the sixth wave of the coronavirus in Japan, is setting record-high case numbers across the country.

Under the quasi-emergency, which is in place in 34 of Japan's 47 prefectures, residents of one prefecture are discouraged from traveling into other prefectures.

A representative of Utopia Saito did not return phone messages left by Stars and Stripes on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

UN: N. Korea is stealing millions in cyberattacks

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — North Korea is continuing to steal hundreds of millions of dollars from financial institutions and cryptocurrency firms and exchanges, illicit money that is an important source of funding for its nuclear and missile programs, U.N. experts said in a report quoting cyber specialists.

The panel of experts said that according to an unnamed government, North Korean "cyber-actors stole more than \$50 million between 2020 and mid-2021 from at least three cryptocurrency exchanges in North America, Europe and Asia, probably reflecting a shift to diversify its cyber-crime operations."

And the experts said in the report's section on cyber activities obtained Sunday by The Associated Press that an unidentified cybersecurity firm reported that in 2021 the North's "cyber-actors

stole a total of \$400 million worth of cryptocurrency through seven intrusions into cryptocurrency exchanges and investment firms." These cyberattacks "made use of phishing lures, code exploits, malware, and advanced social engineering to siphon funds out of these organizations' internet-connected 'hot' wallets into DPRK-controlled addresses," the panel said, using the initials of the country's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The cryptocurrency funds stolen "go through a careful money laundering process in order to be cashed out," the panel of experts monitoring sanctions on North Korea said in the report to the U.N. Security Council.

In the executive summary of the new report, the experts said North Korea has continued to develop its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

'Space it up': Space Force to modify Air Force blues

By CHAD GARLAND AND
ALEXANDER W. RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes

The Space Force is going for "quick wins" with plans to tweak the Air Force blues uniform before eventually rolling out its own service dress outfit, its top enlisted leader said.

Chief Master Sgt. of the Space Force Roger A. Towberman said changes to buttons, name tags and insignia would distinguish members of the newest service, known as Guardians, from those of the Air Force. Both branches fall under the Department of the Air Force.

The goal is to "space it up a little bit," he said in a video message released internally last week, explaining that officials were ditching plans to introduce a completely new service dress uniform all at once. For now, "the chassis remains the same," he said.

The changes will transfer to the Space Force's final uniform as it works to create its own identity, two years after the service formed to operate and protect the military's satellite fleet.

Officials previewed a dress uniform prototype at a September conference, which some observers found reminiscent of costumes from science fiction shows like "Star Trek."

The uniform was being redesigned based on feedback from the force and has garnered positive feedback from wear-testers, Towberman said. But he cautioned that a textile shortage could affect when it will be available for purchase.

Towberman showed off a version of the service's rank insignia patch to be worn on the camouflage uniform. The patch was expected to go into production soon, with availability possible around May, he said.

US puts 33 Chinese firms on red flag list

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is raising red flags about 33 Chinese companies whose legitimacy it cannot verify, imposing new restrictions on their ability to receive shipments from U.S. exporters and requiring extra diligence from American companies that want to do business with them.

The Commerce Department said Monday that it was adding the companies to what is known as the “Unverified List,” a roster of businesses worldwide that are subjected to stricter export control because U.S. officials have been unable to do customary checks.

“The ability to verify the legiti-

macy and reliability of foreign parties receiving U.S. exports through the timely completion of end-use checks is a core principle of our export control system,” Matthew Axelrod, the department’s assistant secretary for export enforcement, said in a statement.

He added that the addition of 33 parties in the People’s Republic of China to the Unverified List “will assist U.S. exporters in conducting due diligence and assessing transaction risk, and signal to the PRC government the importance of their cooperation in scheduling end-use checks.”

The announcement comes as Beijing occupies the world’s attention by hosting the Winter

Games. And it follows a speech last week from FBI Director Christopher Wray in which he said the bureau was opening investigations related to Chinese intelligence operations about every 12 hours and warned there was “no country that presents a broader threat to our ideas, innovation and economic security than China.”

China has repeatedly rejected accusations from the U.S. government, saying Washington has made groundless attacks and malicious smears.

The Commerce Department’s action puts U.S. exporters on notice that they will now need a license if they want to ship products to any of the companies on

the list. It alerts the flagged companies that they must certify that they are legitimate and willing to comply with U.S. regulations to continue receiving shipments.

And the move is meant to advise China that it must permit U.S. checks and inspections of the companies if it wants them to come off the list.

The checks are typically coordinated with the Chinese government. When the U.S. is unable to conduct a check, or unable to verify a company’s legitimacy, the company can then be added to the Unverified List. It can come off the list by agreeing to a check and establishing that it is a legitimate business.

Frontier Airlines buying Spirit in \$3B carrier deal

Associated Press

Frontier is buying Spirit Airlines in a \$2.9 billion cash-and-stock deal that will create the nation’s fifth-largest carrier.

The tie-up is valued at \$6.6 billion when accounting for the assumption of debt and other liabilities.

The companies said Monday that the transaction will provide more low-cost fares for more travelers to destinations in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean. Frontier Group Holdings Inc. and Spirit Airlines Inc. also anticipate \$1 billion in annual consumer savings and are looking to expand their services with more than 350 aircraft on order.

In addition, Frontier and Spirit are looking to add more jobs. The companies foresee adding 10,000 direct jobs and thousands of additional jobs at their business partners by 2026.

“This transaction is centered around creating an aggressive ultra-low fare competitor to serve our guests even better, expand career opportunities for our

team members and increase competitive pressure, resulting in more consumer-friendly fares for the flying public,” Spirit CEO Ted Christie said in a prepared statement.

The carriers may be in for a very close look from antimonopoly regulators. The Biden administration has signaled a tougher line against big corporate mergers. Yet airlines have suffered a devastating stretch during the pandemic despite assistance from the U.S., and are in a weakened position heading into 2022.

Existing Frontier shareholders will own approximately 51.5% and existing Spirit stockholders will own approximately 48.5% of the combined airline. The transaction is expected to close in the second half of the year. It still needs approval from Spirit shareholders.

Spirit shareholders will receive 1.9126 shares of Frontier plus \$2.13 in cash for each existing Spirit share they own. This implies a value of \$25.83 per Spirit share at Frontier’s closing stock price of \$12.39 on Friday.

National Archives retrieved documents from Mar-a-Lago

The Washington Post

President Donald Trump improperly removed multiple boxes from the White House that were retrieved by the National Archives and Records Administration last month from his Mar-a-Lago residence because they contained documents and other items that should have been turned over to the agency, according to three people familiar with the visit.

The recovery of the boxes from Trump’s Florida resort raises new concerns about his adherence to the Presidential Records Act, which requires the preservation of memos, letters, notes, emails, faxes and other written communications related to a president’s official duties.

Trump advisers have denied any nefarious intent and said the boxes contained mementos, gifts, letters from world leaders and other correspondence. The items included correspondence with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, which

Trump once described as “love letters,” as well as a letter left for his successor by President Barack Obama, according to two people familiar with the contents.

The Archives has struggled to cope with a president who flouted document retention requirements and frequently ripped up official documents, leaving hundreds of pages taped back together — or some that arrived at the Archives still in pieces. Some damaged documents were among those turned over to the House select committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol by a pro-Trump mob.

“The only way that a president can really be held accountable long term is to preserve a record about who said what, who did what, what policies were encouraged or adopted, and that is such an important part of the long-term scope of accountability — beyond just elections and campaigns,” presidential historian Lindsay Chervinsky said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Home will be sold in non-fungible token deal

FL GULFPORT — A home along Florida's Gulf Coast will be auctioned off in the upcoming week as a non-fungible token in what is believed to be among the first such transactions in the United States.

Non-fungible tokens — or NFTs — use a version of the encryption technology employed to secure cryptocurrencies to create one-of-a-kind digital objects. The technology provides digital creations a kind of certificate of authenticity, allowing ownership of something that could otherwise be replicated endlessly.

In the case of the four-bedroom home in Gulfport, Fla., a California-based real estate technology company, Propy, will mint the property rights into a digital token and host an online auction, with bids starting at \$650,000.

Minting property rights into an NFT would allow owners to sell a home as quickly as a Venmo transaction, Leslie Alessandra, the home's current owner, told the Tampa Bay Times.

There could also be challenges given the volatility of cryptocurrency, and it's not yet clear if the value of a house tied to an NFT would be affected by the crypto market, Vasilakis said.

Historic school will be new civil rights museum

MS HATTIESBURG — A building that was the first school for Black students in Hattiesburg is going to be used as a civil rights museum.

Eureka School opened in 1921. WDAM reported the transformation into a museum started in 2006, when the Hattiesburg Convention Commission purchased the building.

Officials began restoring the building, but a 2013 tornado caused damage and stalled the renovations.

Work was completed in 2018.

Since then, the building has hosted events. Officials are now figuring out permanent exhibits for the museum.

Latoya Norman, director of museums for the Hattiesburg Convention Commission, said the museum will focus on Hattiesburg's role in the effort to register Black voters during Freedom Summer in 1964.

Firefighters rescue 1 of 2 dogs trapped in quarry

NC CHARLOTTE — Firefighters rescued one of two dogs trapped in a North Carolina quarry, using a crane to bring the 1-year-old animal to safety and a reunion with his family, officials said.

The Charlotte Fire Department received a call on Monday about two dogs stuck in a quarry near Interstate 485 in southwest Charlotte, The Charlotte Observer reported. The dogs were on a ledge about 170 feet down in the quarry. Firefighters and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Animal Care and Control determined there was no safe way to rescue them, a news release said.

A drone lowered into the quarry to check on the dogs discovered that one of the two had died. To rescue Zeus, the husky and pit bull mix, the quarry operators brought in a crane to

lower a firefighter into the quarry on Wednesday.

Zeus was checked out at an emergency animal hospital and reunited with his family, which was not identified. The family's 1-year-old Bella was identified as the dog that died in the quarry.

Man located after not knowing he won jackpot

NV LAS VEGAS — Nevada gambling regulators said their investigation tracked down an Arizona man who left Las Vegas after a visit last month, not knowing he'd won a \$229,368 slot machine jackpot.

The machine being played by Robert Taylor malfunctioned due to a "communication error" and neither he nor the Treasure Island Hotel & Casino realized that he'd won a progressive jackpot the evening of Jan. 8, the Nevada Gaming Control Board said Friday in a statement.

The jackpot was confirmed later after a review, but Taylor had returned to Arizona by then and the casino was unable to identify him, the board's statement said.

The board said it then began an investigation and eventually identified Taylor after two weeks of checking surveillance video, conducting witness interviews, studying electronic purchase records and reviewing ride-sharing data.

7 arrested in illegal weed growing operation

OR KEIZER — Police in Oregon said Saturday that they arrested seven people in what they called an

extensive illegal marijuana growing operation.

The operation was growing cannabis plants in six houses in residential areas of Salem and Keizer and children were living in two of the homes, the Keizer Police Department said.

Authorities seized 273 1-pound packages of marijuana, with a street value of about \$278,000, and 4,085 plants. The plants, once matured, could have yielded marijuana worth at least \$8 million.

All of those arrested were charged with unlawful manufacture of marijuana, unlawful possession of marijuana and attempted delivery of marijuana.

Police to start charging for body camera videos

IN INDIANAPOLIS — After a yearlong review, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department has begun charging for requests for police body camera videos.

The department, which has more than 1,290 officers equipped with body cameras, said its decision to implement fees for requesting videos followed a year of data collection and costs evaluation.

Under state law, public agencies are permitted to charge up to \$150 for copies of law enforcement recordings, The Indianapolis Star reported.

IMPD will charge \$50 for videos shorter than 30 minutes, \$100 for videos between 30 and 60 minutes and \$150 for videos longer than an hour. The department said the fee structure will be followed even if redacting and preparing a video takes more or less time than normal.

— From wire reports

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Rams build strong foundation to success

Associated Press

Andrew Whitworth still has the first voicemail he got from Sean McVay welcoming him to the Los Angeles Rams five years ago, and the left tackle plays it occasionally to tease his boss.

McVay had barely turned 31 at the time, and he had just become the NFL's youngest head coach — a title he still holds.

"He sounded pretty square on the voicemail, and a little cheesy," Whitworth said with a grin. "But he's not that. He's just so passionate sometimes. Once we finally got the chance to sit down and talk ball, it was like — sometimes you meet people and you're like, 'Man, we were destined to meet each other. We were destined to sit down.' We've been destined to be together and be around each other."

Whitworth and McVay didn't know it at the time, but they were also destined to sit down with Robert Woods, Cooper Kupp and Aaron Donald for a ride to a remarkable future.

Their half-decade with the Rams has been the best time of their careers — five winning records, four playoff teams, three NFC West titles and two Super Bowl berths — largely because McVay and Whitworth quickly teamed up with two receivers who also arrived in early 2017 and a defensive tackle who was already here to form the core of a perennial winner.

While big names from Todd Gurley to Odell Beckham Jr. have come and gone on the Rams' high-profile roster, McVay has always been able to count on Whitworth, Woods, Kupp and Donald. While the coach masterminds their moves, all four veterans are prolific contributors who rank among

the most dependable players in the league at their positions.

They're the cornerstones of the Rams' success, and newcomers to Los Angeles immediately understand what they're standing upon.

"It comes from the top down, Coach McVay, the leaders on this team — Aaron Donald, Robert Woods, Cooper Kupp," mid-season acquisition Von Miller said after the Rams' 20-17 victory over San Francisco in the NFC title game. "These guys have built something special, man, and it's an honor and a privilege to be a part of it."

The Rams are well-known for collecting superstars in the unique approach to team-building under McVay and general manager Les Snead. They've repeatedly sacrificed high draft picks to acquire elite veterans, annually assembling a self-described All-Star team built to contend urgently for championships.

But the Rams' risky strategy is possible only because of the moves they made in early 2017, shortly after the franchise finished its 12th consecutive non-playoff season and 13th consecutive non-winning season. Donald was already one of the NFL's best players, but he had little continuity and even less elite talent around him.

After taking a huge risk in hiring the precocious McVay, the Rams went shopping for a left tackle. McVay and Snead persuaded the longtime Bengals lineman to move his family to the West Coast, and Whitworth has been the bedrock of LA's offense and leadership ever since.

"In the five years I've been here, every year there's a new standard," Whitworth said. "This year, adding some of these play-

ers has really taken us to another step, and it's been great."

On the same day in March 2017, the Rams signed both Whitworth and Woods, a Los Angeles native and USC luminary who had underwhelmed in Buffalo. Woods embraced McVay's offense, and his cerebral, precise skills made him a perfect fit.

Nearly two months later, the Rams used a third-round pick on Kupp, a moderately regarded receiver from Eastern Washington who immediately proved he was much more. Kupp and Woods immediately clicked in offseason workouts, and their bond is now among the tightest on the roster, both on the field — they've combined for 10,143 yards receiving and 63 touchdowns in their five seasons together — and off.

The only thing preventing the Rams' core four from playing for a storybook ending in SoFi Stadium next weekend is Woods' season-ending knee injury. It's particularly painful for Kupp, who missed the Rams' first Super Bowl trip together three years ago with his own torn knee ligament.

But Woods is watching the games in the stands next to Kupp's wife and family, and he cheered wildly for the Rams in the NFC title game. Afterward, he took the field and shared meaningful hugs with several teammates, including an emotional moment with Kupp, who won the NFL's receiving triple crown this season.

"It's a special thing having someone like Rob on your team, having someone like him as a friend," Kupp said. "What he means for this team, even when he's not able to be out there with us, it's a special thing. He's a very special person. I love Rob. He's going to be my brother for the rest of my life."

Dolphins hire 49ers assistant McDaniel as head coach

Associated Press

The Miami Dolphins hired San Francisco 49ers offensive coordinator Mike McDaniel as their head coach Sunday, making him the first minority candidate to get hired so far this off-season.

McDaniel, who is biracial, replaces Brian Flores, who was fired despite posting winning records in the final two of his three seasons in Miami.

Flores sued the NFL, the Dolphins and two other teams last

week over alleged racist hiring practices for coaches and general managers, saying the league remains "rife with racism" even as it publicly condemns it.

McDaniel had worked under 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan for the past 11 seasons and gets his first shot as a head coach after only one year as offensive coordinator.

McDaniel was credited for his role in developing San Francisco's creative running game that

featured receiver Deebo Samuel as a running back at times, along with other wrinkles.

"Mike is awesome," 49ers quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo said last month. "He really is. He's kind of that, I don't want to say the mastermind behind everything, but he's kind of that guy in the background that doesn't say a whole ton to a lot of people, but his mind is always moving. The ideas that he comes up with are so fresh and new that it's a cool guy to have on the staff.

"He's a lot smarter than most of us. So he dumbs it down for us and kind of gets us all on the same page."

McDaniel could bring some of those wrinkles to Miami to feature playmaking receiver Jaylen Waddle in even more creative ways.

The Dolphins struggled offensively this season despite finishing 9-8 in a roller-coaster campaign that featured a seven-game losing streak followed by a seven-game winning streak.

Shiffrin's tumble in giant slalom will stick with her

Associated Press

BEIJING — Mikaela Shiffrin will not soon forget what happened Monday in her first race of the Beijing Olympics. The poor transition that came five turns, and about 10 seconds, into the defense of her 2018 gold medal in the giant slalom. The skidding slide onto her left side. The missed gate that meant she was done so early in the opening run of a two-leg event.

The first “DNF” — “Did Not Finish” — next to her name on any GS result sheet in more than four years, a streak encompassing 30 races.

It's not simply about how rare these mistakes are. It's about the sting that sticks with her.

“I won't ever get over this,” Shiffrin said, her voice steady, after slowly making her way to the bottom of a course known as The Ice River at the Yanqing Alpine Skiing Center. “I've never gotten over any.”

That's what happens when an athlete is as successful as Shiffrin, a 26-year-old American who owns three Winter Games medals — including a pair of golds — along with three World Cup overall titles and six world cham-

pionship victories.

The misses stand out.

She spoke about “how much it hurt” and how “heartbreaking” it was when she failed to complete a giant slalom on Jan. 23, 2018, in the Kronplatz World Cup stop at San Vigilio di Marebbe, Italy — the last time she didn't complete a GS, which came three weeks before she won the gold at the Pyeongchang Games. She mentioned, too, a slalom error before those same Olympics. And a flub six years ago in another race.

“That's what drives me to try to keep working and improving, so I can try to make it (so) those things don't happen. But sometimes they still do happen and, unfortunately, it happened today,” said Shiffrin, who plans to be out there again Wednesday in the slalom, a race she won at age 18 at the 2014 Sochi Games. “I felt like there was a lot to look forward to, but, well, now we need to reset.”

The giant slalom was the first women's Alpine race on the schedule in Beijing — Shiffrin intends to enter all five — and she was hardly the only racer to encounter trouble. The second run went on without her; in all, 19 of the 80 first-run starters failed to finish.

Parrot's comeback leads to gold

Associated Press

ZHANGJIAKOU, China — Max Parrot was gearing up for another season at the top of snowboarding when he felt the lump in his neck.

“I had to stop everything to fight,” he said.

That was three years ago.

On Monday, the 27-year-old Canadian slopestyler's ride back to the top ended with an Olympic gold medal — capping the sort of stirring comeback that reminds us why we forgive so many of the Olympic world's sins to get to the drama the Games inevitably deliver.

A few weeks after first feeling the lump — and 10 months after finishing second at the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics — Parrot was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma. He underwent 12 chemotherapy treatments over the span of six months.

“I went through hell,” said Parrot, who started riding when he was 9. “It was the

first time I ever put my snowboard in the closet. I felt like a lion in a cage.”

Clearly, for an athlete of his caliber — this was his 15th title at the Olympics, World Cup or Winter X Games — getting back to snowboarding meant more than gentle rides through the backcountry. In the sport's biggest contest on one of the biggest courses these riders had ever seen, Parrot showed he could handle the best of the best.

Canadian Mark McMorris finished third and now has three bronze medals — “rose gold,” his brother, Craig, calls them — in three Olympics.

McMorris' run knocked the defending champion, US snowboarder Red Gerard, off the podium.

“There's nothing you can really complain about and I don't want to be a judge or anything,” Gerard said. “There were a lot of landed runs out there, and it's hard. But yeah, I would've liked to have been up there for sure.”

Ice dancers propel US to team silver

Associated Press

BEIJING — Madison Chock and ice dance partner Evan Bates knew what they were up against as figure skating's team competition drew to a close at the Beijing Olympics and the American chances of a silver medal started to slip away.

“I had heard the Russians' (score) right before we skated and I was like ‘Oh, that's such a hefty score,’” Chock said in a dark hallway inside Capital Indoor Stadium on the third day of the medley event. “And then it was like: ‘All right. Focus.’”

Did they ever.

With poise and precision, Chock and Bates proceeded to win the discipline with a score of 129.17, less than a point ahead of the world champion Russians, who had been penalized a point for an overly long lift. That gave Team USA the maximum of 10 points and just about locked up its first silver medal in three editions of the team competition.

That spot on the podium was confirmed a few minutes later, when Karen Chen did what she needed to do in her free skate.

“A silver medal is something we should be incredibly proud of. It's the highest achievement for our team in this event,” Bates said. “Up until today, we haven't skated the free dance as well as we could in the season. But it happened today.”

As the U.S. team accepted its medals, missing from the podium was Vincent Zhou, who returned a positive COVID-19 test earlier in the day. The team shot a video message for him during the celebration and wished him well; the men's short program is Tuesday, and Zhou must return a negative test or he will miss the event.

Performing their avant-garde alien-astronaut love story set to Daft Punk's techno music, Chock — wearing silver makeup and an out-of-this-world hairstyle — and Bates showcased the kind of artistry and emotion that could also land on them on the individual dance podium before the Beijing Games are done.

The Russians easily won the team gold medal, thanks to dominance from history-making Kamila Valieva in the women's discipline and their strong performance in pairs. The United States earned the silver after back-to-back bronze medals at the past two Olympics, while Japan climbed onto the team podium for the first time in third place.

Jokic's 14th triple-double leads Nuggets past Nets

Associated Press

DENVER — Nikola Jokic had 27 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists for his NBA-leading 14th triple-double of the season and the Denver Nuggets defeated the short-handed Brooklyn Nets 124-104 on Sunday for their eighth straight loss.

Will Barton had 21 points and Aaron Gordon had 17 points and nine rebounds in his return from a two-game absence to help Denver end a three-game skid.

Kyrie Irving had 27 points and 11 assists for Brooklyn.

Nets guard James Harden missed his second straight game with left hamstring tightness. Brooklyn coach Steve Nash was asked before the game if it's accurate the team won't trade Harden before Thursday's deadline and gave a definitive answer. "Yes, that's correct," he said.

76ers 119, Bulls 108: Joel Embiid dominated with 40 points and 10 rebounds and Philadelphia overcame DeMar DeRozan's season-high, 45-point game to win at Chicago.

The 76ers won the matchup between two of the Eastern Conference's top teams after letting a 17-point lead early in the fourth quarter shrink to four.

Cavaliers 98, Pacers 85: Cedi Osman scored 22 points, and Kevin Love had 19 and host Cleveland rallied from 20 down to beat Indiana, shortly after agreeing to acquire shooting guard Caris LeVert from the Pacers.

Jarrett Allen had 15 points and 17 rebounds, and Rajon Rondo added 15 points and a season-high 12 assists off the bench

for the Cavs, who are one game behind East-leading Miami. They made their first eight three-pointers in the fourth.

Bucks 137, Clippers 113: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 28 points, Jrue Holiday added 27 and Milwaukee rolled to a win at Los Angeles.

Antetokounmpo also had 10 rebounds, and Holiday had 13 assists. Bobby Portis added 24 points and 11 rebounds. The Bucks tied a season high in points.

Mavericks 103, Hawks 94: Luka Doncic had a triple-double with 18 points, 10 rebounds and 11 assists, Jalen Brunson scored 22 points despite both of them being in foul trouble and host Dallas beat Atlanta.

Doncic sat almost the entire third quarter following his fifth foul less than a minute into the second half. Brunson joined him on the bench with his fifth about six minutes later.

Celtics 116, Magic 83: Jaylen Brown scored 26 points and Boston won at NBA-worst Orlando for its season-best fifth straight win.

The Celtics limited the Magic to 35.8% shooting from the floor and 5 of 25 from three-point range. Dennis Schroder scored 23 points and hit four three-pointers off Boston's bench.

Timberwolves 118, Pistons 105: Karl-Anthony Towns had 24 points and 12 rebounds and host Minnesota beat Detroit for its fourth straight victory.

Pelicans 120, Rockets 107: Brandon Ingram scored 33 points and tied a career high with 12 assists in New Orleans's victory at Houston.

NASCAR scores with solid race at LA Coliseum

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — NASCAR was the big winner at its glossy Los Angeles gala held inside Memorial Coliseum.

In need of an energy boost ahead of its upcoming season, NASCAR broke its dated mold and staged an experimental exhibition race inside one of the most iconic venues in sports. The race itself on a temporary quarter-mile asphalt oval was a sideshow in Sunday's made-for-Fox Sports spectacular.

Just how successful was the Busch Light Clash? Two losing drivers high-fived a pair of NASCAR senior executives as they passed in the USC locker room.

One was Ben Kennedy, the 30-year-old great-grandson of NASCAR's founder and forward-thinker who pushed The Clash from its birthplace in Daytona across the country and into the Coliseum.

"Really good day for the entire sport," Kennedy said.

The Clash was a success before a single racecar drove through the Southern California football team's tunnel and onto the smooth, black asphalt that covered the Trojans' field. Ice Cube performed a six-minute set from the Peristyle during a brief "half-time," and Pitbull with backup dancers outfitted in a checkered-flag theme used the same stage for his pre-race concert.

The grand marshals were Los Angeles sporting greats and Jeff Gordon lit the cauldron built for the 1932 Summer Olympics before the race began. Celebrities walked a red carpet, the USC student section filled in early, and the crowd booed pole-sitter Kyle Busch like a bunch of old pros during driver introductions.

The name of the race was the same, but everything else about the 44th running of The Clash was different.

Joey Logano was the race winner and, like nearly everyone else in the industry, heaped praise on NASCAR for successfully fulfilling Kennedy's vision.

"The hype around this, you watch football games lately, they're advertising the Clash as much as they're advertising Daytona 500," Logano said. "That kind of puts it into perspective a little bit on what this event meant to our sport, how big of a gamble this really was, right? This could have gone awful. It went great."

Added runner-up Busch: "Ben Kennedy and the guys at NASCAR, if this didn't work, it was going to be ugly."

Hoge surges past Spieth at Pebble

Associated Press

PEBBLE BEACH, Calif. — Jordan Spieth knew what to expect long before he ever saw Tom Hoge play golf.

Hoge had shown him how to play craps in 2015 during the John Deere Classic, and what Spieth took away from that evening was Hoge was not the kind of player who would back down when the stakes were high.

They were plenty high Sunday in the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am as Hoge, one

of seven players who had at least a share of the lead in the final round, had another chance to win for the first time on the PGA Tour.

At his side was Patrick Cantlay, the FedEx Cup champion and No. 4 player in the world. Two shots ahead of him with five holes to play was Spieth, a three-time major champion and former No. 1 player in the world.

Hoge finished at 19-under 268 and earned \$1,566,000.