

Report: Navy's ships dogged by delays

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy's warships have been spending less time at sea and more time under costly and lengthy repairs since 2011, according to a government watchdog report released Tuesday.

A review of 151 surface warships by the Government Accountability Office showed worsening maintenance delays, more breakdowns requiring repairs and a rising number of working ship parts removed and used elsewhere due to parts shortages in the industry supply chain.

"We have made dozens of recommendations to address these issues, but the Navy has yet to fully implement them all," the agency wrote.

Navy officials argued in the report that a decrease in time at sea is not necessarily bad and does not always reflect a ship's inability to perform its mission. They also explained the allocation of "steaming hours," or a ship's hours at sea, is driven by budgetary concerns and the cost of fuel.

But the Government Accountability Office said persistent ship sustainment issues

have prevented the Navy from reaping the full benefit of its forces and contributed to significant readiness challenges during the past decade.

Congressional lawmakers have pressed the service to build a fleet powerful enough to counter China as it expands its influence in the Indo-Pacific region and eyes a possible invasion of Taiwan. China's navy is now the largest in the world, according to the Pentagon, while the U.S. Navy's 293-vessel fleet falls short of the 350-ship force desired by some of the lawmakers.

Navy officials told the GAO that significant maintenance backlogs influenced their decision last year to seek the recommissioning of nine ships before the end of their service life. Congress has routinely stepped in to prevent certain early vessel retirements, most recently the guided-missile cruiser USS Vicksburg.

"Congress is willing to build more ships than the Navy," Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Va., wrote in an editorial last year. Wittman was named vice chairman of the House Armed Services Committee last week.

Maintenance delays per ship have multi-

plied since 2011, increasing from five days on average to an average of 19 days in 2021. Maintenance costs grew by \$1.2 billion during the same period, according to the report.

Navy officials said growth in the magnitude of previously planned work and the discovery of the need for new work caused maintenance delays for all nine surface ship classes reviewed by the agency.

The Navy spent about \$17 billion during fiscal 2020 to operate and sustain the 10 ship classes assessed in the report, a \$2.5 billion increase from fiscal 2011. The selected ship classes represent about half of the Navy's ship battle force.

Though the Navy has added 33 ships to those classes since 2011, the number of hours at sea declined and became more expensive, according to the report.

The GAO said the service's growing reliance on pulling working parts from ships for installation in ships under repair contributed to the higher costs. Cannibalization of parts increases workloads, lowers morale and takes expensive weapons systems out of service for long periods of time, according to the report.

Biden orders Pentagon to review military pay, benefits

BY DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Tuesday directed the Pentagon to begin reviewing military pay and benefits to make certain service members are being paid fairly and can afford basic needs such as food and housing.

The study — known as the Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation — is conducted every four years to examine whether military pay and other benefits are suitable. Its goal is to make sure service members are being paid comparatively to what they would see in the civilian market and can afford necessities. The review is Biden's first as president.

"Our great nation has the finest fighting force in the world and it remains our sacred obligation to take care of our men and women in uniform," Biden wrote in a memo ordering the review. "Our service

members deserve a 21st century military compensation system that recognizes and rewards their contributions, reflects the values of our nation, and incentivizes the next generation of men and women to serve."

The president outlined five areas of focus for the review:

■ Compensation and benefits, including special pay, to ensure the Pentagon is "appropriately" paying service members, while also being responsible with taxpayer money.

■ The basic pay table to ensure it strengthens "economic security" for troops, improving the Pentagon's ability to recruit and retain service members.

■ Compensation as it relates to future requirements in technology and other defense-critical fields.

■ Formulas that are used to calculate the costs of housing, food and other neces-

sities and cost-of-living allowances — including the military's new Basic Needs Allowance — to make certain troops are food secure and able to afford suitable housing.

■ Evaluate the military's benchmark for compensation to learn how a shift toward dual-income households and other income factors might warrant foundational changes, including military spouse unemployment, frequent moves and the cost of child care.

The Basic Needs Allowance is a supplemental payment given to active-duty troops who have dependents and a gross income below 130% of federal poverty guidelines. The allowance was authorized last year by Congress and the first payments started going out this month. Troops can inquire about eligibility, but officials said each of the military services will proactively screen and notify troops who qualify for the supplemental income.

Russia eyes eastern push, Ukraine fights corruption

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia is mustering its military might in the Luhansk region of Ukraine, officials said Wednesday, in what Kyiv suspects is preparation for an offensive in the coming weeks as the first anniversary of Moscow's invasion approaches.

Also Wednesday, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's government continued its crackdown on alleged corruption. The government dismissed several high-ranking officials, prominent lawmaker David Arakhamia said.

Zelenskyy was elected in 2019 on an anti-establishment and anti-corruption platform in a country long gripped by graft, and the new allegations come as Western allies are channeling billions of dollars to help Kyiv fight Moscow and as his government is introducing reforms so it can potentially join the European Union one day.

On the battlefield, the Kremlin's forces are expelling residents near the Russian-held parts of the front line so they can't provide information about Russian troop deployments to Ukrainian artillery forces, Luhansk Gov. Serhiy Haidai said.

"There is an active transfer of (Russian troops) to the region and they are definitely preparing for something on the eastern front in February," Haidai said.

The Institute for the Study of War said late Tuesday that "an imminent Russian offensive in the coming months is the most likely course of action."

A new offensive might coincide with the invasion anniversary on Feb. 24.

The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine reported Wednesday that Russia is also concentrating its efforts in neighboring Donetsk province, especially in its bid to capture the key city of Bakhmut.

Donetsk and Luhansk provinces make up the Donbas, an industrial region bordering Russia that President Vladimir Putin identified as a goal for takeover from the war's outset.

Russian shelling of Bakhmut, from which most residents have fled while others spend much of their time in cellars, killed at least five civilians and wounded 10 on Tuesday, Ukraine's presidential office said Wednesday.

The regional governor of Donetsk, Pavlo Kyrylenko, posted images of the aftermath of the shelling, showing huge black holes in residential buildings in the embattled city. He said Russia is "actively deploying new military personnel to the region."

Donetsk was one of four provinces that Russia illegally annexed in the fall, but controls only about half of it. To take the remaining half, Russian forces have no choice but to go through Bakhmut, the only approach to bigger Ukrainian-held cities.

Russian forces have been trying for months to capture Bakhmut. Moscow-installed authorities in Donetsk claimed Russian troops are "closing the ring" around the city.

But the Wagner Group, a Kremlin-controlled paramilitary group headed by businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, on Wednesday denied that Bakhmut was encircled.

Experts seeking Wagner Group, Mali forces probe

Associated Press

GENEVA — Independent human rights experts working with the United Nations on Tuesday called for an investigation of possible abuses, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by government forces in Mali and the Wagner Group, a shadowy Russian military contractor.

More than a dozen experts, who focus on issues as various as the use of mercenaries, torture, and violence against women and girls, cited accounts of "horrific executions, mass graves, acts of torture, rape and sexual violence" and other alleged crimes over the last two years by government forces and "their allies" in the area of central Mopti and elsewhere in the restive West African country.

"We are particularly worried by credible reports that over the course of several days in late March 2022, Malian armed forces accompanied by military personnel believed to belong to the Wagner Group, executed several hundred people, who had been rounded up in Moura, a village in central Mali," the experts said in a statement.

The experts said they were "disturbed by the apparent increased outsourcing of traditional military functions to the so-called Wagner Group in various military operations."

Western officials have said hundreds of fighters from the Wagner Group began working more than a year ago alongside Mali's armed forces to try to stem a decadelong insurgency by Islamic extremists in the West African country.

Japanese ex-soldier sues government over sex abuse

Associated Press

TOKYO — A former Japanese soldier who reported being sexually abused by military colleagues said Monday that she filed a damage suit against five perpetrators and the government because she feels their earlier apologies were empty.

Rina Gonoï went public with her experience last year, demanding the Defense Ministry reinvestigate her case, in which she said she was repeatedly assaulted by sever-

al servicemen, causing her to give up her military career. The military had dropped her case when she initially filed a complaint in 2021, saying there was insufficient evidence.

Japan's army in September acknowledged part of the misconduct after an internal probe and apologized. Four of the five perpetrators personally apologized a month later to Gonoï. The ministry in December dismissed the five servicemen and puni-

shed four others. Gonoï said she decided to go to court after feeling that the five perpetrators still took their actions lightly and had stopped responding in their discussions toward a settlement.

She is seeking a total of \$42,270 from her assailants for their misconduct and her mental distress, and \$15,370 from the government over its failure to prevent the assaults, properly investigate and take appropriate steps.

Biden lawyer: FBI finds no docs at beach house

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The FBI searched President Joe Biden’s vacation home in Rehoboth Beach, Del., on Wednesday without finding any classified documents, the president’s attorney said. Agents did take some handwritten notes and other materials relating to Biden’s time as vice president for review.

The search, disclosed by Biden’s personal lawyer, was the latest discomfiting moment for a president who has sought to contrast his sensitivity to rule-following with that of his predecessor Donald Trump, who faces a criminal investigation into his handling of classified documents. Wednesday’s search, the third for a Biden home or office, shows that an investigation that had simmered quietly for weeks was continuing rather than fading away as Biden, who has said he was surprised by an earlier records discovery, presumably hoped.

The attorney, Bob Bauer, said FBI agents spent three and a half hours searching the home

and that, “No documents with classified markings were found.”

Biden’s attorneys revealed last month that they had undertaken their search of the home without turning up classified materials. The fact the FBI did its own search reflected the Justice Department’s determination to retrieve any and all possible classified items rather than rely on assurances that such documents had been located.

Bauer described the search as “planned” and “a further step in a thorough and timely DOJ process we will continue to fully support and facilitate.”

He did not mention Trump by name, but the statement seemed aimed at juxtaposing the Biden investigation with the Trump case, where months of fruitless Justice Department efforts to recover all the classified records taken to the former president’s Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago, culminated in an August search warrant and the removal of roughly three dozen boxes of documents and other

items.

Searches of Biden’s former office and Delaware homes, by contrast, have all been done voluntarily and without a warrant.

The latest search follows the FBI’s 13-hour, top-to-bottom check of his Wilmington, Del., home, where agents located documents with classified markings from his time as a vice president and senator and also took possession of some of his handwritten notes.

One week earlier, Biden’s personal lawyers revealed that they had found a document bearing classified markings while searching the Wilmington property but said they had not found others during a separate inspection of the Rehoboth Beach home.

The White House did not disclose the Justice Department’s investigation until last month, when it acknowledged the Nov. 2 discovery of a “small number” of classified documents by Biden lawyers as they closed an office at the Penn Biden Center, a think tank affiliated with the Ivy League school.

Storm causes 3rd day of icy conditions

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Dangerous road conditions from bands of sleet and snow were blamed for six deaths as a winter storm snarled traffic across parts of the nation’s midsection, forced the cancellation of flights and left hundreds of thousands without power Wednesday in several Southern states.

Watches and warnings stretched from Texas to Tennessee and Mississippi. Several rounds of mixed precipitation, including freezing rain and sleet, were in store for many areas throughout the day, meaning some regions could be hit multiple times, forecasters said.

More than 1,900 flights scheduled for Wednesday nationwide had already been canceled by Wednesday morning, according to the tracking service FlightAware. The list for cancellations included both major airports in Dallas and airports in San Antonio and Austin, Texas, and Nashville, Tenn.

Nearly 260,000 power outages were reported in Texas, including more than 130,000 in Austin, according to the website PowerOutage, which tracks utility reports.

Electric Reliability Council of Texas President and CEO Pablo Vegas has vowed that the state’s electrical grid and natural gas supply will be reliable, and there would be no repeat of the February 2021 blackouts when the grid was on the brink of total failure.

As the ice and sleet enveloped Memphis, Tenn., Memphis-Shelby County Schools announced it would cancel classes Wednesday due to freezing rain and hazardous road conditions.

Job market still hot, to Fed’s dismay

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. job openings rose to 11 million in December, delivering a setback to the Federal Reserve’s effort to cool a hot job market.

Openings were up from 10.44 million in November and were the highest since July, according to data released Wednesday by the Labor Department. Economists had expected job openings to drop slightly in December.

For 18 straight months, employers have posted at least 10 million openings — a level never reached before 2021 in Labor Department data going back to 2000.

The number of openings in December meant that there were about two vacancies for every un-

employed American.

Employers hired 6.17 million workers in December, up from 6.03 million in November.

Still, layoffs and discharges blipped up to 1.47 million in December from 1.42 million in November. And the number of Americans quitting their jobs — a sign they have confidence they can find a better opportunities elsewhere — fell slightly in December.

Hotels, restaurants and bars accounted for more than 70% of the December increase in job openings.

Hiring has remained strong even in the face of rising interest rates, which can increase costs for businesses.

House GOP set to oust Omar from committee

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Newly empowered House Republicans are preparing to oust an African-born Black lawmaker, Democratic Rep. Ilhan Omar, from the Foreign Affairs Committee over comments she has made critical of Israel — and as payback after Democrats booted far-right Republicans from panels for incendiary, violent remarks.

A procedural vote set for Wednesday would gauge Republican support for the move against the Muslim lawmaker, who has apologized for comments that she has said she came to understand were viewed as anti-semitic. A final vote was expected Thursday.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy has been eager to flex Republican power to remove the Minnesota Democrat after he blocked Rep. Adam Schiff and Rep. Eric Swalwell, both California Democrats, from rejoining the House Intelligence Committee once the GOP took control of the chamber in January. Unlike most committees, appointments to the Intelligence Committee are the prerogative of the speaker.

“This is about vengeance. This is about spite. This is about politics,” said Rep. James McGovern, of Massachusetts, the top Democrat on the Rules Committee, as Republicans called a hurried meeting late Tuesday to consider the resolution.

McGovern argued that Democrats had removed Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., and Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., for remarks that were far more extreme and violent against fellow lawmakers than those Omar had made and apologized for.

Republicans said they were waiting for Democrats to formally nominate Omar to the committee, which she served on during the last Congress. Once the committee roster is approved by the House, then Republicans would move to strip her of the seat.

Democrats had yet to formally submit their roster for a vote, which was delaying the committee’s formation.

The resolution against Omar

was proposed by Rep. Max Miller, R-Ohio, a former official in the Trump administration. It says that “Omar’s comments have brought dishonor to the House of Representatives.”

Omar said the issues Republicans have cited in opposing her are a pretext to justify their actions. In reality, “it is about revenge. It’s about appeasing the former president,” Omar said during a recent news conference at the Capitol, referring to Donald Trump.

Omar said that she, along with Schiff and Swalwell, who were House managers in Trump’s impeachment trials, “have been a thorn in the back of the previous, disgraced president.”

Haley closer to announcing presidential run

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Nikki Haley is moving closer to making her presidential campaign official.

On Wednesday, supporters of the former South Carolina governor will get an email invitation to a Feb. 15 launch event in Charleston, at which she plans to announce her campaign, according to a person familiar with the plans but not authorized to speak publicly about them.

Haley, 51, served as South Carolina’s governor for six years before serving as President Donald Trump’s ambassador to the United Nations. When she enters the race, Haley will be the first to join the contest against her for-

mer boss, who is currently the sole Republican seeking his party’s 2024 nomination.

Trump was in South Carolina on Saturday for the initial campaign swing of his 2024 campaign, standing alongside Gov. Henry McMaster — who served as Haley’s lieutenant governor — and several GOP members of the state’s delegation, part of his leadership team in the early-voting state.

During the Trump administration, Haley feuded at times with other White House officials while bolstering her own public persona. Her 2018 departure fueled speculation that she would challenge Trump in 2020, or replace Vice President Mike Pence on the ticket, but Haley did neither.

Instead, Haley returned to South Carolina, where she bought a home on Kiawah Island, joined the board of aircraft manufacturer Boeing Co. and launched herself on the speaking circuit. She penned two books, a step commonly taken by many on the road toward the White House.

After the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol siege, Haley cast doubts on Trump’s political future but said she wouldn’t challenge him in 2024.

In 2021, Haley said that she “would not run if President Trump ran,” but she has since shifted course, ramping up activity through her Stand for America nonprofit and political action committee, and endorsing dozens of candidates in the 2022 midterm elections.

Connecticut may exonerate accused witches centuries later

Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. — Decades before the infamous Salem witch trials in Massachusetts, Alse Young was killed at the gallows in Connecticut, becoming the first person on record to be executed in the American colonies for witchcraft.

The Windsor town clerk registered the death on May 26, 1647, in a diary entry that read: “Alse Young was hanged.” Young was the first of nine women and two

men executed by the colony of Connecticut for witchcraft over 15 years, a period during which more than 40 people faced trial for having ties to Satan.

Now, more than 375 years later, amateur historians, researchers and descendants of the accused witches and their accusers hope Connecticut lawmakers will finally offer posthumous exonerations.

While such requests aren’t new, they have become louder

as many genealogy buffs discover they have distant relatives involved in the lesser-known Connecticut witch trials.

“They’re talking about how this has followed their families from generation to generation and that they would love for someone just to say, ‘Hey, this was wrong,’” said Connecticut state Rep. Jane Garibay, who proposed an exoneration resolution after receiving letters from eighth- and ninth-generation

relatives of accused witches. “And to me, that’s an easy thing to do if it gives people peace.”

Beth Caruso, an author, co-founded the CT Witch Trial Exoneration Project in 2005 to clear the names of the accused. The group is encouraging people who discovered through genealogy research that they are descendants of victims to contact Connecticut state legislators and urge them to support exoneration legislation.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Church loses nearly \$800K in email scam

NC ELKIN — Leaders of a northwestern North Carolina church said cybercriminals stole nearly \$800,000 the congregation spent years raising to build a new sanctuary that’s supposed to be completed in a few months.

It happened in November when Elkin Valley Baptist Church received an email that mimicked another message from the sanctuary builder with payment instructions, news outlets reported.

The emails came one after the other on a Friday, according to the church. The following Monday, a church representative responded to what was the cloned email.

“We followed those instructions, not knowing, and paid the bill,” Johnny Blevins, the church’s senior pastor, told The Elkin Tribune. “It wasn’t until several days later that we were contacted by (the builder) about paying the bill and we said, ‘We did pay the bill.’”

The Elkin police turned over the case to the FBI.

Sheriff sued for ‘Wheel of Fugitive’ defamation

FL TITUSVILLE — A man has filed a defamation lawsuit against a Florida sheriff who posts weekly “Wheel of Fugitive” videos on social media, saying that he wasn’t a fugitive when his name and image appeared several times in 2021 in Brevard County Sheriff Wayne Ivey’s posts that were inspired by the long-running TV game show “Wheel of

Fortune.”

Because of the sheriff’s posts, David Gay lost a job and suffered emotional distress, according to the lawsuit seeking more than \$50,000 in damages. The lawsuit was filed last week in state court in Brevard County.

Gay was sentenced in November 2020 for an undisclosed offense to three years of probation for a withhold of adjudication, a special sentence in which a defendant is not formally convicted of an offense, the lawsuit said.

Gay was taken into custody for violation of probation in January 2021. While Gay was in jail for the violation of probation arrest, however, Ivey said in a “Wheel of Fugitive” video that Gay was a fugitive, when in reality he was already in the Brevard County Jail, according to the lawsuit.

Firefighter injured when swept away in drain

HI WAILUKU — A Hawaii firefighter was critically injured when he was swept into a storm drain and carried the length of eight football fields until being dumped on the shoreline, officials said.

The accident occurred as nearly 13 inches of rain fell on parts of Maui on Friday, and weather officials warned of “unstable weather” ahead, The Maui News reported. A crew responded to a flooded home when the firefighter was caught in a 4-foot-wide storm drain, Maui County spokesperson Mahina Martin said.

He was carried about 800 yards to where the drain empties into the ocean.

Other firefighters and emergency personnel retrieved him from the shoreline, transporting him to a hospital. He was listed late Friday in critical condition, Martin said.

Clothed bathing burglar found in bathroom

WA SEATTLE — A man suspected of breaking into a Seattle home has refused to come clean about his intentions, even though police found him fully clothed in a bathtub filled with water.

A woman returned to her home Friday night to find a window smashed and an unknown man inside the house, according to the Seattle Police Department.

She remained outside the home and called police. Upon their arrival, officers instructed anyone inside to come out. When they got no reply, they went in to search the home — and found a suspect in a bathroom.

The 27-year-old man was arrested for residential burglary and refused to explain his actions, including his choice of a bathing spot, police said.

Police officer allegedly shot another officer

VA WILLIAMSBURG — A local Virginia police officer remains jailed after authorities accused him of shooting another officer while the two were both off duty.

Michael Trenton Rusk, 24, was listed on Saturday as an inmate at Virginia Peninsula Regional Jail in Williamsburg.

Rusk, a James City County police officer, is accused of ma-

licious wounding, the use of a firearm in the commission of a felony and discharging a firearm within city limits, jail records show.

Authorities have not released the name of the other James City County officer — a 38-year-old man who was shot multiple times early Wednesday in a parking lot located next to several Williamsburg businesses.

Driver in cliff crash that injured 4 is charged

CA REDWOOD CITY — The driver of a car that plunged off a treacherous cliff in northern California, seriously injuring himself, his wife and their two young children, was charged Monday with attempted murder.

Dharmesh A. Patel, 41, also faces enhancements for great bodily injury and domestic violence in the Jan. 2 crash, San Mateo County District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe said in a statement.

Witness statements from family and motorists, and video footage from the nearby Tom Lantos tunnels provided enough evidence to charge the father of two, Wagstaffe told the San Francisco Chronicle.

Patel’s wife, who remains hospitalized, was “screaming” about her husband’s “intentionality” to paramedics after they rappelled down the 250-foot cliff to rescue the family, Wagstaffe said. He declined to share what she said.

“We do believe the evidence establishes the necessary intent to kill,” Wagstaffe told the newspaper.

— From wire reports



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Brady retires again, says it's 'for good'

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — This time, Tom Brady says he's done for good.

The seven-time Super Bowl winner with New England and Tampa Bay announced his retirement from the NFL on Wednesday, exactly one year after first saying his playing days were over, by posting a brief video lasting just under one minute on social media.

Unlike last winter, though, the most successful quarterback in league history, as well as one of the greatest athletes in team sports, said his decision was final.

"Good morning guys. I'll get to the point right away," Brady says as the message begins. "I'm retiring. For good."

He briefly retired after the 2021 season but wound up coming back for one more year with the Buccaneers. He retires at age 45, the owner of virtually every meaningful NFL passing record in an unprecedented 23-year career.

A year ago when he retired, it

was in the form of a long Instagram post. But about six weeks later, he decided to return for one more run, citing "unfinished business" after an early playoff exit.

The Buccaneers — with whom he won a Super Bowl two seasons ago — made the playoffs again this season, losing in their playoff opener. And at the time, it begged the question about whether Brady would play again.

Only a couple of weeks later, he has given the answer.

"I know the process was a pretty big deal last time, so when I woke up this morning, I figured I'd just press record and let you guys know first," Brady says in the video. "I won't be long-winded. You only get one super emotional retirement essay and I used mine up last year.

"I really thank you guys so much, to every single one of you for supporting me. My family, my friends, teammates, my competitors. I could go on forever. There's too many. Thank you guys for allowing me to live my

absolute dream. I wouldn't change a thing. Love you all."

Brady is the NFL's career leader in yards passing (89,214) and touchdowns (649). He is the only player to win more than five Super Bowls and has been MVP of the game five times. He also holds marks for regular-season wins (251), Super Bowl appearances (10), playoff games and wins (48, 35), as well as playoff yards (13,400) and TDs (88).

"Tom's legacy is unmatched in the history of this game. All the Super Bowl titles and statistical records speak for themselves, but the impact he had on so many people through the years is what I appreciate the most," Buccaneers general manager Jason Licht said.

"His imprint on this organization helped take us to the mountaintop. We will certainly miss him as our quarterback, but I will also miss him as a leader and friend," Licht added. "Our entire organization is indebted to him for what he provided us over the past three years. We

won't ever forget the wins or the accolades, and his influence will be felt for years to come."

Famously underrated coming into the NFL — he was picked 199th in the 2000 draft by the Patriots, behind six other quarterbacks, three kickers and a punter — Brady certainly wasn't expected to become synonymous with greatness. He played in one game as a rookie, completing one of three passes for 6 yards.

The next year, it all changed.

Brady took over as the Patriots' starter, the team beat the St. Louis Rams in the Super Bowl that capped the 2001 season and he and New England coach Bill Belichick were well on their way to becoming the most successful coach-QB duo in football history.

More Super Bowl wins came after the 2003 and 2004 seasons. The Patriots returned to football's mountaintop for a fourth time in Brady's era a decade later to cap the 2014 season, the start of three more titles in a span of five years.

Source: Broncos make deal to land Payton as coach

Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — The Denver Broncos have agreed to a deal with the New Orleans Saints that will make Sean Payton their head coach, a person with knowledge of the accord said Tuesday.

The person, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the teams hadn't announced the agreement, said the Broncos would send their first-round pick, No. 29 overall, in this year's draft to the Saints along with a future second-rounder. Denver will also receive a third-round pick in the trade.

Payton remained under contract with New Orleans after stepping down from the Saints last year and working in broad-

casting this season.

Payton, 59, went 152-89 in 15 seasons with the Saints and 9-8 in the playoffs. He led New Orleans to a 31-17 win over the Indianapolis Colts in the Super Bowl following the 2009 season. He stepped away last year when quarterback Drew Brees retired.

The Broncos, who went 5-12 in 2022 and extended their playoff drought to seven years, fired rookie coach Nathaniel Hackett on Dec. 26 after he went 4-11. Interim coach Jerry Rosburg went 1-1.

Payton's top task will be to get quarterback Russell Wilson back to his winning ways after the 11-year pro had his worst statistical season following his blockbuster trade from Seattle

for four premium draft picks and three players.

Texans hire Ryans away from 49ers

HOUSTON — DeMeco Ryans has been hired as coach of the Houston Texans, giving him his first head coaching job and bringing him back to the place where he started his playing career.

Ryans joins the Texans from the San Francisco 49ers, where he spent the past two seasons as their defensive coordinator.

He replaces Lovie Smith, who was fired after just one season where the team went 3-13-1.

Ryans issued a statement thanking the 49ers, coach Kyle Shanahan and general manager

John Lynch for his time in San Francisco before looking ahead to his future with the Texans.

"Being the head coach of the Houston Texans is my dream job and my family is thrilled to be back in H-Town," Ryans said. "I have been around the game of football my entire life and I've always had a natural ability to lead others. I know what it takes to win and be successful in this league as both a player and coach."

"We're going to build a program filled with players who have a special work ethic and relentless mindset," he continued. "I understand the responsibility I have to this organization and to the fans of Houston to build a winner, and I can't wait to get to work."

James' triple-double leads Lakers past Knicks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — LeBron James will soon be the NBA's top scorer, though that was never his focus.

He's also one of the game's leading passers, and combining the two — possibly better than anyone ever — is what really makes him proud.

"I didn't get to this point in my career by thinking about records or how many points I have, whatever the case might be," James said. "I just play the game the right way. I approach the game every night only trying to be a triple threat by scoring, rebounding, assisting, defending, and may the chips fall where they may."

James moved within 89 points of breaking the career scoring record and climbed into fourth place on the assists list, finishing with his first triple-double of the season in his return to Madison Square Garden as the Los Angeles Lakers beat the New York

Knicks 129-123 in overtime Tuesday night.

James had 28 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds, with the points giving him 38,299 for his career. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar is the leader with 38,387.

But James' game has always been about more than scoring, as he proved again Tuesday. He fed Dennis Schroder for a three-pointer that snapped a 118-all tie with 3:13 remaining, grabbed his 10th rebound later in the extra period and then powered to the basket for a 127-121 lead with 19 seconds to go.

"He's just doing it all," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "That's what great players do. That's what all-time greats do, and he's right up there at the top of the list with all of them."

Anthony Davis added 27 points and nine rebounds for the Lakers, who had dropped two straight to open their trip. Both James and

Davis had sat out their loss Monday in Brooklyn.

Jalen Brunson scored 37 points and Julius Randle had 23 points and 12 rebounds for the Knicks, who were 7-for-34 from three-point range and dropped their second straight.

Nuggets 122, Pelicans 113: Jamal Murray scored 32 points, Nikola Jokic had his 16th triple-double of the season and host Denver held off reeling New Orleans.

Jokic finished with 26 points, 18 rebounds and 15 assists as the Western Conference leaders improved to 16-0 when Jokic has a triple-double. Murray made a season-high seven three-pointers.

CJ McCollum and Herbert Jones each scored 21 points for the Pelicans. They have dropped nine straight games to finish 3-13 in January.

Bucks 124, Hornets 115:

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 34 points and 18 rebounds and host Milwaukee beat Charlotte to win its fifth straight.

The Bucks withstood a triple-double from Charlotte's LaMelo Ball, who had 27 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds.

Heat 100, Cavaliers 97: Jimmy Butler scored 23 points, Bam Adebayo added 18 points and 11 rebounds and visiting Miami beat Cleveland.

Caleb Martin scored 18 points and matched his career high with 10 rebounds for the Heat, who moved within 1½ games of the fifth-place Cavs in the Eastern Conference standings.

Clippers 108, Bulls 103: Kawhi Leonard scored 33 points, Norman Powell added 27 and visiting Los Angeles beat Chicago for its sixth victory in seven games.

Nikola Vucevic had 23 points and 14 rebounds for Chicago.

No. 8 Kansas avenges prior loss to No. 7 Kansas State

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Jalen Wilson remembers every slight. Every criticism. Every chip that's landed on his shoulder.

You can bet the Kansas forward remembers watching Kansas State fans storm the court after beating the Jayhawks.

So with revenge on their mind, Wilson and his pals jumped on the seventh-ranked Wildcats in the rematch Tuesday night. He finished with 20 points, Kevin McCullar Jr. had 16 points and 13 rebounds, and the No. 8 Jayhawks rolled to a 90-78 victory that also tightened the Big 12 standings at the midway point of conference play.

"It was like a big rub in our face, them storming the court," Wilson admitted. "I always remember stuff like that."

Dajuan Harris Jr. added 18 points for the Jayhawks (18-4, 6-3), who built a 12-point half-time lead before coasting to their 17th straight home win over K-State. They also won their second straight after a three-game skid, and made sure to avoid taking back-to-back losses inside Allen Fieldhouse for the first time since the 1988-89 season.

"Hey, their guys are hard to guard. They've got a good team," Kansas coach Bill Self said.

"I actually thought we did a good job, for the most part, and our bench was terrific. That was the best our bench has played so far."

Markquis Nowell scored 23 points and Keyontae Johnson had 22 points and 12 boards to lead the Wildcats (18-4, 6-3), who were trying for their first regular-season sweep of their biggest rival in four decades.

No. 4 Alabama 101, Vanderbilt 44: Brandon Miller scored 22 points to help the host Crimson Tide rout the Commodores for the their largest margin of victory over an SEC opponent ever.

Alabama (19-3, 9-0 SEC) shot 59% from the field and 46% from three-point range to pull off the fourth-largest win in school history.

Nimari Burnett added 16 points, his first points after three scoreless games since returning from injury on Jan. 21. Three more Alabama players cracked double-digit points: Rylan Griffen with 12, Noah Gurley with 11 and Charles Bediako with 10.

No. 15 TCU 76, West Virginia 72: Damion Baugh had 16 points and 10 assists, big man Eddie Lampkin Jr. made an unexpected return from injury and the host Horned Frogs overcame the absence of top scorer Mike Miles Jr. to beat the Mountaineers.

JaKobe Coles had 17 points, Shahada Wells 16 points and Xavier Cork 15 for TCU (17-5, 6-3 Big 12), which wrapped up the first half of its conference schedule in a four-way tie with No. 7 Kansas State, No. 8 Kansas and No. 13 Iowa State for second place. They are all one game behind league-leading No. 10 Texas.

Boston College 62, No. 20 Clemson 54: Makai Ashton-Langford had two key driving baskets in the closing two minutes and finished with 15 points to help the host Eagles beat the Tigers.

Maryland 66, No. 21 Indiana 55: Jahmir Young scored 20 points, Donta Scott added 19 and the host Terrapins snapped the Hoosiers' five-game winning streak.

Nevada 75, No. 22 San Diego State 66: Jarrod Lucas scored 26 points and Will Baker had 19 points and eight rebounds as the host Wolf Pack beat the Aztecs.

No. 23 Miami 92, Virginia Tech 83: Nigel Pack scored 17 points in a 5-minute span late in the game, and the Hurricanes stayed unbeaten at home this season by topping the Hokies.

No. 24 UConn 90, DePaul 76: Jordan Hawkins scored 26 points, Adama Sanogo had 25 and the visiting Huskies beat the Blue Demons.

NASCAR says Chastain's move illegal

Associated Press

NASCAR has essentially banned the “Hail Melon” video-game move driver Ross Chastain used at Martinsville Speedway to race his way into the championship finale.

Chastain last year mashed the gas and deliberately smashed into the wall so that the energy would speed his car past his rivals. The move advanced him into NASCAR's title-deciding final race and the last of the four spots, and was lauded by motorsports figures globally.

But his fellow NASCAR competitors thought Chastain's trick was both dangerous and not in the spirit of fair competition. NASCAR on Tuesday said the wall-hugging, jaw-dropping pass Chastain made on the final lap will be a penalty in 2023.

“Not a new rule,” said Elton Sawyer, NASCAR's vice president of competition. “I think we all remember the last-lap move at Martinsville in the fall. Brought a great deal of excitement, a great deal of exposure to our sport. But it also came with some scrutiny.”

NASCAR cited rule

10.5.2.6.A, which states “any violations deemed to compromise the safety of an event or otherwise pose a dangerous risk to the safety of competitors, officials, spectators or others are treated with the highest degree of seriousness.”

Chastain was on the verge of playoff elimination when he harkened to a racing move he used on GameCube with his brother, Chad, as a kid. He plastered his car against the outside wall, let go of the steering wheel and pushed the pedal to the floor.

It worked just like it did in the video game. Suddenly, on the final half-lap at the Martinsville short track, Chastain's car looked as if it was turned up to hyper-speed while everyone else was poking along.

Going at least 50 mph faster than everyone else, he passed five cars in a matter of seconds to claim the final spot in the title race.

Other notable changes for NASCAR's Cup Series in 2023:

■ Losing a wheel will no longer be a four-race suspension to the crew chief and two crew members. It will be a two-

race suspension for two crew members if it happens beyond pit road.

■ There will no longer be stage breaks at road courses. NASCAR will still award points at the end of stages, only without the artificial caution.

■ NASCAR will give teams seven minutes on pit road to work on their cars if they are damaged in an accident. It was six minutes last year before being increased to 10 minutes for the Cup playoffs.

■ Restart zones will be increased by 50% — 25% more room before the start/finish line and 25% more at the end. The rule change goes into effect for the first five events of the season and will be reevaluated from there.

■ NASCAR removed the top-30-in-points requirement for drivers trying to make the playoffs. Drivers will still be required to participate in every event unless granted a waiver (typically for an injury).

■ NASCAR will use new recording systems in cars that will provide more powerful crash data. It's a significant upgrade

from the black box technology first used in 2002 following Dale Earnhardt's death at Daytona International Speedway.

■ NASCAR will have a “large increase” in the number of drivers who will wear mouth-piece sensors at races. They were not available at every event in 2022 but will be beginning in 2023. Data recorders measure what cars experience; this would provide data directly from drivers and what they go through during races, specifically in crashes.

■ NASCAR officially designated eight locations at which wet-weather packages (rain tires) will be available in 2023: the LA Coliseum (the Clash), Lucas Oil Raceway in Indianapolis, Martinsville, Milwaukee, New Hampshire, North Wilkesboro (All-Star race), Phoenix and Richmond. NASCAR will have “rain” tires and teams will be required to have windshield wiper hookups and rear lights in case NASCAR wants to race in damp conditions for the Clash, Martinsville, New Hampshire, North Wilkesboro, Phoenix and Richmond.

Aho scores on power play, lifts Carolina over LA

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Carolina Hurricanes keep collecting comeback victories, and their latest was quite an accomplishment.

Sebastian Aho scored on a power play with 53.8 seconds left in overtime and the Hurricanes overcame a three-goal deficit to beat the Los Angeles Kings 5-4 on Tuesday night.

It's the seventh time this season that the Metropolitan Division-leading Hurricanes have won after facing a third-period deficit.

“We got our game going,” Aho said. “It wasn't panic or anything like that. Winning this

hockey game was pretty special, coming from three goals behind. Gives us a lot of belief.”

Brent Burns, Paul Stastny, Jordan Staal and Teuvo Teravainen also scored for the Hurricanes, who trailed 4-1 entering the third period. Andrei Svechnikov had two assists and Frederik Andersen stopped 17 shots.

“Give them credit for not packing it in,” Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. “It's 4-1 going to the third, not playing very well and then we decided to put a good effort up and got rewarded.”

It was just the fifth time in 25 seasons that Carolina trailed by

three goals in the third period and ended up with a victory.

Aho has scored in five straight games as the Hurricanes extended their winning streak to six games and their points streak to nine games. Aho has a franchise-record eight career overtime goals.

Capitals 4, Blue Jackets 3 (OT): Evgeny Kuznetsov scored 26 seconds into overtime, and visiting Washington extended its lead over Pittsburgh for fourth place in the Metropolitan Division.

Trevor van Riemsdyk scored twice, Garnet Hathaway added a goal and Kuznetsov also contributed an assist. Charlie Lind-

gren stopped 31 shots.

Andrew Peeke, Eric Robinson and Johnny Gaudreau scored for Columbus.

Senators 5, Canadiens 4: Brady Tkachuk scored at 18:41 of the third period and visiting Ottawa extended its winning streak to four.

Tim Stutzle scored two goals and added two assists, while Alex DeBrincat and Claude Giroux also found the back of the net for the Senators. Anton Forsberg made 28 saves.

Rafael Harvey-Pinard kept the Canadiens in the game with two third-period goals. Kirby Dach and Mike Hoffman also scored for Montreal.