

Navy removes failed fitness tests from records

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The Navy is wiping the slate clean for active-duty and reserve sailors who have failed fitness tests, as the service tries to keep retention numbers up by easing the way for sailors to reenlist or receive a promotion.

Service members who failed a physical fitness assessment on or before Feb. 15 will have their records reset to zero, the Navy said Thursday in a statement.

Those sailors will also be eligible for other career opportunities, such as a change of duty station, according to the an-

nouncement.

The policy cancels all administrative separations for officers due solely to successive failed PFAs. Enlisted sailors must make a request to cancel a separation or retirement resulting from repeated fitness failures, the Navy said.

The reset gives sailors, whose ability to prepare for and take PFAs was limited because of COVID-19 restrictions, an opportunity to meet fitness standards and stay in the service, the statement said.

During the pandemic, the Navy shifted to a single annual fitness testing cycle as outlined in a January 2021 memo. Prior

to the pandemic, the service had two annual testing cycles.

Faced with missed recruitment goals, the Navy has renewed efforts to focus on retention, such as offering sizable reenlistment bonuses and suspending for two years a program that capped how many years an enlisted sailor could serve. Sailors with certain ratings can receive as much as \$30,000 per year of additional service in bonuses.

The total amount a sailor can receive is capped at \$100,000, however, according to the Navy's online personnel portal. The bonuses can be reduced or stopped depending on the Na-

vy's needs.

The policy change does not exclude counting failed PFAs in programs and processes such as officer commissioning, selection or screening boards and special duty screenings, the Navy said.

And it isn't permission for not meeting physical fitness standards, which, among other criteria, measure performance in activities such as running or swimming, and pushups.

"It remains incumbent upon individual sailors to invest in their personal health and wellness in order to maintain war-fighting readiness," the Navy statement said.

4 US troops, dog hurt in helicopter raid in Syria

By DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military carried out a helicopter raid in Syria that killed a senior Islamic State leader — an operation that also left four American troops and a military dog wounded, defense officials said Friday.

U.S. Central Command, which runs operations in the Middle East, said the raid was conducted Thursday night in partnership with the allied Syrian Democratic Forces in northeastern Syria near Deir el-Zour. The raid targeted and killed senior ISIS leader Hamza al-Homsi, who oversaw the group's terrorist network in eastern Syria.

"An explosion on target resulted in four U.S. servicemembers and one working dog [being] wounded," CENTCOM said in a statement. "The U.S. service members and working dog are receiving treatment in a U.S. medical facility in Iraq."

The injuries suffered by the U.S. service members and the dog weren't immediately clear Friday, though CENTCOM said they are in stable condition. No civilians or SDF forces were injured in the operation.

No other ISIS fighters were killed or captured during this raid. A separate raid that

same night, however, resulted in the death of an ISIS assassination cell leader, CENTCOM said.

The SDF is a Kurdish-led coalition of rebels and ethnic groups that have been fighting government forces and Syrian dictator Bashar Assad in a civil war since 2011. Russia and Iran have been Syria's top allies in the war and Moscow has provided military equipment to the government during the conflict.

At the same time, U.S. and allied forces have also been fighting against terrorist factions in Syria, which has long been home to Islamic State. The primary goal of ISIS is to establish an Islamic caliphate in Syria and neighboring Iraq.

Several U.S. military operations in recent years have resulted in frequent turnover in the leadership of ISIS.

In February 2021, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi was killed in a U.S. raid in northwest Syria. ISIS founder Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was hunted down by U.S. forces in a raid in October 2019. In October, the leader of ISIS, Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, was killed in battle with Syrian rebels in southern Syria, according to The Associated Press.

The helicopter raid happened just a few days after parts of northwestern Syria were devastated by a 7.8-magnitude earthquake. The disaster has so far caused tens of thousands of deaths in Syria and neighboring Turkey and extensive infrastructure damage in both countries. Experts have said in recent days that the ongoing civil war and terrorist dangers have made it difficult to get humanitarian aid into Syria.

Meanwhile, the death toll from an ISIS attack against an army checkpoint and people collecting truffles in central Syria has risen to at least 53, most of them civilians, state media and an opposition war monitor reported Saturday.

The attack near the central town of Sukhna on Friday was the deadliest by the extremist group so far this year, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor said.

The Observatory, which tracks Syria's conflict, said the ISIS gunmen took advantage of the Feb. 6 earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria and killed tens of thousands of people to carry out their deadly attack. The attention in Syria has been mostly focused on the earthquake over the past two weeks.

New threats from N. Korea, US bombers fly after test

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Sunday that its latest intercontinental ballistic missile test was meant to further bolster its “fatal” nuclear attack capacity and threatened additional powerful steps over upcoming military drills between the United States and South Korea.

The U.S. responded by flying long-range supersonic bombers in a show of force later Sunday for separate joint exercises with South Korean and Japanese warplanes.

Saturday’s ICBM test, the North’s first missile test since Jan. 1, signals its leader Kim Jong Un is using his rivals’ drills as a chance to expand his country’s nuclear arsenal to get the upper hand in future dealings with the U.S. An expert says North Korea may seek to hold regular operational exercises involving its ICBMs.

North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency said its launch of the Hwasong-15 ICBM was organized “suddenly” without prior notice at Kim’s direct order.

KCNA said the launch was designed to verify the weapon’s reliability and the combat readiness of the country’s nuclear force. It said the missile was fired at a high angle and reached a maximum altitude of

about 3,585 miles, flying a distance of about 615 miles for 67 minutes before accurately hitting a pre-set area in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan.

The steep-angle launch was apparently to avoid neighboring countries. The flight details reported by North Korea, which roughly matched the launch information previously assessed by its neighbors, show the weapon is theoretically capable of reaching the mainland U.S. if fired at a standard trajectory.

Later Sunday, U.S. B-1B bombers and other aircraft separately trained with South Korean and Japanese fighter jets over and near the Korean Peninsula. A South Korean military statement said Sunday’s training reaffirmed Washington’s “iron-clad” security commitment to South Korea.

North Korea is sensitive to the deployment of U.S. B-1B bombers, which are capable of carrying a huge payload of conventional weapons.

The North’s launch came a day after it vowed an “unprecedentedly” strong response over a series of military drills that Seoul and Washington plan in coming weeks.

Blinken warns that China’s balloon invasion ‘must never happen again’

Associated Press

MUNICH — The top diplomats from the United States and China met on Saturday in the first high-level contact between their countries since the U.S. shot down an alleged Chinese spy balloon two weeks ago, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken sending the message that Beijing’s surveillance program had been “exposed to the world.”

Blinken and Wang Yi, the Chinese Communist Party’s most senior foreign policy official, held the hourlong talks in Munich, where they were attending an international security conference, according to the U.S. State Department.

“I made very clear to him that China sending its surveillance balloon over the United

States in violation of our sovereignty, in violation of international law, was unacceptable and must never happen again,” Blinken said Saturday in an interview for CBS’ “Face the Nation.”

His spokesman, Ned Price, said in a statement that Blinken also told the Chinese official that his nation’s “high-altitude surveillance balloon program — which has intruded into the airspace of over 40 countries across five continents — has been exposed to the world.”

Blinken also told Wang that the U.S. does not seek conflict with China, repeating a standard talking point that the Biden administration has provided since it has come into office.

USS Roosevelt lost 2 to suicide since December

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The crew of the USS Theodore Roosevelt on Wednesday mourned the death of a crewmate lost to suicide, just weeks after another sailor on the aircraft carrier also took his own life, according to social media posts.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Christopher Carroll, 22, a boatswain’s mate from Alabama, died Jan. 18, according to an obituary published by Sunset Memorial Park in Midland City, Ala. The Kitsap County Medical Examiner’s Office confirmed the cause of death as suicide, according to a Jan. 27 report by Military.com.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Jacob Slocum, an electrician’s mate from Illinois, died Dec. 5, according to his obituary published by Chapel Hill Gardens West in Oakbrook Terrace, Ill. The medical examiner ruled Slocum’s death a suicide, according to Military.com.

The two deaths aboard the Theodore Roosevelt bring to at least 10 the number of sailors who have taken their own lives since April across the 335,000-strong Navy, according to published reports. Three suicides that month among the crew of the carrier USS George Washington, docked in Virginia, raised questions in Congress and sparked a Pentagon investigation.

Carroll and Slocum’s crewmates mourned them in separate ceremonies aboard the carrier at its homeport, Kitsap Naval Base, Wash.

The Facebook accounts of their shipboard ceremonies attracted dozens of expressions of condolence and prayers to the sailors and their families.

Some comments, however, were critical of the Navy’s handling of mental health and suicide.

“We have multiple shipmates that have passed away due to taking their own life!” Ayshia Allen wrote on the Jan. 25 Facebook post. “When can y’all take mental health seriously?”

Another commenter, Kimberly Jane McInerney, asked how many kids would “slip through the cracks” before the real issues are addressed?”

The Theodore Roosevelt is undergoing repairs and maintenance at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard.

Families face big tax bills after fuel leak moves

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Carolina Alama considers herself quite responsible when it comes to planning for annual income tax returns.

The retired Navy veteran, who lives on Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, with her three children, carefully manages withholding so that she owes little to the IRS come April 15, she said during a phone interview Wednesday. Not this year.

Earlier this month, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service notified her that she owes \$6,500 in taxes on \$22,000 she received from the government to temporarily relocate her family last year after a Navy fuel leak contaminated their drinking water.

Skipping payment is not an option, Alama said, but she is particularly irked that she and thou-

sands of other evacuees were not informed they'd be on the hook for income taxes.

"The unfair and unjust thing is that in the end we're paying for the government's mistake," Alama said. "We got put out of our homes."

Roughly 4,000 households in military residential areas were temporarily relocated during the crisis that began in late November 2021 when jet fuel from the Red Hill fuel storage facility near the joint base leaked into the Navy's water distribution system.

Many of those who relocated are now learning from DFAS that a huge tax bill awaits, and some have taken to the Facebook page JBPHH Water Contamination Support to seek clarity, commiserate or rage against the surprise notices.

"Omg this makes me livid," a poster named Jen Andersen re-

cently wrote. "They poisoned us and we had to live without clean water for months and now we have to pay taxes on it?"

A poster named Teri'i Garcia said her income tax returns were prepared last week.

"We usually get around 6000 back due to the child tax credits but this year we owe 2000," she wrote.

The bump in income also pushed her into a higher tax bracket, wrote Garcia, who did not respond to a request for an interview.

Alama, like many others, received a Form 1099 from DFAS indicating that the \$22,000 spent for her family's relocation was considered "other income." Her tax preparer told her that she owes \$6,500 in taxes on that income.

"Without that, it would have been like \$2 that I owed to federal

and \$10 to state," Alama said.

Joint Task Force-Red Hill, which is tasked with emptying the Red Hill facility for its permanent closure, referred questions about the tax liability AS.

Stars and Stripes submitted a detailed query to DFAS on Tuesday but has not received a response.

The 1099 forms appear to have been sent to retirees and contractors who live in the military communities. Active-duty service members who relocated during the crisis saw the additional income reflected on their W-2 forms.

Some Facebook posters are vowing to not pay the tax.

"I feel like If they want to tax us on something that was their fault and caused us to have to leave our homes," wrote a poster named Lindsay Lou, "they can take us to court for it."

National Guard pilots killed in Black Hawk crash in Ala.

By **COREY DICKSTEIN**
Stars and Stripes

Two longtime Tennessee Army National Guard pilots were killed Wednesday when their Black Hawk helicopter crashed near Huntsville, Ala., Guard officials said.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Daniel Wadham and Chief Warrant Officer 3 Danny Randolph were killed in the crash that happened at about 3 p.m. local time, Col. James A. Reed, a Tennessee Guard spokesman, said Thursday in a statement. The crash remained under investigation.

Wadham was from Joelton, Tenn., and had served 15 years in the Army. Randolph was from Murfreesboro, Tenn., and had served 13 years, Reed said. Both were assigned to A Company of the 1-230th Assault Helicopter Battalion, which is stationed at Berry Field Air National Guard Base in Nashville, Tenn.

"Words cannot express my sorrow for the loss of these two Tennessee National Guardsmen," Brig. Gen. Warner Ross, the Tennessee Guard's top general, said in a statement. "It is felt not only within the ranks of the Tennessee National Guard but across our entire military community. We ask that Tennesseans continue to join us in prayer for these soldiers' families amid this tragic loss."

The UH-60 Black Hawk was conducting a training flight and approaching the Huntsville Executive Airport when it "rapidly descended and impacted the ground" near Highway 53 and Burwell Road, Reed said. The Huntsville airport is about 100 miles south of Berry Field.

No other service members were aboard the aircraft when it crashed, and no civilians were injured when the Black Hawk went down, officials said.

Additional leave, travel for troops for abortions

By **PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN**
Stars and Stripes

Service members will soon be entitled to up to three weeks of additional leave to have an abortion and may also be eligible to have their travel costs to and from abortion clinics reimbursed by the government.

It's part of a set of policies announced Thursday by the Defense Department aimed at helping military members and their dependents who must travel out of state to terminate a pregnancy.

In June 2022, the Supreme Court overturned the landmark 1973 abortion rights ruling *Roe v. Wade*, and since then, several states have passed laws outlawing abortions in most cases.

The DOD's decision will "ensure service members are able to access non-covered reproductive health care regardless of where they are stationed,"

the statement said.

Three policies aimed at improving service members' access to reproductive health care and abortion services will go into effect March 18. The first provides as much as 21 days of leave for troops to receive an abortion or fertility treatments. That time is not subtracted from other leave allowances. Service members accompanying a spouse or dependent for such care also qualify.

The second policy stipulates that those who must leave their duty stations to receive reproductive care can be reimbursed for their travel fees.

And the third gives pregnant service women up to 20 weeks to notify their commands about their situation.

Military hospitals can perform abortions only if the mother's life is endangered or in cases of rape or incest.

US: Russia has committed crimes against humanity

Associated Press

MUNICH — The United States has determined that Russia has committed crimes against humanity in Ukraine, Vice President Kamala Harris said Saturday, insisting that “justice must be served” to the perpetrators.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, Harris said the international community has both a moral and a strategic interest in pursuing those crimes, pointing to a danger of other authoritarian governments taking advantage if international rules are undermined.

“Russian forces have pursued a widespread and systemic attack against a civilian population — gruesome acts of murder, torture, rape and deportation,” Harris said. She also cited “execution-style killings, beatings and electrocution.”

The Biden administration formally determined last March that Russian troops had committed war crimes in Ukraine and said it would work with others to prosecute offenders. A determination of crimes against humanity goes a step further, indicating that attacks against civilians are being carried out in a widespread and systematic manner.

“Russian authorities have forcibly deported hundreds of thousands of people, from Ukraine to Russia, including children,” Harris said. “They have cruelly separated children from their families.”

She also pointed to the attack in mid-March on a theater in the strategic port city of Mariupol where civilians had been sheltering, which killed hundreds, and to the images of civilians’ bodies left on the streets of Bucha after the Russian pull-

back from the Kyiv area last spring.

Harris said that as a former prosecutor and former head of California’s Department of Justice, she knows “the importance of gathering facts and holding them up against the law.”

“In the case of Russia’s actions in Ukraine, we have examined the evidence, we know the legal standards and there is no doubt,” she said. “These are crimes against humanity.”

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who also was attending the Munich conference, said in a statement issued as Harris spoke that “we reserve crimes against humanity determinations for the most egregious crimes.”

The new determination underlines the “staggering extent” of suffering inflicted on Ukrainian civilians and “also reflects the deep commitment of the United States to holding members of Russia’s forces and other Russian officials accountable for their atrocities,” he said.

In an address to his country on Saturday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Kyiv last week had gotten “strong signals from our partners, specific agreements on the inevitability of holding Russia accountable for aggression, for terror against Ukraine and its people.”

“Every Russian attack ... on every corner of our state will have concrete legal consequences for the terrorist state,” Zelenskyy said, citing attacks not just in the past year of war but dating back to 2014, when fighting with Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine first broke out.

The president did not refer specifically to Harris’ remarks or name any countries that had provided agreements on Russian accountability.

Michigan St. struggles as classes set to resume

Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. — Michigan State University professor Marco Díaz-Muñoz is still haunted by what he witnessed last Monday night, when a gunman entered his classroom in Berkey Hall, killing two of his students in what he describes as “12 minutes of terror.”

“Those images haunt me. The images of those two girls,” Díaz-Muñoz told The Associated Press.

Arielle Anderson and Alexandria Verner, both juniors, would die that night. The suspected gunman, Anthony McRae, would shoot six more students during the rampage in two campus buildings. Brian Fraser also would die. Five others would suffer critical gunshot wounds.

On Monday, Díaz-Muñoz and others are set to return to class. The university confirmed Friday in an email to students and staff that campus operations would resume, even as officials have faced pressure to delay the return. There will be no classes for the rest of the semester in Berkey Hall. Díaz-Muñoz said the university offered to have another professor teach through the end of the semester. While he has yet to make a final decision, his plan is to go back this week and teach.

“On one hand, I want to forget it all. But then on the other hand, I think I need to help my students pick up the pieces,” Díaz-Muñoz said.

Some in the community, however, aren’t ready for the rapid return. The editorial board of The State News, the student newspaper, wrote Thursday that they wouldn’t attend class this week, either in person or online. More time was needed to heal, the students wrote.

Jimmy Carter enters hospice care

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Former President Jimmy Carter, who at 98 years old is the longest-lived American president, has entered home hospice care in Plains, Ga., a statement from The Carter Center confirmed Saturday.

After a series of short hospital stays, the statement said, Carter “decided to spend his remaining time at home with his family and receive hospice care in-

stead of additional medical intervention.”

The statement said the 39th president has the full support of his medical team and family, which “asks for privacy at this time and is grateful for the concern shown by his many admirers.”

Carter was a little-known Georgia governor when he began his bid for the presidency ahead of the 1976 election. He went on to defeat then-President Gerald

R. Ford, capitalizing as a Washington outsider in the wake of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal that drove Richard Nixon from office in 1974.

Carter served a single, tumultuous term and was defeated by Republican Ronald Reagan in 1980, a landslide loss that ultimately paved the way for his decades of global advocacy for democracy, public health and human rights via The Carter Center.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Sheriff: Man run over while taking catalytic converter

CA LOS ANGELES — A man was run over and killed after he crawled under a parked SUV and tried to steal the catalytic converter in Palmdale, authorities said.

The incident occurred at a retail parking lot, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said.

Four people were inside a vehicle parked near a Ford Excursion, according to the Sheriff's Department. A man got out of the vehicle and crawled under the SUV, where he began trying to saw off the catalytic converter.

A woman who had been asleep in the Excursion woke up to the noise of the saw. According to the Sheriff's Department, the woman turned the car on, put it in reverse, then "felt a bump like she ran something over."

"She stopped immediately, leaving the suspect on the ground after running him over," the statement read.

The woman, who was not identified, called 911.

The man was taken to Antelope Valley Hospital, where he died. Authorities have not identified him.

Governor blocks death penalty, calls for repeal

PA HARRISBURG — Democratic Gov. Josh Shapiro said Thursday he will not allow Pennsylvania to execute any inmates while he is in office and called for the state's lawmakers to repeal the death penalty.

Shapiro, inaugurated last month, said he will refuse to

sign execution warrants and will use his power as governor to grant reprieves to any inmate whose execution is scheduled.

In doing so, he is exercising an authority used for eight years by his predecessor, Gov. Tom Wolf, to effectively impose a moratorium on the death penalty in a state where it has been sparsely used.

Shapiro went further, asking lawmakers to repeal the death penalty and calling it fallible and irreversible.

DOJ faults district for use of seclusion, restraints

AK ANCHORAGE — Alaska's largest school district repeatedly and inappropriately secluded and restrained students with disabilities, the U.S. Department of Justice said Thursday following an investigation into alleged violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

According to an agreement reached between the Justice Department and Anchorage schools, the district will eliminate the use of seclusion at all schools and ensure that students are only restrained when there is imminent danger of "serious physical harm to the student to another person." It also found that some students who were put into seclusion harmed themselves and some expressed suicidal thoughts.

Fake sports memorabilia worth millions seized

SC COLUMBIA — Law enforcement agents confiscated over 600 fake championship rings across four major U.S. professional sports leagues and the NCAA from a South Carolina memorabilia

store as part of a seizure of counterfeit merchandise, the South Carolina Secretary of State announced.

The counterfeit goods could have fetched as much as \$15 million at retail.

The hefty price tag, the highest-value seizure in the office's history, was driven by fake NFL, NBA, MLB, NHL and NCAA championship rings, according to spokesperson Shannon Wiley. The hoard includes 157 Super Bowl rings, 83 NBA Finals rings, 99 World Series rings, 29 Stanley Cup rings and 251 NCAA championship rings for unnamed sports, Wiley said.

Federal, state and local officials raided Kirk's Collectibles at an upstate mall on Feb. 8. No arrests have been made. The shop also sells nonsports memorabilia, according to its website. The South Carolina Secretary of State's office said it cannot share information about the number of suspects while a U.S. Department of Homeland Security investigation is underway.

Senate bill lets teachers decide on pronouns

KY FRANKFORT — The Kentucky Senate passed a bill allowing teachers to refuse to refer to transgender students by their preferred pronouns — a proposal that was touted as protecting free-speech rights in classrooms.

The measure cleared the Senate on a 29-6 vote after the emotional debate, sending the culture war topic to the House. Republicans have supermajorities in both chambers. The bill's lead sponsor, Republican Sen. Max Wise, pointed to parts of

the bill that he said would empower parents, strengthening their communications with schools regarding health services and school curriculum around sexuality.

But much of the debate revolved around whether to allow teachers to decide whether to use a student's preferred pronouns. The bill would prevent policies compelling school staff to use pronouns that don't conform to a student's biological sex.

States may ban forced prison labor, servitude

NV CARSON CITY — Lawmakers in Nevada and California are advancing legislation to remove "involuntary servitude" from their states' constitutions, a move that follows four states' bans on forced labor that passed in ballot measures last fall.

The goal of these proposals is to remove exceptions from the states' constitutions that allow forced labor as criminal punishment. The efforts come amid a growing push among some states to scrub outdated, century-old language from their state constitutions. Last fall, voters approved similar ballot measures in Alabama, Oregon, Tennessee and Vermont.

About a dozen states are pushing this year to get rid of the involuntary servitude exceptions, according to the Abolish Slavery National Network. It's not uncommon for prisoners in California, Nevada and other states to be paid less than \$1 an hour to fight fires, clean prison cells, make license plates or do yardwork at cemeteries.

— From wire reports



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McClung wins All-Star slam dunk contest

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Mac McClung might have single-handedly restored the shine on a dunk contest that has been widely panned in recent years.

McClung, the 6-foot-2 Philadelphia guard on a two-way contract, defeated New Orleans' Trey Murphy III in the finals of the dunk contest, culminating an NBA All-Star Saturday that may have finally answered the question as to whether what used to be the league's signature event can be glitzy again.

McClung had the answer: Absolutely.

"I'm truly blessed and grateful for the NBA giving me this opportunity," McClung said.

A 540-degree dunk — not a 360, but a 540, him doing one-and-a-half rotations in the air, a move more reserved for figure skaters and skateboarders than

basketball players — was his third perfect score of the night out of four dunks. By the time the judges' scores came up it was already decided. Everyone in the building knew he'd already won.

"It's over," McClung said.

It was. And he immediately committed to defending his title at Indianapolis at All-Star Saturday next year.

"If you guys will have me, I'll be back," McClung said.

The final score, not that it mattered, was McClung 100.0, Murphy 98.0.

His is an unbelievable story: McClung has played mostly in the G League, where he ranks 36th in scoring this season at 19 points per game. He was undrafted in 2021 after spending three college seasons at Georgetown and Texas Tech. He was signed by Golden State last year but never played in a

regular-season game for the Warriors, and spent a little time on USA Basketball's World Cup qualifying team last year as well.

"Ever since the beginning, I was the underdog," said McClung, who put on a Gate City jersey — his high school and hometown in Virginia, population 1,600 — for the final dunk. "Proving others right instead of others wrong brings a little more satisfaction."

Philadelphia became his third NBA team, and he hasn't even played for the 76ers yet. He played in one game last season for the Chicago Bulls, one other game for the Los Angeles Lakers.

He has three NBA baskets.

He had four dunks on Saturday night.

Three-point contest

Damian Lillard represented

his school and his brand, doing them both proud.

Lillard, the Portland star, won the three-point contest by topping Indiana teammates Buddy Hield and Tyrese Haliburton in the final round.

Lillard wore a Weber State jersey with "Dolla" on the back. Weber State is his college; he performs music under the name Dame D.O.L.L.A. And when he got the trophy, he had a Blazers warmup shirt on for that moment.

"They say the third time's the charm," said Lillard, who got his first three-point title in his third try at the event. "And I'm happy that it happened here. It's a perfect situation. I'm happy that I did it in my home, coming back here to Utah."

Lillard won the final round with 26 points. Hield had 25 and Haliburton scored 17.

Alabama headlines early list of top NCAA seeds

Associated Press

Alabama got the best of Houston in a non-conference matchup. That has the Crimson Tide holding an early lead on the Cougars for the No. 1 overall seed in the NCAA Tournament, too.

The committee that will select the field of 68 revealed its preliminary list of top teams Saturday, with the Crimson Tide taking the top spot over the Cougars due to a head-to-head road win in December — which committee chairman Chris Reynolds said "put them over the top."

Otherwise, there isn't much difference when it comes to the teams' résumés. They're 1-2 in some order in the AP Top 25, NET (NCAA Evaluation Tool) and KenPom rankings. Alabama entered the weekend with seven wins in Quadrant 1 compared with four for Houston, while both teams were unbeaten against Quadrant 2 opponents.

If the order holds, it would mark the first No. 1 regional seed for Nate Oats' Crimson Tide in program history. Alabama climbed to No. 1 in the AP Top 25 poll last week for the first time since 2003, though the Tide lost to Tennessee on Wednesday in their

first game with that ranking.

Houston hasn't held a No. 1 seed since 1983, during the "Phi Slama Jama" era of the early 1980s.

Purdue and reigning national champion Kansas were the other No. 1 seeds, with the Boilermakers spending a national-best seven weeks at No. 1 in the AP Top 25 this season. The Jayhawks are trying to become the first repeat champion since Florida in 2006-07 and entered the weekend with a national-best 12 Quadrant 1 wins, while no other team had reached 10.

The nationally televised reveal of the top 16 seeds offers a snapshot of where things stand with a little more than three weeks remaining until the field is set.

Since the first reveal in 2017, the NCAA said 65 of 80 teams have remained in the top 16, while three of the four No. 1 regional seeds each year have stayed there.

Texas, Arizona, Baylor and UCLA were the preliminary No. 2 seeds, followed by Tennessee, Virginia, Iowa State and Kansas State as 3-seeds. Indiana, Marquette, Gonzaga and Xavier rounded out the list as No. 4 seeds.

Reynolds said Creighton, Miami, Saint

Mary's and Connecticut were the top teams to miss the cut.

The selection committee also sorted the top 16 seeds into four regional groupings, starting with Alabama headlining the South bracket that goes through Louisville, Ky. Baylor, Virginia and Indiana joined the Tide in the South.

Houston topped the Midwest bracket running through Kansas City, Mo., followed by Texas, Tennessee and Xavier.

Purdue was the No. 1 seed in the East bracket running through New York, joined by UCLA, Iowa State and Marquette.

Kansas was the top seed in the West bracket running through Las Vegas, followed by Arizona, Kansas State and Gonzaga.

The Big 12 finished with a national-best five teams in the top 16. The Southeastern, Big Ten, Pac-12 and Big East conferences each had two as the only other leagues with multiple teams.

Selection Sunday is March 12, with First Four games beginning two days later. The Final Four will be held in Houston, with the semifinals set for April 1 and the championship game two days later.

Rice's 24 points help Texas top Oklahoma

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — When Texas is engaged in a close game, it can call on experience, energy and poise. The No. 6 Longhorns needed all of that against Oklahoma on Saturday.

Senior reserve Sir Jabari Rice scored 19 of his game-high 24 points in the second half and overtime, and Texas held off the Sooners 85-83.

The Longhorns (21-6, 10-4 Big 12) have not lost two straight games all season. They are 7-0 under interim coach Rodney Terry in games decided by five points or fewer or in overtime, including a 70-69 victory at Oklahoma on Dec 31.

"I see in Texas the veteran, tough mentality," Oklahoma coach Porter Moser said.

Rice's fourth three-pointer of the game gave Texas an 84-77 lead with 2:26 left in overtime.

Oklahoma had a chance to tie or win when Texas' Tyrese Hunter missed one of two free throws with 6.8 seconds left. But Sam Godwin missed a shot from near the rim, and Texas extended its winning streak against Oklahoma to five games.

Marcus Carr added 17 points for Texas and Timmy Allen had 15 points, nine rebounds and four assists. Both are seniors, as is Dylan Disu, who scored 12.

Though the Longhorns made several clutch shots, Terry cited other factors that were critical.

"We forced 18 turnovers, and we had 19 assists," Terry said, calling it "the difference in the game."

No. 1 Alabama 108, Georgia 59: Brandon Miller scored 21 points, Nick Pringle had 19 points and 12 rebounds and Mark Sears made five three-pointers in the first half to lead the host Crimson Tide.

Alabama (23-4, 13-1 Southeastern Conference) rebounded from its first SEC loss by racing to a 54-25 halftime lead and a season scoring high. Alabama was coming off a 68-59 loss at No. 10 Tennessee on Wednes-

day night after rising to No. 1 for only the second time in program history and first in 20 years.

No. 4 UCLA 78, California 43: Jaime Jaquez Jr. scored 20 points and the Bruins routed the last-place Bears to improve to 15-0 at Pauley Pavilion this season.

Amari Bailey added 16 points and nine rebounds for UCLA (23-4, 14-2 Pac-12), which clinched a first-round bye in next month's Pac-12 Tournament.

No. 5 Kansas 87, No. 9 Baylor 71: DaJuan Harris scored all 14 of his points in the second half as the host Jayhawks stormed back from a double-digit halftime deficit.

Kansas (22-5, 10-4 Big 12) outscored the Bears 55-26 in the second half. Jalen Wilson led Kansas with 21 points and 13 rebounds. KJ Adams added 17 points and Gradey Dick had 16.

Baylor (20-7, 9-5) got nearly all of its scoring from its three-guard combo of Adam Flagler (22 points) Keyonte George (20 points) and LJ Cryer (15 points).

No. 7 Virginia 57, Notre Dame 55: Kihei Clark scored 15 points, including a pair of critical free throws with 22.6 seconds left, and became the Cavaliers' career assist leader in the narrow win over the visiting Irish.

Armaan Franklin added 12 points and Reece Beekman had 11 for Virginia (21-4, 13-3 Atlantic Coast Conference).

No. 8 Arizona 78, Colorado 68: Oumar Ballo had 18 points and 16 rebounds, Cedric Henderson Jr. added 15 points and the host Wildcats dominated inside to beat the Buffaloes.

Arizona (24-4, 13-4 Pac-12) opened with a rash of turnovers, falling into an early 12-point hole. Arizona righted itself quickly with a big run and slogged through a slowed-down second half by shutting down Colorado.

Kentucky 66, No. 10 Tennessee 54: Cason Wallace and

Oscar Tshiebwe each scored 16 points and the host Wildcats rushed to a big lead and upset the Volunteers.

Tennessee (20-7, 9-5 SEC) trailed by 20 points at halftime and lost in its first game since toppling No. 1 Alabama.

No. 12 Kansas State 61, No. 19 Iowa State 55: Markquis Nowell hit a three-pointer from near midcourt with 2:42 remaining to help the host Wildcats beat the Cyclones.

Nowell finished with 20 points. Keyontae Johnson had 15 points for Kansas State (20-7, 8-6 Big 12).

Aljaž Kunc led Iowa State (17-9, 8-6) with 15 points.

No. 13 Gonzaga 97, Pepperdine 88: Drew Timme scored 22 of his 34 points in the second half and Julian Strawther added 28 points to help the visiting Bulldogs extend their winning streak over the Waves to 45 games.

Gonzaga (23-5, 12-2 West Coast Conference) hasn't lost to Pepperdine (9-10, 2-12) since Jan. 18, 2002, and has won 20 straight on the road against the Waves.

No. 14 Indiana 71, Illinois 68: Trayce Jackson-Davis finished with 26 points and 12 rebounds, Jalen Hood Schifino made two free throws with 30.7 seconds left, and the host Hoosiers rallied from a nine-point second-half deficit to beat the Illini.

Hood-Schifino had 13 points for Indiana (19-8, 10-6 Big Ten), which has won nine of 11.

No. 15 Miami 96, Wake Forest 87: Isaiah Wong scored 27 points and Nijel Pack finished with 24 for the host Hurricanes.

Norchard Omier had 17 points on 7-for-8 shooting while Jordan Miller added 14 points for Miami (22-5, 13-4 Atlantic Coast Conference), which won its sixth straight.

No. 16 Xavier 82, DePaul 68: Jack Nunge had 18 points and 10 rebounds as the host Musketeers bounced back from

a pair of narrow losses to reach the 20-win mark.

Adam Kunkel scored 16 points and tied a career-high with eight assists for Xavier (20-7, 12-4 Big East).

No. 17 St. Mary's 71, BYU 65: Logan Johnson scored 27 points and Aidan Mahaney delivered once again in the second half to lead the host Gaels to their 15th win in 16 games.

Mahaney scored 14 of his 16 points in the second half and Mitchell Saxen added 13. Saint Mary's (24-5, 13-1 West Coast Conference) won its 16th straight conference home game to maintain a one-game lead over Gonzaga in the standings.

No. 18 Creighton 77, St. John's 67: Arthur Kaluma hit three straight three-pointers down the stretch and the visiting Bluejays (18-9, 12-4) overcame a second-half scoring drought to pull away from the Red Storm and remain in a three-way tie for second place in the Big East.

Ryan Nembhard scored 16 points as Creighton won for the ninth time in 10 games.

No. 20 UConn 64, Seton Hall 55: Jordan Hawkins scored 20 points and the host Huskies used a big second-half run to beat the Pirates.

Andre Jackson had a career high 15 points and grabbed 10 rebounds for UConn (20-7, 9-7 Big East).

No. 22 TCU 100, Oklahoma State 75: Mike Miles Jr. had 15 points in his first game in three weeks, five of his teammates also scored in double figures, and the host Horned Frogs snapped a four-game losing streak.

Emanuel Miller had 18 points to lead TCU (18-9, 7-7 Big 12), which shot a staggering season-high 68.4% (39-for-57) from the field.

No. 24 Providence 85, Villanova 72: Ed Crosswell scored 21 points and grabbed 10 rebounds and Bryce Hopkins added 19 points and 12 rebounds for the host Friars (20-7, 12-4 Big East).

Woods elicits roars, but makes no charge

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Jon Rahm could hear the cheers from all over Riviera, the sound typically associated with someone making a charge. Except they came from the opposite side of the course that featured players too far away from the lead.

What they meant was not nearly as mysterious as to whom they belonged.

“You’re fully aware where Tiger is anywhere,” Rahm said after his own masterpiece Saturday in the Genesis Invitational, a 6-under 65 for a three-shot lead.

Woods is cheered wildly just walking to the tee, though this time his golf was the source. He had a 67 that didn’t allow him to pick up any ground — in fact, he fell further behind and was 12 back going into Sunday.

“Today was better,” Woods said. “I felt like I made some nice adjustments with my putting and that was the thing that

held me back yesterday. I’ve driven it well the last three days, my iron play has been good. And the firm conditions I like, that’s kind of right up my alley with iron play. Just wish I could have putted a little bit better yesterday.”

What stood out was the day. It was his best score on a Saturday in an official event since the fall of 2019.

It’s a small sample size to be sure — 12 tournaments — but his legs are a bigger issue than how he swings the club.

Woods shattered bones in his right leg and ankle from a car crash in Los Angeles two years ago. He returned 14 months later to play in the Masters and made the cut, a remarkable feat. And then on the weekend, he limped his way to a pair of 78s.

A month later at Southern Hills for the PGA Championship, he again made the cut with some dazzling play on Friday. But he shot 79 on Saturday and

withdrew.

Woods made the cut on the number at Riviera and started on the back nine. He opened with a 15-foot birdie putt, missed a good chance on the par-5 11th and then raised the putter in his left hand as his 25-foot birdie putt from the fringe on the par-3 14th dropped for another birdie.

The biggest moment was on the par-5 opening hole after he made the turn. Caught between clubs and feeling a little wind in his face, he hit a cut with a 5-iron that landed toward the front of the green and rolled inches by the cup before settling 3 feet away for what amounted to a tap-in eagle.

He finally dropped a shot on the seventh when his approach rolled off the steep ledge, leaving a tough pitch. But he finished better than Friday, when he bogeyed three of his last four holes.

“I thought I could make a run

where I could reach out and touch the leaders,” Woods said before conceding he was too far back.

Rahm is playing at another level right now, a level with which Woods is familiar. The Spaniard has not finished out of the top 10 since August, and he is going for his fifth win in his past nine starts.

Woods said he was sore after his fourth straight day walking — starting with the pro-am on Wednesday when he stopped playing after 16 holes — and he speaks of the recovery after a round and the preparation before it.

That part isn’t fun. Saturday was. And while the chill in the morning air hasn’t been great, the fast conditions at Riviera are right up his alley.

Sunday was his first 72-hole event since the Masters, and only his second since his car crash that happened not far from Riviera.

DeBrusk returns to help lead Bruins past Islanders

Associated Press

BOSTON — Jake DeBrusk didn’t hesitate when asked what he missed most about sitting out 17 games with a broken leg: “Scoring goals.”

The Bruins forward didn’t waste any time after missing six weeks, scoring two minutes into the game on Saturday to propel NHL-leading Boston to a 6-2 victory over the tired New York Islanders.

“I’ve been waiting for this day for a while, and I just wanted to get a goal,” said DeBrusk, who scored twice, including the game-winner, in the Jan. 2 Winter Classic despite playing on a fractured fibula and hadn’t played since.

“I just wanted to get the first one,” he said Saturday. “It was great to get that.”

Trent Frederic had a pair of goals and Linus Ullmark

stopped 26 shots for the Bruins, who have won four of their last five games to amass 89 points and the NHL’s best record. Nick Foligno, Patrice Bergeron and Pavel Zacha also scored for Boston.

Kyle Palmieri and Matt Martin scored and Semyon Varlamov made 21 saves for the Islanders.

Hurricanes 4, Capitals 1: Martin Necas had a goal and two assists to help host Carolina win its first NHL Stadium Series outdoor game.

Devils 5, Penguins 2: Nico Hischier had two goals and two assists, Vitek Vanecsek made 29 saves and visiting New Jersey breezed past Pittsburgh.

Maple Leafs 5, Canadiens 1: Michael Bunting scored twice, and Ryan O’Reilly and Noel Acciari made their de-

butts for host Toronto.

Flames 3, Rangers 2 (OT): Mikael Backlund’s power-play goal 1:28 into overtime led host Calgary over New York, snapping its seven-game winning streak.

Golden Knights 5, Lightning 4: Jonathan Marchessault ended a 13-game goal drought with two first-period goals and host Vegas extended its winning streak to five games to remain in first place in the Pacific Division.

Blue Jackets 4, Stars 1: Adam Boqvist broke a tie early in the third period and last-place Columbus put together consecutive victories for first time in more than two months.

Kings 6, Coyotes 5 (SO): Kevin Fiala had two goals and an assist, and host Los Angeles held off Arizona in a shootout.

Kraken 4, Red Wings 2: Jordan Eberle had two goals and an assist, and host Seattle beat Detroit for the second time in franchise history.

Avalanche 4, Blues 1: Bowen Byram scored twice and Mikko Rantanen scored his 200th NHL goal in a win for visiting Colorado.

Predators 7, Panthers 3: Tommy Novak scored twice and Roman Josi had a goal and two assists to lead host Nashville over Florida.

Sabres 4, Sharks 2: Jeff Skinner scored the game-winning goal, and visiting Buffalo defeated San Jose.

Canucks 6, Flyers 2: Arturs Silovs made 35 saves for his first NHL victory, Elias Pettersson had two empty-net goals and three assists and host Vancouver beat Philadelphia.