

Ukraine defiant on invasion anniversary

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's leader pledged Friday to push for victory in 2023 as he and other Ukrainians marked the somber anniversary of the Russian invasion that upended their lives and Europe's security.

It was Ukraine's "longest day," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, but the country's dogged resistance a year on has proven that "every tomorrow is worth fighting for."

On a day of commemorations, reflection and tears, the Ukrai-

nian president's defiant tone captured the national mood of resilience in the face of Europe's biggest and deadliest war since World War II. Zelenskyy, who has himself become a symbol of Ukraine's refusal to bow to Moscow, said Ukrainians proved themselves to be invincible during "a year of pain, sorrow, faith and unity."

"We have been standing for exactly one year," Zelenskyy said. Feb. 24, 2022, he said, was "the longest day of our lives. The hardest day of our modern

history. We woke up early and haven't fallen asleep since."

Ukrainians wept at memorials for their tens of thousands of dead — a toll growing inexorably as fighting rages in eastern Ukraine in particular.

The killing continued: Russian shelling killed another three civilians and wounded 19 others in the most recent 24-hour spell, Ukraine's presidential office said.

Ukraine is readying another military push to roll back Russian forces with the help of

weaponry that has poured in from the West. NATO member Poland said Friday that it had delivered four advanced Leopard 2A4 tanks, making it the first country to hand the German-made armor to Ukraine.

Air raid alarms didn't sound overnight in Kyiv, alleviating concerns that Russia might unleash another barrage of missiles to pile yet more sadness on Ukraine on the anniversary.

Still, the government recommended that schools move classes online, and offices close.

Cold storm brings rain, blizzard warnings to Calif.

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — California and other parts of the West faced heavy snow and rain Friday from the latest winter storm to pound the U.S., while thousands of people in Michigan shivered through extended power outages wrought by one of the worst ice storms in decades.

The National Weather Service warned of a "cold and dangerous winter storm" that would last through Saturday in California. Blizzard warnings were posted in the Sierra Nevada and Southern California mountain ranges, where as much as 5 feet of snow was expected.

Interstate 5, the West Coast's major north-south highway, was shut down south of the Oregon border as snow fell to the floor of the Sacramento Valley and in a high mountain pass north of Los Angeles, where blizzard warnings were in effect. Smaller roads also closed.

Forecasters warned of severe

thunderstorms that could create waterspouts off the Southern California coast. A blizzard warning was to go into effect in part of Nevada later in the day.

Meanwhile, a storm that battered the Plains and Midwest for days began to diminish, the weather service said, but gusty winds could still cause blowing and drifting snow. And Portland, Ore., continued to recover from snow that brought traffic to a standstill this week.

The weather has closed major roads around the U.S., caused pileups, closed schools and snarled air travel. Friday morning, nearly 300 flights were canceled and over 900 were delayed, according to FlightAware.com. That was down from more 2,000 canceled and 14,000 delayed flights Thursday.

All told, the storms have blacked out nearly 1 million homes and businesses from coast to coast. Michigan was hardest hit after a storm coated branches, power lines and util-

ity poles with ice, putting more than 820,000 customers in the dark at one point. By Friday, that was down to under 700,000, most in the state's populous southeast corner, around Detroit.

Some 3,000 power lines were toppled after being coated with ice as thick as three-quarters of an inch, and crews were struggling to get power back by the end of Sunday, utilities said.

Temperatures were expected to remain far below normal, with lows below zero in the Upper Midwest before warming to near or above normal by the end of the weekend.

Parts of Interstate 80 in California and Wyoming closed, including about a 70-mile stretch over the top of the Sierra Nevada linking California and Nevada.

Ice is believed to have caused a pileup on the Massachusetts Turnpike late Thursday in Brimfield that involved about 15 vehicles, including tractor-

trailers, and resulted in injuries. A 14-vehicle crash on Interstate 89 in Vermont caused minor injuries.

In Southern California, the latest storm began moving in Thursday with rain and snow flurries. Flood watches and warnings were in effect through Saturday afternoon for some coastal regions and valleys, with the potential for rainfall causing flooding and debris flow in some areas burned by wildfires in recent years.

Evacuation warnings also were issued in Ventura County for four areas considered unstable after being hit hard by storms last month.

The storm has added to major precipitation from the December and January "atmospheric rivers" that improved California's drought outlook, but authorities who allocate water to farms, cities and industries remain cautious because of a recent history of abrupt changes in hydrologic conditions.

North Korea claims it fired missiles while rivals trained

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Friday it test-fired long-range cruise missiles off its eastern coast a day earlier, adding to a provocative streak in weapons demonstrations as its rivals step up military training.

The launches, which were later confirmed by South Korea's military, were intended to verify the reliability of the missiles and the rapid-response capabilities of the unit that operates those weapons, North Korean state media said.

They took place as the U.S. and South Korea held a simulation in Washington aimed at sharpening their response to North Korean nuclear threats.

Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency said the four missiles flew for nearly three hours after being launched from the northeastern coast, drew oval and figure-

eight patterns above the sea and showed they can hit targets 1,240 miles away.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the flight details announced by North Korea had discrepancies with the readings by U.S. and South Korean intelligence assets, but it didn't elaborate. It said the allies were continuing to analyze the launches.

Lee Hyojung, spokesperson of Seoul's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, denounced North Korea for escalating its testing activity despite signs of deepening economic isolation and food insecurity.

North Korea first tested a long-range cruise missile system in September 2021 and has implied the missiles are being developed to be armed with nuclear warheads.

It also test-fired an intercontinental ballistic missile Saturday and a pair of short-range mis-

siles Monday to demonstrate a dual ability to conduct nuclear strikes on South Korea and the U.S. mainland.

North Korea said Monday's short-range launches were a response to the United States flying B-1B bombers to the region for joint training with South Korean and Japanese warplanes on Sunday in a show of force following the North's ICBM test.

Prior to the ICBM launch, North Korea vowed an "unprecedentedly" strong response over a series of military drills planned by Seoul and Washington. North Korea has described the annual U.S.-South Korea drills as rehearsals for a potential invasion, although the allies say their exercises are defensive in nature.

Cruise missiles are among a growing number of North Korean weapons and are designed to be maneuverable in flight to evade defenses.

Wastewater from Ohio derailment goes to Texas

Associated Press

DEER PARK, Texas — Toxic wastewater used to extinguish a fire following a train derailment in Ohio has been transported to a Houston suburb for disposal, according to a county official in Texas who said there are outstanding questions about the transportation and disposal of the material.

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo said at a press conference Thursday that 500,000 gallons of the wastewater had been delivered to Deer Park, Texas.

"I know that our community was taken aback by the news just as I was," Hidalgo said. "I also want folks to know there are many things we don't know that we should know. That doesn't mean that something is wrong. And I want to stress that point."

Hidalgo said the county on Wednesday learned of the wastewater transfer from the site of a fiery Feb. 3 derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, which prompted evacuations when toxic chemicals were burned after being released from five derailed tanker rail cars carrying vinyl chloride that were in danger of exploding.

The wastewater has been delivered to Texas Molecular, which injects hazardous waste into the ground for disposal. The company told KHOU-TV it is experienced in managing this type of disposal.

Hidalgo said Texas Molecular informed county officials that it had taken delivery of a half million gallons of firefighting water with the expectation of an additional 1.5 million gallons hauled to the site by about 30 trucks per day.

Blinken heads to Asia as tensions soar

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Fresh from a meeting with China's top diplomat and a U.N. Security Council session on Ukraine, Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to Central and South Asia next week for international talks that will put him in the same room as his Chinese and Russian counterparts.

The State Department announced late Thursday that Blinken would travel to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan before going to India for a meeting of the Group of 20 foreign ministers from the world's largest indus-

trialized and developing countries, including China and Russia.

The trip comes as tensions have soared between the U.S. and Russia and between the U.S. and China over Russia's war in Ukraine and Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific. All three countries are competing fiercely to outdo each other in global influence.

U.S. officials have been tight-lipped about the prospects for Blinken having sit-down talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang or Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in New

Delhi. But all three will be present in the Indian capital for the G-20 meeting. The State Department has said only that no meetings are scheduled.

The last time the group met — in Bali, Indonesia, in 2022 — Blinken held extensive talks with China's then-foreign minister, Wang Yi, that led to a summit between President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping in November.

And Wang, who has since been promoted, met with Blinken last weekend on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Germany.

US ending grocery help that started during COVID

Associated Press

Nearly 30 million Americans who got extra government help with grocery bills during the pandemic will soon see that aid shrink — and there's a big push to make sure they're not surprised.

Officials in 32 states and other jurisdictions have been using texts, voicemails, snail mail, flyers and social media posts — all in multiple languages — to let recipients know that their extra food stamps end after February's payments.

"One of the scenarios you don't want to see is the first time they're aware of it is in the checkout line at the grocery store," said Ellen Vollinger, an official with the Food Research & Action Center, a nonprofit organization.

For the average recipient, the change will mean about \$90 less per month, though for many, it could be much more, an analysis shows. Benefits will return to usual levels, which are based largely on a household's income, size and certain expenses, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

A public notice in Michigan urged the 1.3 million recipients in that state to "seek needed resources" to make up for the cuts.

"We want to make sure our clients are prepared for this change, as we realize inflation is affecting all of us," said Lewis Roubal with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Jacqueline Benitez, 21, who works as a preschool teacher in Bellflower, Calif., expects a significant cut, perhaps half, of the \$250 in food benefits she has received since

2020 through CalFresh, the state's SNAP program.

"It's such a lifesaver," said Benitez, who was previously homeless, but now lives in a subsidized one-bedroom apartment. "Food is such a huge expense. It's a little nerve-wracking to think about not having that."

Benitez said she's already thinking twice about paying \$5 for fresh fruit.

"What happens if it goes bad?" she said.

The emergency program was enacted by Congress at the start of the pandemic in March 2020 and expanded a year later. Originally, the extra benefits were intended to continue as long as the COVID-19 public health emergency was in force. It's now set to expire in May.

But 18 states have already rolled back payments for more than 10 million people and Congress decided to end the program early, trading the extra benefits for a new permanent program that provides extra money to low-income families to replace school meals during the summer.

Experts credit the emergency funds with making sure most Americans had enough food to eat, despite the pandemic. About 10% of U.S. households had trouble obtaining sufficient food in 2020 and 2021, roughly unchanged from pre-COVID levels.

SNAP benefits can rise and fall with inflation and other factors. Maximum benefits went up by 12% in October to reflect an annual cost-of-living adjustment boosted by higher prices for foods and other goods. But payments went down for those who also receive Social Security because of the 8.7% cost-of-living increase in that program on Jan 1.

R. Kelly avoids lengthy add-on to prison sentence

Associated Press

CHICAGO — A federal judge on Thursday rejected a call from prosecutors to keep R. Kelly behind bars until he is 100, instead telling the Grammy Award-winning R&B singer he would serve all but one of his 20 years on child sex convictions simultaneously with a previous sentence.

Handed down in a courtroom in Kelly's hometown of Chicago, the sentence means Kelly could make it out of prison alive, when he is about 80. Prosecutors had asked Judge Harry Leinenweber to sentence him to 25 years — and to not let him begin serving those until after he completed the first 30-year sentence, imposed on him last year in New York for federal racketeering and sex trafficking convictions.

"The nature of this offense is ... horrific," Leinenweber said in explaining the 20-year sentence. He noted that Kelly's sexual abuse victims would suffer from his crimes for the rest of their lives.

At the same time, he accepted defense arguments that Kelly might not even make it to 80, so handing him a consecutive lengthy sentence, rather than allowing him to serve all but one year of it simultaneously, didn't make much sense.

"He has a life expectancy of not a hell of a lot more," the judge said. "He is 56 years of age."

Kelly's defense lawyer celebrated the ruling as a victory, and some of the singer's fans could be heard cheering outside the courtroom.

Kelly remained still, his eyes downcast, as Leinenweber explained what was at times a hard-to-follow sentence.

Weinstein gets 16 more years for rape, sexual assault

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A Los Angeles judge on Thursday sentenced Harvey Weinstein to 16 more years in prison after a jury convicted him of the rape and sexual assault of an Italian actor and model, furthering the fall of the onetime movie magnate who became a #MeToo magnet.

The prison term, along with the 23 years he received in 2020 for a similar conviction in New York, amounts to a likely life sentence for the 70-year-old.

Weinstein, sitting in a wheelchair and wearing jail attire, directly appealed to Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Lisa B. Lench, saying: "I maintain that I'm innocent. I never raped or sexually assaulted Jane Doe 1." The woman whom Weinstein was convicted of raping sobbed in the courtroom as he spoke.

Moments earlier she had told the judge about the pain she felt after being attacked by Weinstein. "Before that night I was a very happy and confident woman. I valued

myself and the relationship I had with God," the woman, who was identified in court only as Jane Doe 1, said through tears. "I was excited about my future. Everything changed after the defendant brutally assaulted me. There is no prison sentence long enough to undo the damage."

Lench sentenced Weinstein to eight years for a forcible rape count, six years for forcible oral copulation and two years for forcible penetration with a foreign object, for a combined 16 years.

Japanese in US seek Black reparations

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — When Miya Iwataki and other Japanese Americans fought in the 1980s for the U.S. government to apologize to the families it imprisoned during World War II, Black politicians and civil rights leaders were integral to the movement.

Thirty-five years after they won that apology — and survivors of prison camps received \$20,000 each — those advocates are now demanding atonement for Black Americans whose ancestors were enslaved. From California to Washington, D.C., activists are joining revived reparations movements and pushing for formal government compensation for the lasting harm of slavery's legacy on subsequent generations, from access to housing and education to voting rights and employment.

Advocating for reparations is “the right thing to do,” said Iwataki, a resident of South Pasadena, Calif., who is in her 70s. She cited cross-cultural solidarity that has built up over decades.

Black lawmakers such as the late Califor-

nia congressmen Mervyn Dymally and Ron Dellums played critical roles in winning the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which formalized the government's apology and redress payments.

Last Sunday marked the 81st anniversary of President Franklin D. Roosevelt signing an executive order that allowed the government to force an estimated 125,000 people — two-thirds of them U.S. citizens — from their homes and businesses, and incarcerate them in desolate, barbed-wire camps throughout the west.

“We want to help other communities win reparations, because it was so important to us,” Iwataki said.

After stalling for decades at the federal level, reparations for slavery has received new interest amid a national reckoning over the 2020 police killing of George Floyd. Amid nationwide protests that year, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed legislation that established a first-in-the-nation task force to address the topic of slave reparations.

Other cities and counties have since followed, including Boston, St. Louis and San Francisco, where an advisory committee issued a draft recommendation last year proposing a lump-sum payment of \$5 million apiece for eligible individuals.

In December, the National Nikkei Reparations Coalition, alongside more than 70 other Japanese American and Asian American organizations, submitted a letter calling on the Biden administration to establish a presidential commission.

Japanese American activists in California are studying the landmark report issued by California's task force — and plan to reach out to college students, churches and other community groups to raise awareness about why Black reparations is needed — and how it intersects with their own struggle.

Reparations critics say that monetary compensation and other forms of atonement are not necessary when no one alive today was enslaved or a slave owner, overlooking the inequities today impacting later generations of Black Americans.

Flotsam found off New York may be from SS Savannah

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A chunk of weather-beaten flotsam that washed up on a New York shoreline after Tropical Storm Ian last fall has piqued the interest of experts who say it is likely part of the SS Savannah, which ran aground and broke apart in 1821, two years after it became the first vessel to cross the Atlantic Ocean partly under steam power.

The roughly 13-foot square piece of wreckage was spotted in October off Fire Island, a barrier island that hugs Long Island's southern shore, and is now in the custody of the Fire Island Lighthouse Preser-

vation Society. It will work with National Park Service officials to identify the wreckage and put it on public display.

“It was pretty thrilling to find it,” said Betsy DeMaria, a museum technician at the park service's Fire Island National Seashore. “We definitely are going to have some subject matter experts take a look at it and help us get a better view of what we have here.”

It may be difficult to identify the wreckage with 100% certainty, but park service officials said the Savannah is a top contender among Fire Island's known shipwrecks.

Explorers have searched for the Savannah for over two centuries but have not found anything they could definitively link to the famous ship. The newly discovered wreckage, though, “very well could be” a piece of the historic shipwreck, said Ira Breskin, a senior lecturer at the State University of New York Maritime College in the Bronx. “It makes perfect sense.”

Evidence includes the 1-to-1.3-inch wooden pegs holding the wreckage's planks together, consistent with a 100-foot vessel, park service officials said in a news release. The Savannah was 98 feet, 6 inches long.

Brad Paisley pens country song featuring Zelenskyy

Associated Press

A year ago, country star Brad Paisley watched the news on television as Russian troops invaded Ukraine and, like many people around the world, he felt helpless at the images of people fleeing their homes.

“The world felt like it was in a new place that it hadn't been in decades,” the three-time Grammy winner recalls.

On Friday, the one-year anniversary of the war's start, Paisley is releasing a new

song called “Same Here,” featuring Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy speaking proudly about his country and people.

The song is Paisley's first from his new record, “Son of the Mountains,” to be released later this year on Universal Music Group Nashville.

The West Virginia native wrote the song with Lee Thomas Miller (co-writer on Paisley hits “The World” and “Perfect Storm”) and Dawes frontman Taylor Goldsmith. It's a three-part narrative that reflects on universal similarities, despite distance and language.

While it doesn't mention Ukraine specifically, the song ends with Paisley and Zelenskyy in conversation, recorded during a video call. Zelenskyy talks about Ukrainians' desire for freedom, adding “There is no distance between our two countries in such values.”

Rescue capsule sent to space station

Associated Press

Russia launched a rescue ship on Friday for two cosmonauts and a NASA astronaut whose original ride home sprang a dangerous leak while parked at the International Space Station. The new, empty Soyuz capsule should arrive at the orbiting lab on Sunday.

The capsule leak in December was blamed on a micrometeorite that punctured an external radiator, draining it of coolant. The same thing appeared to happen again earlier this month, this time on a docked Russian cargo ship.

The Russian Space Agency delayed the launch of the replacement Soyuz, looking for any manufacturing defects. No issues were found, and the agency proceeded with Friday's predawn launch from Kazakhstan of

the capsule with bundles of supplies strapped into the three seats.

Given the urgent need for this capsule, two top NASA officials traveled from the U.S. to observe the launch in person. To everyone's relief, the capsule safely reached orbit nine minutes after liftoff — "a perfect ride to orbit," NASA Mission Control's Rob Navias reported from Houston.

Officials had determined it was too risky to bring NASA's Frank Rubio and Russia's Sergey Prokopyev and Dmitri Petelin back in their damaged Soyuz next month as originally planned. With no coolant, the cabin temperature would spike during the trip back to Earth, potentially damaging computers and other equipment, and exposing the suited-up crew to excessive heat.

Until the new Soyuz pulls up, emergency plans call for Rubio to switch to a SpaceX crew capsule that's docked at the space station. Prokopyev and Petelin remain assigned to their damaged Soyuz in the unlikely need for a fast getaway. Having one less person on board would keep the temperature down to a hopefully manageable level, Russian engineers concluded.

The damaged Soyuz will return to Earth with no one aboard by the end of March, so engineers can examine it.

The three men launched in this Soyuz last September on what should have been a six-month mission. They'll now stay in space for a full year, until a new capsule is ready for their crew replacements for liftoff in September.

Two Pakistanis reach home after being freed from Guantanamo Bay

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — Two Pakistani brothers held by the United States at Guantanamo Bay military prison for two decades were freed by U.S. officials and returned home on Friday, officials said.

They will be reunited with their families after a formal questioning by Pakistani authorities, according to security officials and a Pakistani senator.

Pakistan arrested Abdul and Mohammed Rabbani on suspicion of their links to al-Qaida in 2002 in Karachi, the country's largest southern port city. It was the same year Ramzi Binalshibh, a top al-Qaida leader, was arrested by Pakistan's spy agency on a tip from the CIA.

The releases come months after a 75-year-old Pakistani, Saifullah Paracha, was freed from the Guantanamo Bay detention center.

The two brothers arrived at an airport in the capital, Islamabad, on Friday. Pakistani Sen. Mushtaq Ahmed Khan, the chairman of the human rights committee in the upper

house of Pakistan's Parliament, tweeted Friday that the two brothers had reached Islamabad airport.

He said the men were "innocently imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay for 21 years. There was no trial, no court proceedings, no charges against them. Congratulations on their release. Thank you Senate of Pakistan," he wrote on Twitter.

Khan later told The Associated Press that the brothers were being sent to Karachi, the capital of southern Sindh province, where they lived with their families. He said he hoped the men will be reunited with their families soon.

The brothers' release was the latest U.S. move toward emptying and shutting down the Guantanamo Bay detention facility. Former President George W. Bush's administration set it up to house extremist suspects after the Sept. 11, 2001 al-Qaida attacks on the United States.

U.S. officials accused the brothers of helping al-Qaida members with housing and other logistical support.

Workers search for 47 missing at mine in China

Associated Press

ALXA LEAGUE, China — Work crews trying to find 47 people missing after a collapse at an open-pit mine in northern China have had to change their excavation methods to avoid causing more landslides, state media reported Friday.

Six people have been confirmed dead and six injured people have been rescued at the mine in Inner Mongolia's Alxa League as of Thursday night, broadcaster CCTV said.

With a large collapsed area at the mine, the digging done by backhoes and bulldozers can risk more collapses. The crews are excavating by layers and making trapezoid-shaped descents to carry on their search from both sides of the mountain in an adjustment of their rescue plans, the report said.

On Friday, heavy machines were seen working on the top level of the collapsed site, searching for trapped vehicles and missing persons.

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New bases designed for action, safety

Associated Press

PEORIA, Ariz. — Like a violin virtuoso using a new music stand, San Diego Padres third baseman Manny Machado noticed a difference right away.

Not only are the bases bigger, but they feel different, too.

“It’s definitely different, for sure,” said Machado, a two-time Gold Glove winner. “They look better. I just got to kind of keep playing with it and stepping on it and kind of like getting the feel for it. But it’s definitely different for sure.”

The bigger bases — going from 15- to 18-inch squares — are part of a flurry of changes by Major League Baseball designed to put more action and athleticism back in the game and make it more appealing to a younger generation of potential fans.

When the new rules were adopted by baseball’s 11-person competition committee in September, the four players on the panel supported the bigger bases

and voted against the use of a pitch clock and limits on defensive shifts.

The new bases — “They look like a pizza box,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora cracked — cut down the distance between the bases by 4½ inches. The distance between third and home and home and first was trimmed by 3 inches.

It doesn’t sound like much, but the impact could be considerable.

Instead of waiting around for a three-run homer, big league teams could try a more aggressive approach on the basepaths. Coupled with new limits on what MLB calls disengagements — pickoff attempts or steps off the rubber — it’s more important than ever that pitchers are quick to the plate and strong-armed catchers stay alert with runners on.

“The run game, preventing the run game, is something that we’ve talked about, we’re going to continue to talk about, be-

cause ... the stolen-base attempt should increase a good bit, I think,” Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

Major league teams finished with 2,486 steals in 3,297 attempts last year, up from 2,214 steals and 2,926 attempts in 2021, according to Sportradar, but much lower than 3,229 steals and 4,365 attempts a decade ago in 2012.

In testing in the minors, two Triple-A leagues used the bigger bases for half of the 2021 season. One experienced a 2.2% increase in successful steals, and the other posted 0.7% increase.

The 2012 season — when Mike Trout led the majors with 49 stolen bases — was the last time the big leagues surpassed 3,000 steals and 4,000 attempts.

“I’ve definitely been thrown out by less than (4½) inches ... so maybe that starts factoring into results,” said Chicago Cubs second baseman Nico Hoerner, who swiped a career-best 20

bases in 22 attempts last year.

Of course, it also gives the majors’ top defensive first basemen an even better chance of keeping runners off base altogether.

“I think it could help. It’ll give me another inch or so of reach on a throw that wants to pull me off the base,” said Arizona Diamondbacks first baseman Christian Walker, who won his first Gold Glove last year.

Besides the activity on the basepaths, Major League Baseball is hoping the change will help reduce injuries. While testing the bigger bases in the minors, there was a 13% decline in what the league calls “injury events near the bases” from 2021 to 2022.

There’s more room for first basemen to avoid getting stepped on, or to pull their arm away in time to avoid a batter hustling up the line. It also should help avoid collisions all over the diamond.

MLB rule changes: pitch clock, larger bases and more

Associated Press

Major League Baseball is introducing a slate of new rules for the 2023 season. Here is a breakdown:

Pitch clock: The pitch clock aims to speed the pace of play by eliminating down time between pitches. Players will have 30 seconds to resume play between batters. Between pitches, pitchers have 15 seconds with nobody on and 20 seconds if there is a baserunner. The pitcher must start his delivery before the clock expires. After a pitch, the clock starts again when the pitcher has the ball back, the catcher and batter are in the circle around home plate, and play is otherwise ready to resume.

Batters must be in the box and alert to the pitcher with at least eight seconds on the clock. Bat-

ters can call time once per plate appearance, stopping the count-down.

When a pitcher fails to throw a pitch in time, the penalty is an automatic ball. When a batter isn’t ready in time, it’s an automatic strike.

Clocks will be positioned behind home plate and beyond the outfield, where pitchers and hitters can easily see them.

Limits on pitcher disengagements: Pitchers may only disengage from the pitching rubber — either to call timeout or to attempt a pickoff throw — twice per plate appearance. After a pitcher has used his two disengagements, he can still attempt a pickoff, but it better be successful. If the baserunner gets back safely, a balk is assessed and the runner advances.

If a runner advances during a plate appearance, the limit on disengagements is reset. Mound visits, injury timeouts and offensive team timeouts are not considered disengagements.

With a focus on disengagements, umpires may be stricter in calling balks for pitchers who don’t come to a complete stop in their stretch.

Infield shift limits: The infield shift — putting three or more infielders on one side of second base, usually with one positioned in the outfield — has been a popular trend over the past decade, and many believe it has contributed to plummeting batting averages.

The new rule states that all four infielders must have both feet within the outer boundary of the infield and two infielders

must be on each side of second base when a pitch is delivered. MLB also mandated infield dirt have uniform dimensions in all 30 ballparks — the outfield edge must be 95 feet from the front of the pitching rubber. Players will not be allowed to sprint from one side of second base to the other after the pitch is released, and umpires will be given broad discretion to ensure players are following the spirit of the rule.

Bigger bases: New larger bases have been introduced to improve player safety and to modestly encourage more stolen-base attempts. The bases are now 18 square inches, up from 15 square inches. Home plate is now three inches closer to first and third base, while the corner bases are now 4½ inches closer to second base.

Celtics outlast Pacers 142-138 in OT

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Jayson Tatum scored 31 points, including the final four in the last minute of overtime, and the Boston Celtics outlasted the Indiana Pacers 142-138 on Thursday night.

Jaylen Brown added 30 points as the Celtics improved the NBA's best record to 43-17.

It was 138-all with 56.2 seconds left before Tatum hit a pair of free throws. He capped the scoring with a tip-in off the glass with 10.4 seconds to go.

Myles Turner tied his career high with 40 points for Indiana. He made a career-best eight 3-pointers and Indiana shot 22 of 49 overall on 3s.

76ers 110, Grizzlies 105: PHILADELPHIA — Tobias Harris made the go-ahead 3-pointer with 39 seconds left, James Harden scored 31 points, and Joel Embiid had 27 points and 19 rebounds to help Philadelphia beat Memphis.

The 76ers shrugged off three of their worst quarters of the season to turn in a fantastic fourth that nearly shook the arena with each clutch bucket. Down by nine points late in the game, the Sixers took over.

Desmond Bane scored 25 points for Memphis.

Lakers 124, Warriors 111: LOS ANGELES — Malik Beasley scored 25 points, Austin

Reaves had 17 off the bench and Los Angeles beat Golden State.

Beasley, who was acquired from Utah as part of a three-team trade during the Feb. 9 deadline, has two 20-point games in his four starts for the Lakers.

LeBron James had 13 points, but was 5 of 20 from the floor.

Klay Thompson led Golden State with 22 points.

Nuggets 115, Cavaliers 109: CLEVELAND — Nikola Jokic had 24 points, 18 rebounds and 13 assists for his latest triple-double and Michael Porter Jr. scored 25 points, leading Denver past Cleveland.

Jokic's 13th triple-double in 16 games and his NBA-leading 22nd this season helped the Nuggets come out of the All-Star break with an impressive road win over the Cavs, who dropped to 25-7 at home. The Nuggets improved to 22-0 when Jokic got a triple-double.

Evan Mobley scored 31 points for Cleveland.

Mavericks 142, Spurs 116: DALLAS — Luka Dončić scored 28 points, Kyrie Irving added 23 and the All-Star pair won for the first time together in Dallas, leading the Mavericks past woeful San Antonio.

The Mavericks had a season high in points while stopping a

three-game losing streak in the return from the All-Star break. The Spurs extended their franchise-record skid to 15 games with their 20th loss in 21 games.

The start was delayed about 20 minutes because of moisture on the court. Larger-than-normal crews worked before the game and at halftime to dry the court.

Malaki Branham led San Antonio with 23 points.

Jazz 120, Thunder 119, OT: SALT LAKE CITY — Lauri Markkanen hit three free throws with 4.6 seconds left in overtime to give Utah the lead and finished with 43 points and 10 rebounds as the Jazz beat Oklahoma City.

Markkanen scored 18 points in the fourth quarter, helping the Jazz rally from a nine-point deficit early in the period. Walker Kessler tipped in a layup with 4.6 seconds remaining to force overtime.

Jordan Clarkson added 24 points and six assists for Utah.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 39 points for Oklahoma City. He missed a potential winning jumper at the overtime buzzer.

Raptors 115, Pelicans 110: TORONTO — Pascal Siakam scored 26 points, Jakob Poeltl had 21 points and a career-high 18 rebounds and Toronto beat

New Orleans for its sixth victory in seven games.

Gary Trent Jr. scored 18 points, including a key 3-pointer in the final minute, Scottie Barnes also had 18 and O.G. Anunoby returned from injury with 12 points as the Raptors matched their season high by winning three straight.

Brandon Ingram scored 14 of his 36 points in the fourth for New Orleans.

Magic 108, Pistons 106: ORLANDO, Fla. — Wendell Carter Jr. tipped in Paolo Banchero's missed layup at the buzzer to lift Orlando past Detroit.

Franz Wagner added 21 points, and Carter controlled the boards in the fourth quarter, finishing with 14 points and 14 rebounds.

Jaden Ivey led Detroit with 25 points. He hit a 3-pointer with 4.5 seconds left to tie it.

Kings 133, Trail Blazers 116: SACRAMENTO, Calif. — De'Aaron Fox scored 31 points, Domantas Sabonis had his seventh triple-double of the season and Sacramento beat Portland.

Sabonis had 18 points, 18 rebounds and 10 assists to help the Kings improve to 33-25. Terence Davis scored 20 points off the bench.

Nassir Little scored 26 points for Portland.

Shannon helps rally Illinois past No. 21 Northwestern

Associated Press

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Terrence Shannon Jr. shook off a slow start in his return from a concussion, scoring 24 of his 26 points in the second half as Illinois rallied from an 18-point halftime deficit to beat No. 21 Northwestern 66-62 on Thursday night.

Shannon did not start and found himself back on the bench with three fouls as Northwestern closed on a 13-2 run to take a 37-19

lead into halftime.

But he picked up steam after the break and scored 15 of the Illini's last 24 points as they erased a 14-point deficit in the final 10:07.

Boo Buie led Northwestern with a career-high 35 points, hitting six 3-pointers and going 12 of 24 from the floor. The Wildcats had won five straight.

No. 4 UCLA 78, Utah 71: Jaime Jaquez Jr. scored 17 of his 23 points in the second half and Tyger Campbell added 18 to lift

UCLA over Utah.

Jaquez, who was UCLA's only effective offensive player in the second half, made a 3-pointer with 1:03 remaining to seal the win just moments after Campbell hit a 3 from the corner.

Mike Saunders Jr. came off the bench to score a career-high 25 points for Utah.

No. 12 Gonzaga 97, San Diego 72: Drew Timme had 22 points and 13 rebounds to help Gonzaga beat San Diego for its

fourth consecutive victory.

Timme needs to average 19.3 points over the next three games to break Gonzaga's career scoring record set by Frank Burgess in 1961.

No. 15 Saint Mary's 83, Pacific 52: Logan Johnson scored 29 points in the final home game of his career and Saint Mary's clinched at least a share of the West Coast Conference regular-season title with a victory over Pacific.

Caps sent to 6th straight loss by Ducks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—Jakob Silfverberg scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period, John Gibson made 41 saves and the Anaheim Ducks handed the reeling Washington Capitals a sixth consecutive defeat, 4-2 Thursday night.

Isac Lundestrom, Troy Terry and Derek Grant also scored for Anaheim, which ended a six-game skid.

Gibson's 21st save gave him the most through a goaltender's first 40 games of the season since Hall of Famer Jacques Plante made 1,396 for the New York Rangers in 1963-64.

The Capitals are mired in their longest losing streak since losing seven in a row in 2019 and their longest stretch without a point in nearly two decades. They last lost six consecutive games all in regulation in October 2003.

Wild 2, Blue Jackets 0: Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 30 shots for his 73rd career shutout and Minnesota beat Columbus for its fourth straight win.

Fleury is 12th on the NHL's career shutouts list, three behind Ed Belfour and Tony Esposito, who are tied for 10th.

Brandon Duhaime and Kirill Kaprizov scored for Minnesota, which passed Colorado for third place in the Central Division.

Joonas Korpihalo stopped 23 shots for Columbus, which was shut out for the sixth time this season and third at home. The Blue Jackets have lost four of their past five home games.

Oilers 7, Penguins 2: Connor McDavid scored twice to push his total to a career-best 46 goals, and Edmonton embarrassed Sidney Crosby and Pittsburgh.

Leon Draisaitl picked up his 35th goal for the Oilers, who improved to 10-1-5 in their past 16 games. Warren Foegele, Kailer Yamamoto, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Devin Shore also scored for Edmonton.

Kris Letang scored early in the first and late in the third period for the Penguins, who lost their fourth straight.

Devils 4, Kings 3, OT: Red-hot Dawson Mercer scored his second goal of the game 2:30 into overtime and New Jersey rallied late to beat Los Angeles.

Tomas Tatar and Nico Hischier also scored for the Devils. Hischier netted the tying goal with 38 seconds left in regulation, and Vitek Vanecek had 19 saves.

Anze Kopitar, Viktor Arvidsson and defenseman Sean Durzi scored for the Kings. Pheonix Copley made 27 saves.

Mercer, who has seven goals in five games, tipped a pass by Dougie Hamilton past Copley for the winner.

Red Wings 4, Rangers 1: Filip Zadina scored the go-ahead goal midway through the second period and Ville Husso made 30 saves to lift Detroit past New York.

Andrew Copp, Michael Rasmussen and Filip Hronek also had goals for the Red Wings, who have surged into the playoff

picture with seven wins in eight games, giving them a chance to earn a wild card and end a seven-year postseason drought.

Vincent Trocheck pulled New York into a 1-all tie shortly before Zadina scored, but the Rangers didn't make enough plays at both ends of the ice to slow one of the NHL's hottest teams.

Sabres 6, Lightning 5, OT: Ilya Lyubushkin scored a short-handed goal 1:41 into overtime, helping Tage Thompson and Buffalo top Tampa.

With Thompson scoring three times in his fourth hat trick of the season, Buffalo led 5-3 early in the third period. After Tampa Bay rallied, the Sabres got the win when Lyubushkin beat Andrei Vasilevskiy on a breakaway for his first goal of the season.

Zemgus Girgensons and Jack Quinn also scored for Buffalo, and Eric Comrie made 36 saves.

Anthony Cirelli, Ross Colton, Steven Stamkos, Victor Hedman and Brayden Point scored for Tampa Bay.

Canucks 3, Blues 2, OT: Elias Pettersson scored 4:45 into overtime and Vancouver rallied past St. Louis.

Pettersson also had two assists for Vancouver, which trailed 2-0 after two periods. J.T. Miller had a goal and an assist, and Andrei Kuzmenko also scored. Rookie Arturs Silovs had 20 stops in his third career NHL start.

Rookie Tyler Tucker scored his first career goal for the Blues, and Alexey Toropchenko

had a short-handed goal. Jordan Binnington made 38 saves.

Golden Knights 4, Flames 3, OT: Alex Pietrangolo scored on a rebound 42 seconds into overtime to complete Vegas' rally from two goals down in the third period to beat Calgary.

Jack Eichel, Zach Whitecloud and William Carrier also scored to help the Western Conference-leading Knights extend their points streak to eight games. They are 6-0-2 over that stretch.

Jakob Pelletier, Jonathan Huberdeau and Mikael Backlund had goals for the Flames.

Bruins 6, Kraken 5: Jake DeBrusk scored the tiebreaking goal with 1:38 left in the third period and Boston edged Seattle.

Seattle's Matty Beniers scored just 40 seconds into the game, and the teams went back and forth the rest of the way.

Brandon Carlo, Patrice Bergeron, David Krejci, David Pastrnak and Brad Marchand also scored for the Bruins.

Jaden Schwartz, Yanni Gourde, Vince Dunn and Jamie Oleksiak had Seattle's other goals.

Predators 6, Sharks 2: Mikael Granlund and Nino Niederreiter each scored twice to lead Nashville past San Jose.

Yakov Trenin and Tommy Novak also scored for Nashville. Matt Duchene had three assists and Juuse Saros made 22 saves for his 22nd win of the season.

Nico Sturm scored his 11th goal and Martin Kaut scored his first for the Sharks. James Reimer made 24 saves.

Horschel, Bramlett lead Honda Classic with 1st-round 65s

Associated Press

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. — Billy Horschel has never won a PGA Tour event in his home state of Florida. His quest to change that is off to a fine start.

Horschel shot a 5-under 65 on Thursday, tying him with Jo-

seph Bramlett for the first-round lead in the Honda Classic at PGA National. Bramlett had a bogey-free round; Horschel had six birdies and one bogey.

"Just played really solid," Horschel said. "Didn't do anything special. Hit some quality iron shots here and there. I

wouldn't say everything was sort of automatic and it was easy. I had to just sort of work my way into making some good swings here and there. But overall, it was a really solid day of golf."

Horschel's pre-Honda preparations included a trip to the

doctor, finally giving in and getting a prescription after trying to fight off a sinus infection for a few days. He might have felt tired, but it didn't show.

The 65 was his best score in 33 rounds as a pro at PGA National. He'd shot 66 on two previous occasions.