

## US, UK airstrikes target Houthi rebels

*Associated Press*

JERUSALEM — Iran issued a warning Sunday to the U.S. over potentially targeting two cargo ships in the Mideast long suspected of serving as forward operating bases for Iranian commandos. The warning came just after the U.S. and the United Kingdom launched a massive airstrike campaign against Yemen's Houthi rebels.

The statement from Iran on the Behshad and Saviz ships appeared to signal Tehran's growing unease over the U.S. strikes in recent days in Iraq, Syria and Yemen targeting militias backed by the Islamic Republic.

Those attacks, themselves a retaliatory campaign for the killing of three U.S. soldiers and wounding of dozens of others in Jordan, all stem back to Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, which has escalated tensions across the wider Middle East and raised fears about a regional conflict breaking out.

American and British forces conducted strikes against 36 Houthi militant targets in Yemen over the weekend in a continued effort to stem the capabilities of the undeterred Iranian-backed group from attacking ships in the Red Sea.

The strikes were made at about 11:30 p.m. Saturday and targeted multiple underground storage facilities, missile systems, drone storage and operations sites, radars and helicopters at 13 sites in Houthi-controlled territory, U.S. Central Command said in a statement on Saturday.

Strikes overnight Sunday struck across six provinces of Yemen held by the Houthi rebels, including in Sanaa, the capital. The Houthis gave no assessment of the damage but the U.S. described hitting underground missile arsenals, launch sites and helicopters used by the rebels.

"These attacks will not dis-

courage Yemeni forces and the nation from maintaining their support for Palestinians in the face of the Zionist occupation and crimes," Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree said. "The aggressors' airstrikes will not go unanswered."

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin warned the Houthis after the strikes that "they will continue to bear further consequences if they do not end their illegal attacks on international shipping and naval vessels."

President Joe Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, also warned the strikes may continue.

"We are prepared to deal with anything that any group or any country tries to come at us with," Sullivan told CBS' "Face the Nation." "And the president has been clear that we will continue to respond to threats that American forces face as we go forward."

In the video statement Sunday by Iran's regular army, a narrator for the first time describes the vessels as "floating armories." The narrator describes the Behshad as aiding an Iranian mission to "counteract piracy in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden." However, Iran is not publicly known to have taken part in any of the recent campaigns against rising Somali piracy in the region off the back of the Houthi attacks.

The statement ends with a warning overlaid with a montage of footage of U.S. warships and an American flag.

"Those engaging in terrorist activities against Behshad or similar vessels jeopardize international maritime routes, security and assume global responsibility for potential future international risks," the video said.

The U.S. Navy's Mideast-based 5th Fleet declined to comment.

## Biden joins families as troops killed in Jordan return home

*Associated Press*

DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del. — Standing solemnly under gray skies, President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden joined grieving families at Dover Air Force Base on Friday to witness the return of three American service members killed in a Jan. 28 drone attack in Jordan.

It's a ritual honoring fallen troops that is one of a commander in chief's most somber duties.

With his gloved right hand over his heart, Biden looked on as the three transfer cases draped with American flags were carried the short distance

from a C-5 galaxy military transport aircraft to a waiting van. The only words spoken during the 15-minute dignified transfer, aside from the commands as each case was carried, were from an Air Force chaplain's brief prayer, asking God for "grace and mercy."

The first transfer case held the remains of Sgt. William Jerome Rivers of Carrollton, Ga., who the Army posthumously promoted to staff sergeant Friday. The movement was then repeated for Sgt. Breonna Moffett of Savannah and Sgt. Kennedy Sanders of Waycross. Once the seven-member, white-

gloved carry team — composed of members of the U.S. Army, in which Rivers, Moffett and Sanders served — placed the last of the cases in the van, they offered a final salute as the remains were transported to the mortuary facility at Dover.

Before the dignified transfer, the Bidens met privately with the families at the Center for Families of the Fallen.

"This is not the homecoming for Kennedy I dreamed about," Sanders' father, Shawn, wrote in a Facebook post. "Now, I can't stop reliving this nightmare."

In the post, Shawn Sanders said that "kindness and out-

pouring of love" was "the only thing holding me up" since his daughter's death.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who walked with the assistance of a cane, and Air Force Gen. CQ Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were among the Defense Department and administration officials who joined the Bidens for the dignified transfer. Georgia Sens. Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock, as well as Rep. Buddy Carter, who represents the home district of Moffett and Sanders, and Delaware Sens. Tom Carper and Chris Coons attended.

# Military hospitals' records system still has bugs

By JEREMY STILLWAGNER  
AND KELLY AGE

*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Three months after Military Health System Genesis debuted at military hospitals in Japan, the digital recordkeeping and appointment system's shortcomings are leaving some patients and medical professionals frustrated.

Patients at most bases in Japan have been unable to use MHS Genesis to book visits at local clinics since the system came online in October, said Maj. Mark Pomerleau, the officer responsible for its installation at Yokota Air Base, the home of U.S. Forces Japan in western Tokyo.

That function, which requires patients to search by their primary care manager or appointment type, was deliberately disabled at many hospitals in Japan because of the added work it caused.

"It lets you select any provider in the world, which, as you can imagine, is hundreds if not thousands," Pomerleau, chief nursing informatics officer for Yokota's 374th Medical Group, told Stars and Stripes on Jan. 23.

"If we were to enable online booking, a patient in Alabama or

Germany could book appointments in our slots," he added.

Medical facilities at Yokosuka Naval Base, Sasebo Naval Base and Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni have also disabled the appointment function, Yokosuka Naval Hospital spokesman Daniel Taylor said an email Friday.

The hospital is working with MHS Genesis' deployment team to open online appointments as soon as possible, Taylor wrote. "We apologize for any inconvenience and hope to have this option available soon," he said.

MHS Genesis became operational at military bases in the Pacific Northwest in 2017, followed by elsewhere in the United States and then European bases last September.

Indo-Pacific bases began implementing the system in October. By Jan. 13, installation was completed for Guam, its final overseas location, according to an email Thursday from Defense Health Agency spokesman Peter Graves.

In Genesis' early days in Japan, staff spent "a considerable amount of their day scrubbing their appointments to figure out if the patient belongs with their clinic and making a lot of phone

calls, which causes a lot of headaches for the staff," Pomerleau said.

A fix is in the works, Pomerleau said, but he had no information on how long that's expected to take.

Graves said the problem with the appointment function is part of an adjustment period.

"Each military hospital and clinic choose when they are ready to implement that capability once local conditions are properly set to accommodate online booking," he said. "This is a normal part of the MHS Genesis deployment."

MHS Genesis was developed as a "state-of-the-market electronic health record system" for the Military Health System under a \$4.3 billion contract signed in 2015 with Leidos Partnership for Defense Health. The partnership includes the Leidos, Accenture, Oracle and Henry Schein One corporations.

The system's rollout was delayed while the Defense Department reviewed and tested it for functionality and cybersecurity, according to a November 2016 health.mil newsletter, The Scope.

Among other improvements, MHS Genesis has smoothed communication between pa-

tients and medical care providers through its patient portal, Pomerleau said.

But a military spouse who visited Naval Hospital Yokosuka at the Navy base south of Tokyo on Jan. 4 said the system slowed health care providers' response to her medical emergency.

At every step, an MHS Genesis problem popped up, said the spouse, who spoke to Stars and Stripes on condition of anonymity to discuss a personal health matter.

The woman arrived at the hospital with abdominal pain, she said by phone Jan. 25. She required surgery, but getting checked in and provided the appropriate pain relief after surgery was complicated by MHS Genesis, she said.

She was accompanied that day by friend Alexandra Cummings, the spouse of a Navy contractor at Yokosuka.

"Thankfully, she was one of the only patients there, but I can't imagine on a busy night if you have three or four people having medical issues, and you can't get the medications," Cummings said by Facebook Messenger on Jan. 19. "It felt like Genesis was sucking up time and energy from intelligent, skilled professionals."

## Wikoff assumes command of Navy's operations in Middle East

By ALISON BATH

*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — A Navy leader with extensive experience in fighter squadrons and the service's operations in the Middle East has assumed command of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. 5th Fleet.

Vice Adm. George Wikoff relieved Vice Adm. Brad Cooper on Thursday in a ceremony presided over by Army Gen. Erik Kurilla, commander of U.S. Central Command, the Navy said in a statement.

Wikoff takes the helm amid soaring tensions in the region, as Navy ships in the Red

Sea come under increasing attacks by Iran-backed Houthi militants in Yemen.

On Tuesday, an anti-ship cruise missile launched from Houthi-controlled territory came within a nautical mile of the destroyer USS Gravely before being intercepted by the ship's close-in weapons system.

The attack was the closest a missile has come to a Navy ship since the rebel group began targeting vessels in the Red Sea almost three months ago.

Wikoff's command also includes the newly formed multinational Operation Prosperity Guardian, tasked with protecting ships in

the sea.

The New Jersey native will lead other Navy operations in the Middle East, such as Combined Maritime Forces, a drone and artificial intelligence task force and a Coast Guard unit focused on interdicting illegal drugs and weapons, primarily smuggled out of Iran.

Wikoff's Navy career spans over three decades. Most recently, he was acting commander of Naval Air Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet. He served fighter squadrons VF-102 and VF-154 aboard the aircraft carriers USS America and USS Kitty Hawk, respectively, according to his service biography.

# Astronaut, now in Space Force, to launch again

Orlando (Fla.) Sentinel

NASA announced the four members for the planned August SpaceX mission to rotate crew on the International Space Station, and it includes the first member of the U.S. Space Force flying to orbit.

The crew member, which Space Force calls a guardian, has already been to space, but for NASA as a member of the Air Force.

Piloting the SpaceX Crew-9 flight will be Space Force Col. Nick Hague, who previously had a scary initial ride the Air Force technically considered having reached space in 2018 that ended with an abort. It happened as he and Russian crewmate cosmonaut Alexey Ovchinnikov aboard a Soyuz capsule blasted away from a malfunctioning booster after launch from Kazakhstan.

“It went from normal to something was wrong pretty quick,” Hague said after the abort. “We weren’t going to make it to orbit that day, so the mission changed to getting back down on the ground as safely as we could.”

The altitude of the Soyuz capsule passed the 50-mile mark the United States considers for awarding astronaut status, although it’s shy of the Karman line, which is the internationally recognized line for having made it to space at around 62 miles high.

“I got to experience a few seconds of weightlessness and I was able to watch a few things float around in the capsule,” Hague said. “I was also able to look out the window primarily to make sure, ‘Hey, are we in a good attitude? Are we stable? Are we ready to come back down?’ But

also to look out the window and realize, you know, looking down at the curvature of the Earth and out into the blackness of space, and realizing I got close but it wasn’t going to be this time.”

The duo got another shot, though, five months later in 2019, and that time they made it past the Karman line along with NASA astronaut Christina Koch. Hague spent more than 200 days on board the ISS, so Crew-9 will be his third or second flight to space depending on who you ask.

Commanding the Crew-9 flight will be rookie Zena Cardman, a member of the astronaut candidate class of 2017 that was nicknamed “The Turtles” by the astronaut class that preceded them.

Also flying will be NASA astronaut and mission specialist Stephanie Wilson, who flew three

times on Space Shuttle Discovery on STS-121, STS-120 and STS-131, logging 42 days in space, and Roscosmos cosmonaut and mission specialist Aleksandr Gorbunov, making his first trip to space.

The quartet will spend about six months on board the station as part of Expeditions 71 and 72 to be relieved by either a SpaceX or possibly Boeing Starliner mission in early 2025.

Hague’s return in 2019 led him to a post-flight role at the Pentagon with the Air Force, but working as leadership as director of test and evaluation for the newly formed Space Force. In 2021, Hague transferred to the Space Force, which at just over 4 years old now has about 14,000 military and civilian guardians. Since August 2022, Hague has been back with NASA working on the Starliner program.

## Indo-Pac Command nominee: China’s buildup ‘concerning’

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The nominee to command American forces in the Indo-Pacific region told senators Thursday that he is worried about China’s rapid ship and military buildup, describing its momentum as “concerning.”

Adm. Samuel Paparo, who now commands the U.S. Pacific Fleet, said the United States remains equipped to handle the rising dominance of China and its larger naval fleet, but that the pace of the country’s warship-building raises alarm.

The Defense Department considers China a “pacing threat” that has the capability to challenge America’s military and spark a war over Taiwan, a democratically governed island and U.S. partner that China considers its own territory.

“[China’s] navy has been on a historic trajectory these last 25 years and while ... I am confident that we would prevail in combat,

it is a concerning trajectory,” Paparo said. “We are not overmatched, but I don’t like the pace of the trajectory.”

He offered his assessment to the Senate Armed Services Committee during a confirmation hearing on his promotion to commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, an area of responsibility that includes nearly 400,000 service members and half of the world’s surface.

Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, said China’s fleet stands at about 370 ships, nearly 80 more than the U.S. Navy’s 291 ships. China added 30 ships in the last year, including an aircraft carrier and about a dozen cruisers and destroyers, he said. The U.S. during the same time added two ships to its fleet and is set to shrink in the coming years as retirement of its inventory outpaces new construction.

Paparo said he had faith the fleet would overcome any size disadvantages, pointing to American forces on land that would be used to augment its forces at sea.

## Justices: West Point can still use race as admissions factor

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court is allowing West Point to continue taking race into account in admissions, while a lawsuit over its policies continues.

The justices on Friday rejected an emergency appeal seeking to force a change in the admissions process at West Point. The order, issued without any noted dissents, comes as the military academy is making decisions on whom to admit for its next entering class, the Class of 2028.

The military academies had been explicitly left out of the court’s decision in June that ended affirmative action almost everywhere in college admissions.

The court’s conservative majority said race-conscious admissions plans violate the U.S. Constitution, in cases from Harvard University and the University of North Carolina, the na-

tion’s oldest private and public colleges, respectively. But the high court made clear that its decision did not cover West Point and the nation’s other service academies, raising the possibility that national security interests could affect the legal analysis.

In their brief unsigned order Friday, the justices cautioned against reading too much into it, noting “this order should not be construed as expressing any view on the merits of the constitutional question.”

Students for Fair Admissions, the group behind the Harvard and North Carolina cases, sued the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in September. It filed a similar suit against the U.S. Naval Academy in October.

Lower courts had declined to block the admissions policies at both schools while the lawsuits are ongoing. Only the West Point ruling has been appealed to the Supreme Court.



# Ukrainian general: Strategy needs a drone overhaul

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Ukraine's survival could hinge on a strategy shift that better exploits drones and other unmanned systems, given Russia's manpower advantages and reduced Western support for Kyiv's war effort, the country's top military commander said last week.

Gen. Valery Zaluzhny laid out a new war strategy in a seven-page essay that focused heavily on ramping up the production of cheap drones.

The strategy, first published Thursday by CNN, also comes amid reports that the war commander may soon be fired by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"The challenge for our armed forces cannot be underestimated. It is to create a completely new state system of technological rearmament," Zaluzhny wrote. "Taking everything into account at this moment, we think the creation of such a system could be achieved in five months."

It is not clear whether disagreements over future strategy are at the heart of the dispute between the two leaders. But the failure of Ukraine to regain substantial territory during its summer counteroffensive has exposed weaknesses.

In a war of attrition, Russia has the advantages, given its ability to mobilize more fighters than Ukraine, which is facing its own manpower shortage because of domestic resistance to unpopular draft measures, Zaluzhny said.

"We must acknowledge the significant advantage enjoyed by the enemy in mobilizing hu-

man resources," Zaluzhny wrote.

To change the dynamics, Ukraine needs to overhaul how it is fighting the war, with more focus on unmanned technology that can inflict damage on Russia from a distance, he said.

"It is well-known by now that a central driver of this war is the development of unmanned weapons systems," Zaluzhny wrote. "They are proliferating at a breathtaking pace, and the scope of their applications grows ever wider."

Another factor is a reduction in military support from key allies, he said. In the U.S., lawmakers are at odds over the merits of continuing to arm Ukraine in light of domestic concerns, such as immigration and security on the southern border.

Moreover, some allies are running out of munitions.

"Our partners' stocks of missiles, air defense interceptors and ammunition for artillery is becoming exhausted due to the intensity of hostilities in Ukraine, but also from a global shortage of propellant charges," Zaluzhny said.

In 2024, the top priority for Ukraine's armed forces should be "mastery of an entire arsenal of (relatively) cheap, modern and highly effective, unmanned vehicles and other technological means," he wrote.

Ukraine has used such systems to great effect on the battlefield, enabling commanders to collect real-time intelligence and deliver precision strikes.

Many of those attacks have been played over and over on social media, showcasing Ukrainian drones wiping out Russian positions.

# House Dems call for investigation into Tuberville's blockade

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Two Democrats on the House's main investigative panel are calling for a government review of Sen. Tommy Tuberville's hold on senior military nominations last year and the impact it had on national security and service members.

Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, the top Democrat on the Oversight and Accountability Committee, and Rep. Robert Garcia, D-Calif., said the extent of the damage from the 10-month blockade is still unknown and warrants an examination by the watchdog Government Accountability Office. The hold by Tuberville, R-Ala., delayed the promotion of more than 425 general and flag officers, including members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"Sen. Tuberville's actions created a damaging ripple effect on the careers of service members at all levels," Raskin and Garcia

wrote in a letter to Gene Dodaro, U.S. comptroller general and head of the GAO.

The lawmakers said senior military leaders were forced to assume roles without the necessary legal authorities for decision-making and junior officers lost the opportunity to rise in rank and gain experience.

"Such career stagnation radiates massive effects on factors such as service member retention, pay, pension and future opportunities," they wrote.

Raskin and Garcia said they also wanted to know the cost of Tuberville's blockade on military families. A survey conducted by the Democratic staff of the Senate Armed Services Committee last year found military spouses and children grappling with the uncertainty of stalled promotions.

Tuberville dropped his blockade in December and the Senate confirmed the last group of stalled nominees weeks later.

# Calif. preps for dangerous 'Pineapple Express' storm

*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — California braced Sunday for the worst of a potentially dangerous storm that threatened to hammer parts of the state with hurricane-force winds and cause flooding and mudslides as it moves down the coast over the next few days.

Evacuation warnings and orders were in effect for Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, Ventura and Monterey counties. Classes were canceled Monday for schools across Santa Barbara County.

The storm, called a "Pineapple Express" because the atmospheric river's plume of moisture stretches back across the Pacific to near Hawaii, arrived in

Northern California on Saturday when most of the state was under some sort of wind, surf or flood watch.

By early Sunday, the National Weather Service issued a rare "hurricane force wind warning" for the Central Coast, with wind gusts up to 92 mph from the Monterey Peninsula to the northern section of San Luis Obispo County.

The rain caused a several-hour delay during Sunday's final round of the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am in Monterey County.

The storm was expected to move down the coast and hit the Los Angeles area with downpours, flash floods on Sunday.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Lawmakers who walked out barred from ballot**

**OR** SALEM — The Oregon Supreme Court said Thursday that 10 Republican state senators who staged a record-long walkout last year to stall bills on abortion, transgender health care and gun rights cannot run for reelection.

The decision upholds the secretary of state's decision to disqualify the senators from the ballot under a voter-approved measure aimed at stopping such boycotts. Measure 113, passed by voters in 2022, amended the state constitution to bar lawmakers from reelection if they have more than 10 unexcused absences.

Last year's boycott lasted six weeks — the longest in state history — and paralyzed the legislative session, stalling hundreds of bills.

**Judge: No background check to buy ammo**

**CA** SACRAMENTO — California residents don't have to pay for and pass a background check every time they buy bullets, a federal judge has ruled.

The ruling last week by U.S. District Judge Roger Benitez took effect immediately.

Many states, including California, make people pass a background check before they can buy a gun. California goes a step further by requiring a background check, which cost either \$1 or \$19 depending on eligibility, every time people buy bullets. A few other states also require background checks for buying ammunition, but most let people buy a license that is good for a few years.

**Change of venue sought in slayings of students**

**ID** MOSCOW — Attorneys for the man charged with stabbing four University of Idaho students to death in late 2022 are seeking a change of venue, saying he cannot receive a fair trial in the community where the killings occurred.

Anne Taylor, Bryan Kohberger's lead public defender, last week asked Judge John Judge of Idaho's 2nd Judicial District in Latah County to schedule a hearing no earlier than the end of April to hear arguments on the potential move, the Idaho Statesman reported.

Bryan Kohberger, 29, a former criminal justice student at Washington State University in nearby Pullman, Wash., is charged with four counts of murder in the deaths of Ethan Chapin, Xana Kernodle, Madison Mogen and Kaylee Goncalves at a rental home near the university campus in Moscow, Idaho, last year.

**Representative quits just before vote on expulsion**

**AZ** PHOENIX — Democratic Rep. LeeZah Sun resigned her Arizona House seat last week shortly before the chamber was expected to vote on whether to expel her from office after a legislative ethics committee concluded she had engaged in a pattern of disorderly behavior.

Sun was accused of making a profane threat at an August conference to slap and kill a lobbyist for the city of Tolleson, interfering in a child custody matter even though she wasn't a party in the legal case, and threaten-

ing a school superintendent in December 2022 with a legislative investigation. Four of Sun's fellow Democrats filed an ethics complaint against her last year.

**Town without water for more than 2 weeks**

**AR** HELENA-WEST HELENA — Residents of an east Arkansas town were without running water for more than two weeks after the state was hit by below-freezing temperatures, and the outage has forced them to line up for bottled water, fill up jugs or take showers at a truck brought in by the state.

The outage affected about 1,400 residents of Helena-West Helena. It is the second in the past year for the town 52 miles southwest of Memphis, Tenn., located along the Mississippi River. The town faced a similar crisis last summer, when the same part of the city was without water in June.

Officials are racing to fix leaks throughout the city and restore water to residents, but they say they're facing the longer term challenge of overhauling a system with an infrastructure that dates back decades.

**Vet who aided lawmaker seeks charge dismissal**

**CT** HARTFORD — A military veteran who rushed to the aid of Connecticut's first Muslim state representative when she was being attacked after a prayer service and subdued the suspect is seeking to have a misdemeanor assault charge erased.

Jason Spencer, 43, applied last week for the state's accelerated rehabilitation program, which would result in the

charge being dismissed if he successfully completes a period of probation.

"I took an oath to defend this Constitution, to defend the country, to defend all the citizens," Spencer told reporters after his appearance in Hartford Superior Court. "If I see someone needing help I have to intervene, and I feel all citizens should do that."

Police, however, allege Spencer went too far when he kicked the suspect in the face after he stopped struggling.

State Rep. Maryam Khan, who was assaulted last June, joined Spencer and his lawyer outside the courthouse and criticized Spencer's arrest.

**Third graders who fail exam could be held back**

**IN** INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana lawmakers have vowed to reverse the state's long declining literacy rates with legislation targeting early elementary school years. State senators advanced a sweeping bill Thursday that could hold back thousands of third graders who do not pass the state's reading exam.

The bill, which has the support of Gov. Eric Holcomb, Republicans who control the House chamber and the Indiana Department of Education, now advances to the House.

Indiana's proposal was partially inspired by the "Mississippi miracle," a term referring to the success of the Southern state in improving literacy scores over the last decade. The gains have been attributed in part to a third-grade retention policy, early intervention and the science of reading.

— From wire reports



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# Chiefs in Super Bowl after fixing offense

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — There was a moment back on Christmas Day, long before the Kansas City Chiefs could even start thinking about playing in the Super Bowl again, when Patrick Mahomes broke the huddle in a game against the Las Vegas Raiders.

His team was in total disarray. Players were coming off the sideline, then racing back, only to turn around and rush back onto the field. Nobody knew where to line up. And all the while, the play clock was quickly ticking down to zero.

That moment may have changed the course of the entire season for Kansas City.

In the midst of that deflating loss to the Raiders, their fifth in eight games, Chiefs coach Andy Reid and his offensive brain trust came to the realization that their famously complex offense had grown — well, too complex. There were too many formations. Too many motions. Too many route concepts. In fact, there were too many words, often more than 15 to spit out a single play.

So the Chiefs simplified ev-

erything. And they haven't lost since.

While their offense still may not be the juggernaut that carried the Chiefs to three previous Super Bowls in four years, it has at least become efficient, and that's all it needed to be alongside the league's No. 2 defense. The Chiefs gained more than 400 yards in a wild-card win over Miami, or more than 100 than they did that day against Las Vegas, and put up enough points against the Bills and Ravens on the road to earn a spot opposite the San Francisco 49ers on Feb. 11 — in Las Vegas, of all places.

"When you see some of the things that happened on tape, like that game where we had trouble getting in and out of the huddle, whether it's personnel or what we have in the play call — I think it is a combination of all that," Chiefs offensive coordinator Matt Nagy said. "So sometimes that stuff makes you look back and think, 'What can we do different to help these guys out?'"

In some ways, the decision to pare back everything goes against common sense.

Shouldn't an offense that is more complex be more difficult to defend?

It also seemed to go against the instincts of both Reid and Mahomes, who relish designing creative plays and share the same go-for-broke attitude. When rookies show up to training camp each July, they are hit with the entirety of the offensive playbook, and it usually leaves their eyes spinning like slot machines and their brains feeling like mush.

"It's a complex offense. It's hard for young guys to do," Mahomes admitted.

There are unusual formations. A wide range of personnel groups. Lots of shifts and movements, designed to both confuse the defense and provide a tell as to what it might do. There are ghost motions. And even when a wide receiver knows the route he is supposed to run, it could change mid-stride depending on what the secondary is doing.

No wonder the play calls themselves get long-winded. In fact, former quarterback Alex Smith used to warn his teammates in the huddle that he had "a doozy" so they could pay at-

ention as he delivered the entire word salad.

"There's so much verbiage in this playbook and so much dialogue," Chiefs general manager Brett Veach acknowledged last fall, "and there's so many tweaks to every assignment in regard to where they align and how they look at coverage and how they alter routes. It's super complicated."

By simplifying things, the Chiefs have gotten to the line of scrimmage in the playoffs with 15 or 20 seconds on the clock, and that has given Mahomes time to survey the defense, change protections or audible to an entirely different play, if necessary.

"Nobody took offense to any of it," Nagy said. "We said, 'How can we get better?' And we started with that. There's a lot of other things that go into it, with execution and play design and everything, but put it all together and see what happens."

What happened was back-to-back wins to clinch the AFC West and the No. 3 seed in the playoffs. And three more wins there, including the past two on the road.

# Curry scores season-high 60, but Hawks win in OT

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Another loss for Golden State drained the joy out of Stephen Curry's second career 60-point game.

Curry scored a season-high 60 points in the Warriors' 141-134 overtime loss to Trae Young and the Atlanta Hawks on Saturday night.

"It sucks to not have something to show for it," Curry said after the Warriors fell four games under .500 at 21-25. Golden State is 12th in the Western Conference.

Curry had eight points in overtime to finish only two points shy of his career high of 62 at home against Portland on

Jan. 3, 2021. He was 22 of 38 shots from the field, hitting 10 of 23 3-pointers, and made all six of his free throws.

Young led the Hawks with 35 points. Dejounte Murray scored the last seven points in an 11-0 run to open the overtime for Atlanta and finished with 19 points. Onyeka Okongwu had a career-high 22 points and a season-high 16 rebounds, and Jalen Johnson scored 21 points.

**Lakers 113, Knicks 105:** LeBron James scored 24 points and visiting Los Angeles ended New York's winning streak at nine games.

Jalen Brunson scored 36 points to lead New York.

**Bucks 129, Mavericks 117:** Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 48 points and visiting Milwaukee overcame a 25-point deficit against Dallas for its first victory under coach Doc Rivers.

Damian Lillard scored 30 points in the second-biggest comeback victory this season for Milwaukee. Luka Doncic had 40 points and 11 assists for Dallas.

**Nets 136, 76ers 121:** Cam Thomas scored 40 points, Mikal Bridges had 23 and visiting Brooklyn routed short-handed Philadelphia.

Two nights after scoring a career-high 51 points at Utah, Tyrese Maxey had 23 points for

Philadelphia on 8-for-23 shooting. The 76ers lost for the fifth time in six games.

**Cavaliers 117, Spurs 101:** Donovan Mitchell scored 31 points, Evan Mobley had 28 points and 10 rebounds and visiting Cleveland routed San Antonio.

Victor Wembanyama had 19 points and 14 rebounds for San Antonio.

**Kings 123, Bulls 115:** Domantas Sabonis had a triple-double and De'Aaron Fox scored 41 points, helping visiting Sacramento hold off Chicago.

Coby White scored 26 points for depleted Chicago.



# Balanced Kansas cruises past Houston

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Hunter Dickinson had 20 points to lead four Jayhawks in double figures as No. 8 Kansas beat No. 4 Houston 78-65 in front of a frenzied crowd on Saturday.

Kansas (18-4, 6-3 Big 12) got 17 points each from Kevin McCullar and Johnny Furphy, and 10 from KJ Adams.

The Jayhawks hit nine of their first 10 shots, helping them to a 23-11 lead at the second media timeout. The Cougars, who lead the nation in field goal defense (35.5%) allowed Kansas to shoot 68% (17-for-25) in the first half.

The Cougars (19-3, 6-3) were led by L.J. Cryer with 24 points while J'Wan Roberts and Emanuel Sharp scored 11 points each.

Houston came into the game with the nation's best scoring defense at 52.9 points per game allowed and had not allowed more than 72 points in a game all season. The Jayhawks hit 53 points with 14:17 left in the second half on a layup by Dickinson.

Kansas led 43-28 at halftime. The Cougars had not allowed more than 30 points in a first half all season.

**No. 1 UConn 77, St. John's 64:** Cam Spencer scored 23 points, freshman Stephon Castle had a season-best 21 and the visiting Huskies pulled away from the Red Storm at Madison Square Garden.

Daniss Jenkins scored 19 for scuffling St. John's (13-9, 5-6), which has dropped five of six after opening 4-1 in conference play during their first season under Hall of Fame coach Rick Pitino.

**No. 3 North Carolina 93, No. 7 Duke 84:** Armando Bacot had 25 points and 10 rebounds and Harrison Ingram added 21 points, 13 rebounds and four steals as the host Tar Heels beat the rival Blue Devils.

Freshman Jared McCain had 23 points and 11 rebounds to lead Duke (16-5, 7-3), while star big man Kyle Filipowski added 22 points but only five rebounds in his marquee matchup with Bacot inside.

**No. 5 Tennessee 103, No. 10 Kentucky 92:** Josiah-Jordan James scored 17 of his 26 points in the second half, and Zakai Zeigler also added 26 points in the visiting Volunteers' win over the Wildcats.

Zeigler made all five of his field goal attempts for 13 points before halftime, including three from long range, helping Tennessee (16-5, 6-2 Southeastern Conference) lead throughout.

Reserve Rob Dillingham had a career-high 35 points with six 3-pointers before

fouling out late for Kentucky (15-5, 5-4).

**No. 9 Marquette 91, Georgetown 57:** Kam Jones scored a career-high 31 points, Tyler Kolek had 17 points and eight assists and the visiting Golden Eagles won their sixth straight game.

David Joplin scored 15 points and Oso Ighodaro added 10 points and 10 rebounds. Marquette (17-5, 8-3 Big East) forced 19 turnovers and outscored the Hoyas 35-5 in points off turnovers.

Rowan Brumbaugh scored 12 points to lead Georgetown (8-13, 1-9), which lost its sixth straight game. The 34-point loss is the largest home Big East defeat for the Hoyas.

**No. 18 Baylor 70, No. 12 Iowa State 68:** Jayden Nunn made the go-ahead layup with 2 seconds remaining and the host Bears overcame coach Scott Drew's first career ejection to beat the Cyclones.

Baylor hung on for the victory when Milan Momcilovic's banked 3-pointer by Iowa State was ruled to be shot after the final buzzer.

Nunn finished with 16 points and RayJ Dennis had 18 points and seven rebounds for the Bears (16-5, 5-3 Big 12).

**Cincinnati 75, No. 15 Texas Tech 72:** Simas Lukosius scored 16 points, including the go-ahead jumper with 21 seconds left, and the visiting Bearcats dealt the Red Raiders their first home loss this season.

The 14-footer by Lukosius was the 14th and final lead change of the game, which also had eight ties. That gave Cincinnati (15-7, 4-5 Big 12) a 73-72 lead right after Pop Isaacs made a long defended step-back 3-pointer to put Texas Tech ahead for the final time.

Isaacs, who finished with a game-high 22 points for the Red Raiders (16-5, 5-3), missed a potential go-ahead jumper with nine seconds left. Dan Skillings Jr. grabbed the rebound and passed ahead to breaking John Newman III for a slam dunk, though Isaacs had a longer than half-court shot ricochet off the front rim as time expired.

**No. 16 Auburn 91, Mississippi 77:** Jaylin Williams scored 16 points and the visiting Tigers erased a 13-point deficit in the first half with a dominating second half to defeat the Rebels.

Johni Broome and Chad Baker-Mazara each scored 15 points, with 27 of those 30 combined points coming in the second half. Denver Jones and K.D. Johnson scored 11 points apiece as Tre Donaldson added 10 points for Auburn (18-4, 7-2 SEC).

Allen Flanigan scored 20 points, Matthew Murrell had 18 and Jaemyn Brakefield had

15 for Ole Miss (18-4, 5-4).

**San Diego State 81, No. 17 Utah State 67:** Jaedon LeDee had 16 points and nine rebounds to lead the host Aztecs past Great Osobor and the Aggies, pulling defending Mountain West champion San Diego State within one game of Utah State.

LeDee scored nine points in the second half of the showdown between the top two scorers and rebounders in the league. Osobor had 17 points and seven rebounds.

**No. 20 Florida Atlantic 102, Tulsa 70:** Johnell Davis scored 24 points, Alijah Martin and Vladislav Goldin each scored 18 and the host Owls won their seventh consecutive game.

Nick Boyd finished with 13 and Bryan Greenlee added 11 for Florida Atlantic (18-4, 8-1 American Athletic Conference), which remained tied with Charlotte and South Florida atop the league standings.

**No. 22 BYU 86, West Virginia 73:** Fousseyni Traore had a season-high 24 points and nine rebounds to lead the visiting Cougars past the Mountaineers.

Richie Saunders added 17 points and Jaxson Robinson scored 15 for BYU (16-5, 4-4 Big 12), which earned its second road win in five trips this season.

**UCF 74, No. 23 Oklahoma 63:** Jaylin Sellers shot 13-for-14 from the line and scored 20 points, Antwann Jones hit three early 3-pointers and finished with 15 points and Knights coach Johnny Dawkins earned his 300th coaching victory.

Darius Johnson added 14 points and eight assists for host UCF (13-8, 4-5 Big 12), which never trailed and built a 17-point lead in the game. The Knights shot 28-for-32 from the line in the game and blocked 12 shots in the win.

**No. 24 Alabama 99, Mississippi State 67:** Mark Sears scored 21 points and the host Crimson Tide maintained their spot atop the Southeastern Conference standings.

Aaron Estrada scored 15 points and Mouhamed Dioubate and Jarin Stevenson each scored 14 for Alabama (16-6, 8-1).

**Texas 77, No. 25 TCU 66:** Max Abmas scored 19 of his 21 points after halftime, including the last 13 for the visiting Longhorns in a win over the Horned Frogs.

Abmas put Texas (15-7, 4-5 Big 12) ahead to stay with a three-point play with 3:25 left that broke a 64-all tie. That layup and free throw started a personal 11-0 run that included two 3-pointers, and he added a pair of free throws in the final minute.

# Matthews, Marner shine as All-Stars

Associated Press

TORONTO — Auston Matthews and his Toronto Maple Leafs teammates soaked in the spotlight of NHL All-Star Weekend as the hometown fan favorites, and they gave the crowd the ending it wanted.

Matthews scored twice, including a game winner, and had an assist to beat reigning MVP Connor McDavid's team 7-4 in the final of the All-Star 3-on-3 tournament on Saturday. Matthews, the U.S.-born face of Canada's richest franchise who last summer re-signed to stay in Toronto through 2028, was named MVP.

Leafs forward Mitch Marner also had a goal, and he and Matthews were able to celebrate with teammates Morgan Rielly and William Nylander as the entire team splits the \$1 million prize.

"The whole weekend in itself is special for all of us, especially the host city and the hometown guys," Matthews said. "Nice to

cap it off with a win, and everybody goes home happy."

Team Matthews winning the finale of a new-look All-Star Weekend, featuring the return of the popular player draft and a redesigned skills competition, in the Leafs' home rink made it a dream event for the league on the ice. Off the ice, the Hockey Canada sexual assault investigation and charges pending against four current NHL players loomed over the festivities, which also included an Olympic agreement for 2026 and 2030.

The success of the Leafs quartet came a day after McDavid stole the show by winning the skills competition he played a big role in altering. As much as the Edmonton Oilers captain was motivated Friday night, Matthews' team cared about getting the job done in the 3-on-3 tournament.

"We wanted to win, for sure," Matthews said. "Talking in the locker room, I don't think there

was much messing around. Everybody was on the same page to try to go out there and put in a pretty good effort and try to come out with a good result."

Marner wouldn't have it any other way. Growing up in nearby Markham, Ontario, watching All-Star Games growing up, being in one in Toronto was something he cherished.

"You always dream of being a part of one," Marner said. "To have it in this city, it's pretty remarkable and to be able to enjoy with the ones that got me to where I am, it's even better."

It couldn't have been much better for Rielly, a first-time All-Star who did not expect to feel nervous before the 3-on-3 exhibition.

"I think when you're in that environment around all those elite players, I think I was a little nervous," Rielly said.

The event that leaned into being in Canada's biggest city had plenty of star power — and not just in hockey. Singers Justin

Bieber, Michael Bublé and Tate McRae and actor Will Arnett served as celebrity captains — and McRae performed at an MVP-caliber level between the semifinals and final.

"Just cool to have somebody like (Bieber) and the other celebrities we had over the weekend come in," Matthews said. "They're so down to earth and engaging with players, staff, people that are around."

New York Rangers coach Peter Laviolette got to spend a lot of time with Arnett, who was behind the bench for the 3-on-3 tournament. Arnett also may have provided a little bit of the winning motivation to end an eventful All-Star Weekend on a high note.

"He gave a speech before the first game that was right up there with some of the best," Laviolette said. "For a guy like him to come in — a huge fan of the game, loves the game — (and) to be a part of that is really good."

## NHL Players returning to Olympics in 2026, 2030

Associated Press

TORONTO — NHL players are returning to the Olympics for the first time in more than a decade.

The world's top hockey league will allow its players to participate in the Winter Games in 2026 in Milan and in 2030 under an agreement announced Friday by the NHL, NHL Players' Association, International Ice Hockey Federation and the IOC.

NHL players have not been at the Olympics since 2014 in Sochi.

"There is a recognition of how important this is to the players," NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said at a news conference during All-Star Weekend. "Everybody felt on our ownership side that it was the right thing to do. ... This really came down to doing something because the players really wanted it."

IIHF president Luc Tardif smiled and said, "We made it" after two years of work that picked up over the past six months.

"With all the uncertainty that's been around it in years prior and just how great of

an experience that it is, I think it's just awesome news and I'm sure a lot of players are really happy," Canada and Pittsburgh Penguins star Sidney Crosby said. "And especially to commit to two different Olympics, I think that'll be great."

Milan, barring another unforeseen circumstance like the pandemic that caused players to miss Beijing in 2022, will be the first Olympics for a generation of stars led by Canadians Connor McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar and Americans Auston Matthews, Jack Eichel and Adam Fox. The tantalizing rosters could see the likes of McDavid, Crosby and Connor Bedard on the same team battling for gold.

"The opportunity to do that is a dream come true," McDavid said. "I've been vocal about this. I feel like it's important for hockey as we continue to try to grow our game internationally and at home. I think it's a great thing."

The NHL paused its season for the Olympics five times from 1998 through 2014, and

most of the players now in the league grew up expecting to play on that stage. Disagreements over who would pay for insurance and travel costs, along with the time difference between South Korea and North America, were cited as factors in the NHL passing on Pyeongchang in 2018.

Bettman said in 2026 and '30, team owners will not be paying "big ticket" costs like travel and insurance. That is up to the IIHF and respective organizing committees. Tardif said national federations and Olympic committees will contribute.

Pandemic-related scheduling issues scuttled plans to send players to Beijing two years ago. As recently as this past fall, U.S. defenseman Charlie McAvoy said he was still upset about not being able to play in the 2022 Olympics.

"That one took a while to get over," McAvoy said. "You're picking sizes for your Ralph Lauren outfit to walk around in the opening ceremonies. You want to be a part of that, and then you just lose it in a matter of seconds."