

DOD: Strikes in Syria, Iraq had 'good effects'

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — U.S. airstrikes in Iraq and Syria on Friday that targeted Iran-backed militants were successful, though Pentagon officials could provide few details three days later, citing ongoing battle-damage assessments.

"We currently assess that we had good effects and that strikes destroyed, or functionally damaged, more than 80 targets at the seven facilities. The number of casualties is still being assessed," Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon's top spokesman, told reporters Monday. "As it relates to actions that we're taking, again, I'm not going to have anything

to provide for you beyond what we put out in our statements."

The U.S. military on Friday began retaliatory airstrikes in Iraq and Syria against Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and affiliated militia groups in response to a drone attack Jan. 28 in Jordan that killed three American soldiers.

At least 41 other soldiers — all in the National Guard — were injured in the attack on the U.S. base known as Tower 22.

Twenty-seven were able to return to duty, while 14 others continue to be evaluated for follow-up care, including one in stable condition who required medical evacuation.

The U.S. strikes in retaliation

hit three facilities in Iraq and four in Syria, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said.

President Joe Biden and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Friday vowed the strikes would continue.

"Our response began today. It will continue at times and places of our choosing," Biden said in a statement issued shortly after the attacks. "The United States does not seek conflict in the Middle East or anywhere else in the world. But let all those who might seek to do us harm know this: If you harm an American, we will respond."

U.S. and British forces on Saturday also conducted strikes against 36 militia targets in Ye-

men in a continued effort to stop Iran-backed Houthi rebels in that country from their attacks on the shipping lanes in the Red Sea.

Ryder said Pentagon officials are tracking two attacks in Syria against U.S. troops since the retaliatory strikes on Friday.

There are no reports of U.S. injuries or damages, he said. But at least six members of the Syrian Democratic Forces were killed in a drone attack Sunday in the vicinity of Mission Support Site Green Village, a compound in northeastern Syria that houses U.S. and allied forces. Ryder said he is not aware of any U.S. forces who were with Syrian Democratic Forces at the time.

More sue Navy over Hawaii water contamination

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Another 2,200 people filed suit in federal court Monday seeking compensation for illnesses, distress and financial hardship they say stem from exposure to petroleum-tainted Navy tap water in Hawaii.

The complaint was filed in U.S. District Court for Hawaii by Just Well Law in Austin, Texas, and Honolulu-based Hosoda Law Group on behalf of 2,212 plaintiffs. They allege the Navy was negligent and failed to properly address medical concerns in the wake of jet fuel contamination in the Navy's water distribution system at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

The contamination was traced to a spill from the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility a few miles from the base.

The World War II-era facility is being emptied and permanently closed.

This lawsuit joins a similar one filed in 2022 by the same attorneys on behalf of 296 residents and former residents of the affected communities who are also seeking compensation.

The first suit is set for trial in April and too far along to add new litigants, Kristina Baehr, an attorney with Just Law, said.

Active-duty service members are not plaintiffs in those lawsuits. Three soldiers and two sailors, represented by the same law firms, filed a separate suit in Hawaii federal court in November, the first active-duty service members to do so.

The pair of law firms now represents about 7,500 people affected by the contamination, Baehr said. Most are still working through an administrative process that is a prerequisite to

filing a lawsuit in federal court, she said.

The Navy said Monday it would not comment on ongoing litigation.

The lead plaintiffs in the suit filed Monday are Jaclyn Hughes and her three children, whose home in late 2021 was in the Halsey Terrace military community. She is married to an active-duty service member who is not named in the lawsuit nor is a plaintiff.

Hughes gave birth to their third child just days before residents began complaining of fuel-tainted water in late November 2021.

"Around Thanksgiving, their water had a sheen and smelled of gasoline," the lawsuit states.

"Jaclyn's throat was sore and burned. Her newborn son's body was covered in red rashes."

One of the Hughes daughters

was most severely affected, experiencing "rapid behavioral changes" in the weeks after the contamination, the suit states.

"In January 2022, a pediatrician referred her for a psychology assessment," the suit states. "The child, who once adorned her mother with hugs and kisses, became unrecognizable.

"During fits of rage she screamed uncontrollably and became combative. For months she refused to wear clothes due to sensory overwhelm, or safely take car rides, holding the family captive in the home that was poisoning her."

The girl was subsequently diagnosed with a host of conditions, and in July 2022 she was prescribed blood pressure medication "to aid her constant fight or flight response," the suit states.

The family now lives in California.

Qatari PM: Hamas 'generally positive' on cease-fire bid

Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar — Qatar's prime minister said Tuesday that Hamas' reaction to the latest plan for a cease-fire in Gaza and the release of hostages was "generally positive" as he met with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was making his latest visit to the Middle East.

Qatar, which has long mediated with Hamas, has been working with the U.S. and Egypt to broker a cease-fire that would involve an extended halt in fighting and the release of the over 100 hostages still held by Hamas after its Oct. 7 cross-border raid that ignited the war.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani did not provide any details on Hamas' response but said the group had "comments." Blinken confirmed that officials had received Hamas' response and said he would brief Israel's leaders when he visits the country on Wednesday.

Hamas said in a statement that it responded in a "positive spirit" to the latest proposal from the U.S. and Mideast mediators. But the militant group said it still seeks "a comprehensive and complete" cease-fire to end "the aggression against our people." Israel has ruled out the kind of permanent cease-fire sought by the militant group.

Blinken met with Egyptian officials earlier in the day and was in Saudi Arabia on Monday.

His visit also comes amid growing concerns in Egypt about Israel's stated intentions to expand the combat in Gaza to

areas on the Egyptian border that are crammed with displaced Palestinians.

Israel's defense minister has said his country's offensive will eventually reach the town of Rafah, on the Egyptian border, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people have sought refuge and are now living in increasingly miserable conditions.

U.N. humanitarian monitors said Tuesday that Israeli evacuation orders now cover two-thirds of Gaza's territory, driving thousands more people every day toward the border areas.

Egypt has warned that an Israeli deployment along the border would threaten the peace treaty the two countries signed over four decades ago. Egypt fears an expansion of combat to the Rafah area could push terrified Palestinian civilians across the border, a scenario Egypt has said it is determined to prevent.

Blinken, who met with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi in Cairo, has said repeatedly that Palestinians must not be forced out of Gaza.

The Palestinian death toll from nearly four months of war has reached 27,585, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory, with 107 bodies brought to hospitals over the past day.

The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count but says most of the dead have been women and children.

The war has leveled swaths of the enclave and pushed a quarter of residents to starvation.

Navy sacks 2nd leader of USS Howard in 6 months

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The commander of the USS Howard, a guided-missile destroyer based in Japan, was fired Tuesday, the Navy announced without providing a specific reason.

Cmdr. Cameron Dennis was dismissed as the ship's skipper by Capt. Justin Harts, the commodore of Yokosuka Naval Base's Destroyer Squadron 15, for "a loss of confidence in his ability to perform his duties," the Navy announced in a brief statement.

Dennis' firing marks the second dismissal of a USS Howard commander since August.

Navy officials on Tuesday declined to provide additional details about Dennis' dismissal beyond the "loss of confidence" statement that military services use in most announcements of fired commanders.

The Navy said Dennis would be reassigned to the 7th Fleet staff, which is also headquartered at Yokosuka Naval Base. Capt. Dave Huljack, who had been serving as the deputy commodore for Destroyer Squadron 15, will take temporary command of the Howard. It was not immediately clear Tuesday when a new, permanent USS Howard skipper would be named.

Dennis took command of the Howard on Sept. 1, replacing another temporary commander who took the helm of the ship from Cmdr. Kenji Igawa, who was fired in August for poor performance, Navy officials said at the time.

Igawa's dismissal came just days after the Howard sustained a "soft grounding" just before arriving in port in Indonesia on Aug. 10, 7th Fleet officials said.

GAO: Coast Guard lacking on tracking housing costs

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The Coast Guard's failure to survey housing costs since at least 2012 may be forcing service members to make tradeoffs that worsen their quality of life, a government watchdog agency found.

Coast Guard personnel and their spouses battling the rising costs and limited availability of rental properties in desirable locations say their troubles have added up to longer and more expensive commutes, less school choice and limited access to health care, according to a Government Accountability Office report released Monday.

The service's lack of data prevents its leaders from determin-

ing whether personnel are receiving sufficient housing allowances to cover the costs of living in remote areas and popular vacation destinations, the report found.

The Defense Department's process for setting basic allowance for housing, or BAH, influences how the Coast Guard manages housing, according to the GAO report, which reviewed data from 2018 to 2023.

The GAO's recommendations included having the service seek the capability to buy existing homes, as well as to acquire longer-term contracts for utility services to reduce costs.

The Coast Guard concurred with the GAO's recommendations.

Calif. records more than 300 mudslides

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles Fire Chief Kristin Crowley said Tuesday that crews had responded to 307 mudslides and that five buildings had been deemed uninhabitable since an atmospheric river-fueled storm moved into the region over the weekend.

Despite the record-setting rain that has drenched the city and caused widespread flooding, there have been no storm-related deaths reported in Los Angeles, Mayor Karen Bass said at a news conference.

The rain began to ease up Tuesday after bombarding Los Angeles with nearly half of its seasonal rainfall in just two

days. Although the rain was tapering off, forecasters warned of the ongoing threat of potentially deadly landslides.

The slow-moving storm that parked itself over the region on Monday and dumped a record amount of rain on sections of the nation's second-largest city could linger into Wednesday, the National Weather Service said. Scattered showers and possible thunderstorms were expected to bring light to moderate rain to the region, but some places could get brief yet fierce downpours that could dump up to an inch of rain in an hour.

Most of Southern California remained under flood watches, and the weather service warned

people to remain on high alert, as swollen and fast-moving creeks and rivers increase the risks of drowning and the need for swift-water rescues.

The storm plowed through Northern California over the weekend, killing three people who were crushed by falling trees, before moving south and lingering. It was the second storm fueled by an atmospheric river to hit the state in a matter of days.

On Monday, the storm pounded Los Angeles with rain, sending mud and boulders down hillsides dotted with multimillion-dollar homes while people living in homeless encampments in many parts of the city scrambled

for safety.

Near the Hollywood Hills, floodwaters carried mud, rocks and household objects downhill through Studio City, city officials said. Sixteen people were evacuated and several homes were red-tagged.

"It looks like a river that's been here for years," said Keki Mingus, whose neighbors' homes were damaged. "I've never seen anything like it."

More showers are possible Wednesday and Thursday, National Weather Service forecaster Bob Oravec said early Tuesday. "So it doesn't look like it's going to be totally in the clear probably until Thursday and into Friday," he said.

Senate GOP resists advancing on border policy bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan Senate deal intended to curb illegal crossings at the U.S. border with Mexico faced almost certain defeat Tuesday as Senate Republicans signaled their opposition, stranding President Joe Biden with no clear way to advance aid for Ukraine through Congress.

The Democratic president has urged lawmakers to embrace a bipartisan deal that pairs border enforcement measures with \$60 billion in wartime aid

for Ukraine, as well as tens of billions of dollars more for Israel, other U.S. allies in Asia, the U.S. immigration system and humanitarian aid for civilians in Gaza and Ukraine. But he and the Senate's top Democrat, Sen. Chuck Schumer, and top Republican, Sen. Mitch McConnell, have run into a wall of opposition from conservatives — led by Donald Trump — who rejected the border proposal as insufficient.

Schumer, from New York, cast Tuesday as a "gloomy day here in the United States Sen-

ate" during a floor speech in which he scolded Republicans for backing away from the deal. He offered to delay a key test vote on the package until Thursday, but still dared them to vote against border security — an issue they have long championed.

"After months of good faith negotiations, after months of giving Republicans many of the things they asked for, Leader McConnell and the Republican conference are ready to kill the national security supplemental package even with border provi-

sions they so fervently demand," Schumer said.

The White House has worked for months with senators on the carefully negotiated compromise in hopes that it would unlock Republican votes for the Ukraine aid in the House — where scores of GOP lawmakers have come out against funding Kyiv's fight against Russia. The impasse threatens a cornerstone of Biden foreign policy: Halting Russian President Vladimir Putin's advance into Europe.

Calif. bill would OK psychedelic mushroom therapy

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — A pair of California lawmakers introduced a bipartisan bill on Tuesday to allow people 21 and older to consume psychedelic mushrooms under professional supervision as part of an agenda to tackle the state's mental health and substance use crises.

It comes after Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom last year vetoed legislation that would

have decriminalized the possession and personal use of several plant-based hallucinogens, including psychedelic mushrooms. It was the first time the proposal by Democratic Sen. Scott Wiener made it through the legislature after years of stalling. In his veto message, Newsom, who championed legalizing cannabis in 2016, asked lawmakers to work on therapeutic guidelines and regula-

tions.

Now Wiener has teamed up with Republican Assemblymember Marie Waldron on a proposal to allow participants to consume psilocybin — the hallucinogenic component in what's known as psychedelic mushrooms — under the supervision of a licensed therapist. The bill also would include dimethyltryptamine (DMT), MDMA and mescaline.

Colorado and Oregon have already decriminalized psychedelic mushrooms and established regulated systems for therapeutic use of the substances. In California, San Francisco, Oakland and Santa Cruz have effectively decriminalized possession of psychedelic mushrooms, meaning a person cannot be arrested or prosecuted for possessing limited amounts of plant-based hallucinogens.

Court: Trump not immune from prosecution

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal appeals panel ruled Tuesday that Donald Trump can face trial on charges that he plotted to overturn the results of the 2020 election, rejecting the former president's claims that he is immune from prosecution.

The decision marks the second time in as many months that judges have spurned Trump's immunity arguments and held that he can be prosecuted for actions undertaken while in the White House and in the run-up to Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob of his supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol. But it also sets the stage for addition-

al appeals from the Republican ex-president that could reach the U.S. Supreme Court.

The trial was originally set for March, but it was postponed last week and the judge didn't immediately set a new date.

The trial date carries enormous political ramifications, with the Republican primary front-runner hoping to delay it until after the November election. If Trump defeats President Joe Biden, he could presumably try to use his position as head of the executive branch to order a new attorney general to dismiss the federal cases or he could potentially seek a pardon for himself.

The appeals court took center stage in the immunity dispute after the Supreme Court last month said it was at least temporarily staying out of it, rejecting a request from special counsel Jack Smith to take up the matter quickly and issue a speedy ruling.

The legally untested question before the court was whether former presidents can be prosecuted after they leave office for actions taken in the White House related to their official duties.

The Supreme Court has held that presidents are immune from civil liability for official acts, and Trump's lawyers

have for months argued that that protection should be extended to criminal prosecution as well.

They said the actions Trump was accused of in his failed bid to cling to power after he lost the 2020 election to Biden, including badgering his vice president to refuse to certify the results of the election, all fell within the "outer perimeters" of a president's official acts.

But Smith's team has said that no such immunity exists in the U.S. Constitution or in prior cases and that, in any event, Trump's actions weren't part of his official duties.

US upping aid to Guyana amid Venezuela's threats

Associated Press

GEORGETOWN, Guyana — The U.S. government is increasing its urgent military assistance to Guyana, officials said Monday, as neighboring Venezuela threatens to seize a large part of the country's territory it has long claimed.

The United States is pledging to help Guyana buy new aircraft, helicopters, a fleet of military drones and, for the first time, radar technology. The details were not immediately clear, and Guyanese officials declined to say how much they expect to pay.

Confirmation of the plan came a day after the U.S. deputy national security adviser, Jon Finer, and Western Hemisphere senior director Juan González met with authorities in Guyana about improving defense capabilities.

Their visit was the latest engagement by top defense and administration officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken, on improving Guyana's ability to defend itself from external threats.

"That cooperation is fundamentally defensive in nature and grounded in our desire for Guyana to be able to defend its territorial integrity against any possible threats," Finer told reporters late Sunday.

He added that "we do not think that it is appropriate for countries to make threats or to contemplate publicly the use of force against another country." It was a veiled reference to Venezuela, which amassed a small number of troops along its eastern border late last year and threatened to annex Guyana's mineral-rich Essequibo region after holding a referendum to approve the annexation.

Tensions between the countries have cooled following talks mediated by Brazil and Caribbean leaders in December. A second round of talks involving foreign ministers was held in Brazil in late January to prepare for an upcoming summit between Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and Guyanese President Irfaan Ali.

King Charles' cancer was caught early, Sunak says

Associated Press

LONDON — King Charles II's cancer was caught early and the whole country is hoping for a speedy recovery, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said Tuesday, as Prince Harry flew in from California for a rare visit with his father.

Royal officials announced Monday that the 75-year-old king has been diagnosed with an undisclosed form of cancer and is receiving treatment as an outpatient.

Less than 18 months into the reign that he'd famously waited decades to begin, Charles suspended public engagements but will continue with state business — including weekly meetings with Sunak — and won't be handing over his constitutional roles as head of state.

On Tuesday afternoon, Harry could be seen arriving at the king's Clarence House residence in a black SUV after an overnight flight.

The two have a troubled relationship, and Harry has seen his father infrequently since the prince quit royal duties in 2020

and moved to Los Angeles with his wife, Meghan, citing what they said was the unbearable intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media.

About an hour after Harry arrived, Charles and Queen Camilla were driven from their residence to nearby Buckingham Palace in a royal Bentley.

The couple waved to tourists and well-wishers gathered outside the palace gates.

They then traveled by helicopter to Sandringham, the monarch's rural residence in eastern England.

Buckingham Palace said the king's cancer was found during Charles' recent hospital treatment for an enlarged prostate but is a "separate issue" and not prostate cancer.

"Thankfully, this has been caught early," Sunak told BBC radio, adding: "We'll crack on with everything."

The palace said Charles, who has generally enjoyed good health, "remains wholly positive about his treatment and looks forward to returning to full public duty as soon as possible."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Jordan's championship sneakers sold for \$8M

NY NEW YORK — A collection of sneakers that superstar Michael Jordan wore as he and the Chicago Bulls won six NBA championships has fetched \$8 million at auction, setting a new record for game-worn sneakers, Sotheby's said.

The six Air Jordan shoes — one apiece from the last games of the 1991, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1997 and 1998 championship series — sold Friday. Sotheby's dubbed it the "Dynasty Collection."

Sotheby's didn't identify the buyer and described the seller only as "a private American collector" who obtained them from a longtime Bulls executive.

Jordan first gave a sneaker to the executive after the championship-winning game in 1991 and continued the tradition afterward, according to Sotheby's. The auction lot included photos of Jordan wearing a single shoe as he celebrated the 1992, 1993, 1996 and 1998 wins.

Goose found in medical helicopter that crashed

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — A dead goose was found in part of the flight control system of a medical helicopter that crashed in western Oklahoma, killing all three people on board, according to a preliminary report by the National Transportation Safety Board.

The report does not cite a suspected cause of the crash, but noted one goose was found in the helicopter's flight control system and others were found

in the debris field.

A report on the probable cause could take up to two years to complete, according to the NTSB.

The helicopter crashed Jan. 20 in a pasture near Hydro, about 60 miles west of Oklahoma City, as it was returning to Weatherford after taking a patient to an Oklahoma City hospital.

Skydiver dies, 2nd fatal incident within month

AZ ELOY — Authorities are investigating the death of a 73-year-old skydiver in Arizona, the second deadly incident involving skydiving in Eloy in less than a month.

Terry Gardner and three fellow experienced skydivers were making their third jump of the day around noon Wednesday, and the group planned a formation jump from about 14,000 feet, police said. Gardner's main parachute never fully deployed to slow his descent, police in Eloy said.

The other three skydivers landed safely, but Gardner was rushed to a hospital where he later died.

Federal Aviation Administration officials said the agency will investigate how the parachute was packed as well as flight rules for the pilot and aircraft.

Bill passed to legalize online sports betting

MS JACKSON — The Mississippi House passed a bill Thursday that would legalize online sports betting, bringing the state one step closer to joining 29 other states

that already allow the practice.

The Mississippi Mobile Sports Wagering Act, which would legalize mobile sports betting while requiring gambling companies to contract with brick-and-mortar gambling establishments, passed 97-14 after a brief debate on the House floor. Sports wagering has been legal in the state for years, but online betting has remained illegal amid fears the move could harm the bottom line of the state's casinos.

Republican Rep. Casey Eure of Saucier, the bill's prime sponsor, said the state could bring in \$25-35 million a year in tax revenue, based on state Gaming Commission estimates. Mississippi is missing out on that money as it houses one of the nation's most active black markets.

Across the United States each year, illegal betting sites see about \$64 billion in wagers, Eure said. Mississippi makes up 5% of that market, which is about \$3 billion in illegal bets.

Lawmaker reverses on plan, will seek reelection

IN NOBLESVILLE — Republican U.S. Rep. Victoria Spartz announced Monday that she intends to seek reelection for Indiana's 5th Congressional District, reversing an announcement a year ago that she would forgo another run.

Last February, Spartz said she wanted to spend more time with her family and would not be running in 2024. But the two-term congresswoman now says she doesn't want her work in the Capitol to end in January.

Ukrainian-born Spartz faced

a tight and expensive race when she first won in 2020, but secured the suburban seat in 2022 with 61% of the vote following a Republican redistricting plan.

The move shakes up the congressional race in which at least nine Republicans have already filed with the secretary of state to run for Spartz's seat. As of Monday, no Democrats have filed, according to public postings from the secretary of state's office.

Judge rejects challenge to pot licensing program

NY ALBANY — A federal judge has rejected a challenge to New York state's licensing program for selling legal marijuana, a system that two California applicants have said unconstitutionally discriminates against out-of-state residents.

The ruling Friday by Albany Judge Anne M. Nardacci may spur New York into issuing hundreds of licenses in a state where most marijuana is sold by unlicensed businesses.

Nardacci said the public interest in letting properly licensed businesses take over the market in New York outweighed concerns raised in the lawsuit.

She said the main purpose of the dormant Commerce Clause plaintiffs argued should allow them to access New York's market doesn't apply to the federally illegal cannabis trade. The clause is supposed to stop states from creating protectionist measures to restrict interstate commerce in the absence of rules from Congress.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

McCaffrey worth high cost 49ers paid

Associated Press

As San Francisco 49ers CEO Jed York tells the story, coach Kyle Shanahan took some convincing before deciding it was worth dealing a boatload of draft picks before last season's trade deadline for Christian McCaffrey.

With most teams around the NFL downgrading the value of running backs, the Niners ultimately decided the cost of four draft picks was worth it to acquire McCaffrey from Carolina if they wanted to have a team worthy of winning a championship.

That move was a big step in lifting the 49ers from a good offense to perhaps the most efficient in the NFL and is a major reason why San Francisco is preparing to play the Kansas City Chiefs in the Super Bowl on Sunday.

"That's the time that you want to push your chips in the middle," York said. "I feel like that's where we were with Christian.

We did give up a lot. But I think we have one of the best, if not the best player in the National Football League on our team."

McCaffrey has proven to be as valuable as anyone on the 49ers after leading the NFL in yards from scrimmage (2,023), tying for the lead in touchdowns (21) and generating the most first downs (114) in the regular season.

That earned McCaffrey a unanimous spot as the All-Pro running back and made him a finalist for both the MVP and Offensive Player of the Year awards that will be handed out this week.

He's added four more touchdowns and 260 yards from scrimmage in two playoff wins.

"He's why our pass game and our play-action pass and all that kind of stuff opened up because he sort of sets the standard with the run game and then when we do pass the ball, he's there in our play," quarterback Brock Purdy said.

"He catches the ball, he makes guys miss, he can go up against safeties and linebackers and make them miss and stuff in the pass game. And then he scores touchdowns. His stats are crazy. So, he's definitely a valued player and I think the most valued player."

There are few backs as versatile as McCaffrey. He can run inside or outside. He excels at picking up blitzes as well as running pass patterns out of the backfield. Or he can line up in the slot or out wide and run pass patterns as well as many receivers.

That versatility can sometimes be a curse with some coaches viewing him more as a scat back than a traditional three-down back who can pound it between the tackles for positive yards play after play such as the old-school backs from the 1970s and '80s.

That's why McCaffrey made sure Shanahan knew as soon as he arrived that he could handle

the heavy load of a three-down back who was physical enough to gain the tough yards when needed.

"It's probably part of my insecurities and competitiveness. I want to be a complete back," he said. "I think this dates back to when I was in middle school and high school. ... I had coaches in the NFL who didn't think I could run in between the tackles. So I think, for me, it'll always be in the back of my head and something that I take a lot of pride in, just being a complete back."

McCaffrey is meticulous about how he takes care of his body starting in the offseason and how hard he works during the season.

That helped McCaffrey play the fourth-most snaps of any running back in the league this season as he rarely takes a play off and gives so much effort even when his number isn't called that Shanahan called him the best player he has ever seen without the ball.

Super Bowl opening night festivities relatively tame

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Brock Purdy went overtime on Super Bowl opening night.

The San Francisco 49ers' second-year quarterback began by saying he's ready to spoil Taylor Swift's trip to Las Vegas and finished by remaining at the microphone to answer questions for several minutes after Monday's media extravaganza concluded.

With rowdy Niners fans chanting his name and wildness surrounding him in Sin City's first time hosting the NFL's biggest week, Purdy demonstrated the same poise he displays under pressure in the pocket.

He gave thoughtful answers, posed for pictures and even signed an autograph while taking questions for about 65 minutes.

With Patrick Mahomes standing next to him on stage after the defending Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs wrapped up their media session, Purdy fielded this question from NFL Network host Scott Hanson: "It's late in the fourth quarter, are you prepared to disappoint Taylor Swift?"

Purdy smiled and responded: "Yes. I'll leave it at that."

No surprise Swift was a hot topic as her romance with Chiefs star tight end Travis Kelce has dominated headlines throughout the season. Even NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell was asked a few times about Swift during his 53-minute news conference.

Purdy, a finalist for NFL MVP, has already led the 49ers to two comeback wins in the playoffs. He's gone from being picked last in the 2022 draft to one win away from joining Pro Football Hall of Famers Joe Montana and Steve Young in San Francisco's championship history.

Asked if he knew all the names of the 16 quarterbacks picked ahead him in his draft class, Purdy said: "I'm a believer that God has a plan for everybody and I fell last for a reason. I'm blessed to be part of the 49ers."

Kelce, of course, answered plenty of questions about his girlfriend. Swift earned her fourth career Grammy for album of the year on Sunday, and Kelce said he also has to

"bring home some hardware."

Super Bowl opening night evolved into a circus-like spectacle long before Las Vegas had a chance to host the NFL's championship game.

But there wasn't as much of the outrageous behavior at Allegiant Stadium, a surprise considering the host city is known for being over the top.

Comedian Carrot Top asked Chiefs coach Andy Reid a question. A reporter from a Mexican television station asked players what their Lucha Libre wrestling names would be and gave them masks. Members of the Blue Man Group entertained the audience and stuck around for interviews and pictures.

Overall, it was tame compared to media nights of the past.

This is where a female reporter once showed up in a wedding dress and veil and proposed to Tom Brady. Back then, it was called media day and took place on Tuesday.

Now, it's shown live on national television in prime time.

Mitchell, Cavs top Kings to stay hot

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Donovan Mitchell was stuck in the foul lane after picking up his dribble, so he tossed the ball off the backboard to himself and dunked.

“I’ve never thrown it left-handed,” Cleveland’s All-Star guard said with a laugh. “Sometimes you just make (stuff) up.”

The Cavaliers can do no wrong right now.

Mitchell scored 29 points, Max Strus added 22 and Cleveland beat the Sacramento Kings 136-110 on Monday night for its sixth straight win and 14th in 15 games.

Cleveland is a league-best 19-4 since Dec. 16 — when starters Darius Garland and Evan Mobley went down indefinitely with injuries — and the Cavs have climbed to No. 2 overall (by percentage points over Milwaukee) in the Eastern Conference.

“It’s good, but it’s February,” Mitchell said. “We’re just going to try to continue to play the way we’ve been playing. We’re being cohesive as a group. We’re

playing great, but the biggest thing is: How do we keep going?”

At the moment, it doesn’t matter who the Cavs are facing. They’re clicking on all cylinders offensively and are healthy after being without Garland (broken jaw) and Mobley (knee surgery) for six weeks.

Sacramento’s Domantas Sabonis had 12 points, 19 rebounds and 15 assists for his 15th triple-double this season, tying him with Denver’s Nikola Jokic for the league lead.

Lakers 124, Hornets 118: Anthony Davis had 26 points, 15 rebounds and 11 assists for his third career triple-double, and visiting Los Angeles beat short-handed Charlotte.

D’Angelo Russell scored 28 points and LeBron James had 26 for the Lakers, who won their third straight and concluded a 4-2 trip.

Miles Bridges scored a career-high 41 points and rookie Brandon Miller added 33 points for the Hornets, who lost their eighth straight since trading Terry Rozier to Miami.

Mavericks 118, 76ers 102: Kyrie Irving had 23 points and eight assists and Luka Doncic scored 19 points as visiting Dallas beat Philadelphia.

Irving and Doncic played together for just the 23rd time in the Mavericks’ 50 games. Josh Green scored 20 points for Dallas.

Kelly Oubre Jr. scored 19 points, Tobias Harris had 17 and Tyrese Maxey had 15 for the Sixers, who fell to 4-11 without injured MVP Joel Embiid, who’s set for knee surgery this week.

Warriors 109, Nets 98: Stephen Curry scored 29 points, Jonathan Kuminga added 28 points and 10 rebounds, and visiting Golden State shook off a poor start to beat Brooklyn.

The Warriors outscored the Nets 66-49 in the second half, even while going just 4-for-22 from behind the arc in the game — with all the makes by Curry.

Cam Thomas scored 18 points but shot 4-for-21 for the Nets, who had won three of four. Nic Claxton added 15 points and a career-high seven blocked

shots before being ejected in the fourth quarter for a flagrant foul against Brandin Podziemski, who had 15 points and 11 rebounds.

Pelicans 138, Raptors 100: Brandon Ingram made a career-high eight 3-pointers and scored 41 points, and host New Orleans routed Toronto.

Ingram hit 16 of 21 shots and also dished out nine assists in 30 minutes. He capped his performance by hitting five straight 3s at the end of the third.

CJ McCollum scored 20 points for the Pelicans, who won their third straight and sent the Raptors to their eighth loss in nine games.

Clippers 149, Hawks 144: Kawhi Leonard scored 36 points, including 11 in the fourth quarter, and visiting Los Angeles beat Atlanta to conclude a 6-1 road swing.

James Harden had 30 points and 10 assists, and Paul George scored 18 for Los Angeles.

De’Andre Hunter matched a season high with 27 points for the Hawks. Trae Young added 25 points.

Perry lifts Kansas State past No. 4 Kansas in OT

Associated Press

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Tylor Perry scored eight of his 26 points in overtime and Kansas State beat No. 4 Kansas 75-70 on Monday night in the 300th matchup of their heated rivalry.

“It was a fun environment to be in,” Perry said. “Our fans did a very good job of packing it in and setting the mood for the game. Kansas is obviously a very good basketball team. Everybody was excited to play. I feel that we went out there, we did what we had to do in order to get the win.”

Perry’s 3-pointer with 1:54 left gave the Wildcats a 70-66 lead. Hunter Dickinson’s basket trimmed it to 70-68, but Perry’s

two free throws extended the margin back to four.

Dajuan Harris Jr. cut it to 72-70 with two free throws before Kevin McCullar Jr. missed the front end of a 1-and-1 for Kansas with 22 seconds remaining. Arthur Kaluma sank a pair of foul shots and Perry added another one to seal it, ending Kansas State’s four-game losing streak.

“I thought that they were the more athletic and explosive team,” Kansas coach Bill Self said. “I thought we showed stretches where we were, as well. But the bottom line is it comes down to making free throws.”

Kansas State is 6-0 in overtime this season.

“In overtime, it’s about players making plays,” Tang said. “They don’t feel the pressure. We work on it every day in practice, but I don’t know that that’s necessarily the reason. I think guys just make plays and their confidence level grows.”

Cam Carter had 19 points and 11 rebounds for K-State (15-8, 5-5 Big 12).

Dickinson had 21 points and 12 rebounds to pace Kansas (18-5, 6-4). Harris and McCullar each added 15 points, and KJ Adams Jr. scored 13.

Kansas scored the first nine points of the second half to open its largest lead at 41-30. But the Wildcats scored the next 11, capped by a three-point play

from Carter.

“I thought our guys did a great job,” Tang said of his team’s response. “TP (Perry) had an 8-0 run on his own. But the guys locked back in. The fact that we were able to make it a ballgame again and put some score pressure on them helped us.”

Perry hit three free throws with 4:49 left in regulation to give K-State a three-point lead. Dickinson scored inside, but Carter answered from long range to give the Wildcats a 58-54 lead.

Harris hit a layup to tie it with 2:14 left, and the teams started trading baskets, with Adams’ bucket with 14.2 seconds left sending the game to overtime.

Royals extend Witt with 11-year, \$288.7M deal

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Kansas City Royals agreed with shortstop Bobby Witt Jr. on an 11-year deal worth more than \$288.7 million guaranteed, two people familiar with the contract told The Associated Press on Monday, locking up one of baseball's young stars as the club tries to turn around its fortunes and persuade a weary fan base to invest in a new stadium.

The deal includes a three-year, \$89 million team option that would drive the value to more than \$377 million and keep Witt in Kansas City through the 2037 season, according to the sources, who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the financial terms were not disclosed. Witt's guaranteed salary makes it the 16th-largest current deal in Major League Baseball and second-biggest pre-arbitration agreement behind the 14-year, \$340 million contract the Padres gave Fernando Tatis Jr. last April.

The Royals planned a Tues-

day news conference to discuss the longest and richest deal in club history.

It includes a signing bonus riffing off Witt's lucky jersey No. 7 of \$7,777,777, payable in seven installments, with the first due within 60 days of the contract's approval by the commissioner's office. Witt will receive \$2 million this year, then in the three years he would have been eligible for arbitration: \$7 million in 2025, \$13 million in 2026 and \$19 million in 2027.

Witt will earn \$30 million in 2028, the first year after he would have been eligible for free agency, and \$35 million each in 2029 and '30. He has four player options at \$35 million annually from 2031-34, then the Royals have their three-year team option that would pay \$33 million in 2035 and \$28 million each in 2036 and '37.

If all the options are included, Witt would be 37 by the time the contract expires.

"From the moment I was drafted in 2019, the entire Royals organization and fans have

treated me and my family like their own," Witt said in a statement. "This city and this team have felt like home since Day 1."

The Royals selected Witt second overall in the 2019 amateur draft, and he rocketed through the minors while winning just about every accolade possible. He made his big league debut in 2022, hitting 20 homers and stealing 30 bases, then had a breakthrough sophomore season in which he became the only Royals player in the 30-30 club.

The 23-year-old Witt finished with 30 homers and 49 steals, making him the only player in major league history with 50 homers and 79 steals through their first two seasons. Alex Rodriguez in 1998 is the only other American League shortstop with a 30-30 season by their age, putting the son of longtime big leaguer Bobby Witt in some select company.

"From the day we drafted him, we felt confident Bobby would become one of our game's brightest stars and biggest talents," Royals general

manager J.J. Picollo said. "These last two seasons have been confirmation of that talent, and proof that he's an even better teammate. We know he wants to win here for our fans as much as we do."

The Royals spent more than \$100 million in free agency this offseason, hoping to turn around a beleaguered club coming off a 106-loss season. That investment, coupled with Witt's massive contract, also comes as the Royals are trying to persuade fans in Jackson County, Mo., to extend a sales tax that would help to pay for a new downtown ballpark.

"We are extraordinarily proud to announce a historic deal with a very special player," said Royals owner John Sherman, who purchased the club not long after Witt was drafted. "I'm thrilled that this ensures Bobby will compete in a Royals uniform for many years to come. Bobby makes us better, and I'm grateful for his commitment to our fans, our city and our team."

Lafreniere scores in OT, lifts Rangers over Avalanche

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Alexis Lafreniere scored 1:53 into overtime and the New York Rangers rallied to beat the Colorado Avalanche 2-1 on Monday night.

Artemi Panarin also scored and Jonathan Quick stopped 31 shots to help the Rangers get their second straight win and their 15th comeback win this season.

Nathan MacKinnon scored for the Avalanche, who had won three straight. Alexander Georgiev finished with 27 saves against his former team.

In the extra period, Mika Zibanejad dropped the puck to Lafreniere, who then whipped a shot past Georgiev for his 13th goal of the season and third overtime winner of his career.

"Luckily it went in, so that was good," Lafreniere said. "That was big win against a really good team. We wanted to play better defense, and I think we did a really good job."

The Central Division-leading Avalanche, starting a season-high six-game trip, are 11-3-1 in their last 15 games and 5-2-1 in their last eight on the road.

MacKinnon got his team-leading 32nd goal with 1:48 left in the opening period, firing the puck past Quick to give the Avalanche a 1-0 lead.

Cale Makar and Josh Manson had assists on the play, giving Colorado a league-best 155 points from its defensemen. Makar has 305 points in 283 career games, two shy of tying Tyson Barrie as highest-scoring defenseman in franchise history.

MacKinnon has points in 14 straight games and in 33 of his last 34 games overall. The 28-year-old forward is tied with Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov with an NHL-leading 85 points.

After Georgiev frustrated the Rangers for more than 50 minutes, Panarin scored his team-leading 31st at 11:17 of the third to tie it. The Rangers outshot the Avalanche 12-6

in the third period.

"I think they had more jump as the game went on," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said. "We just didn't do enough to secure the win."

Islanders 3, Maple Leafs 2: Forward Pierre Engvall returned to face his former team and scored late to help visiting New York halt Toronto's three-game winning streak.

Kyle MacLean and Mathew Barzal also scored for the Islanders. Goalie Ilya Sorokin made 35 saves.

The win evened new Islanders head coach Patrick Roy's record at 2-2-1.

Toronto captain John Tavares tied the game on the power play with 4:48 left in the third period, redirecting a Morgan Rielly shot from the slot. Mitch Marner also scored for Toronto.

Ilya Samsonov made 26 saves in his fourth consecutive start as Toronto outshot the visitors 37-29.