

Israel sets sights on final stronghold

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday said he has ordered the military to prepare a plan to evacuate civilians from Rafah ahead of an expected Israeli invasion of the densely populated southern Gaza city.

The announcement came after heavy international criticism, including from the U.S., of Israeli intentions to move ground forces into the city that borders Egypt. Rafah had a pre-war population of roughly 280,000, and according to the United Nations is now home to some 1.4 million additional people living with relatives, in shelters or in sprawling tent camps after fleeing fighting elsewhere in Gaza.

Israel says that Rafah is the last remaining Hamas stronghold in Gaza after more than four months of war.

"It is impossible to achieve the goal of the war of eliminating Hamas by leaving four Hamas battalions in Rafah," Netanyahu's office said. "On the con-

trary, it is clear that intense activity in Rafah requires that civilians evacuate the areas of combat."

It said he had ordered the military and security officials to come up with a "combined plan" that includes both a mass evacuation of civilians and the destruction of Hamas' forces in the town.

Israel declared war after several thousand Hamas militants burst across the border into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and taking 250 others hostage. An Israeli air and ground offensive has killed roughly 28,000 Palestinians, most of them women and minors, according to local health officials. Roughly 80% of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced, and the territory has plunged into a humanitarian crisis with shortages of food and medical services.

Netanyahu has largely rebuffed international criticism of the civilian death toll, saying that Hamas is responsible for endangering civilians by oper-

ating and hiding in residential areas. But that criticism has grown in recent days as Netanyahu and other leaders vow to move into Rafah.

U.S. President Joe Biden said Thursday that Israel's conduct in the war is "over the top," the harshest U.S. criticism yet of its close ally. The State Department said an invasion of Rafah in the current circumstances "would be a disaster."

The operation will be a challenge on many levels. It remains unclear where civilians can go. The Israeli offensive has caused widespread destruction, especially in northern Gaza, and hundreds of thousands do not have homes to return to.

In addition, Egypt has warned that any movement of Palestinians across the border into Egypt would threaten the 4-decade-old peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. The border crossing between Gaza and Egypt, which is mostly closed, serves as the main entry point for humanitarian aid.

Israel already has begun to

strike Rafah. Airstrikes overnight and into Friday hit two residential buildings in Rafah, while two other sites were bombed in central Gaza, including one that damaged a kindergarten-turned-shelter. Twenty-two people were killed, according to AP journalists who saw the bodies arriving at hospitals.

Comments from top U.S. officials about Rafah have signaled growing friction with Netanyahu after a visit to the region by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Blinken, who has been working with Egypt and Qatar on trying to mediate a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, left the region Thursday without an agreement.

But he said he believed it was still possible to strike a deal that would include an extended pause in fighting in exchange for the release of many of the more than 100 hostages held by Hamas.

Netanyahu appeared to snub Blinken, saying he will settle for nothing short of "total victory."

Kim says he has no desire for talks, repeats threats

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un restated he has no desire for diplomacy with South Korea and that the North would annihilate its rival if provoked, state media said Friday, in the latest of his belligerent statements.

During a visit to North Korea's Defense Ministry on Thursday, Kim said his recent moves to cut ties with South Korea allow his military to take on a more aggressive posture "by

securing lawfulness to strike and destroy (the South) whenever triggered."

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have increased in recent months, with Kim elevating his weapons demonstrations and threats and the United States, South Korea and Japan strengthening their combined military exercises in response.

While most South Korean officials and experts have downplayed the possibility that Kim has real intent to engage in a

war, concerns about a direct military provocation have grown as the North may try to ramp up pressure in an election year in South Korea and the United States.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency reported Kim said he took the initiative to "shake off the unrealistic pretense of dialogue and cooperation with the (South) Korean puppets who sought the collapse of our republic." The agency said Kim on his visit to

the ministry was accompanied by his daughter, thought to be named Kim Ju Ae, who some experts believe is being groomed as a future leader.

Kim Jong Un's remarks came weeks after he declared to his rubber-stamp parliament that North Korea was abandoning its long-standing objective of a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered the re-writing of its constitution to cement the South as its most hostile foreign adversary.

Ukraine's new army chief eyes better troop rotation, new tech

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's new military chief said Friday that his immediate goals are to improve the rotation of troops at the front lines and harness the power of new technology, at a time when Kyiv's forces are largely on the defensive in the war with Russia.

Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, who previously was the commander of Ukraine's ground forces, spoke a day after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy put him in charge of the battlefield campaign with the war poised to enter its third year. He replaced the broadly popular Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi.

"New tasks are on the agenda," Syrskyi said on his Telegram channel.

Though he provided little detail, his remarks appeared to align with Zelenskyy's stated aim of bringing "renewal" to the armed forces with

Thursday's shake-up and adopting a fresh approach to the fight.

But the changes at the top won't solve some of Ukraine's biggest problems: a shortage of manpower that has helped sap morale and may require a mass mobilization, and the inadequate supply of Western weapons to take on Russia's might.

Kyiv officials are "rethinking" their war strategy "with a new emphasis on improved technology and updated command and control," said James Nixey, an analyst at London's Chatham House think tank.

One sign of that may be the claimed recent sinking of a Russian warship in the Black Sea by a new generation of Ukrainian naval drones.

"It's not going to be easy" for Syrskyi, said Marina Miron, a researcher at the War Studies Department of King's

College London. "There are a lot of problems" for Ukraine at the moment.

She cited a lack of ammunition, uncertainty about new weapons from Ukraine's Western allies, a manpower shortage, people's reluctance to be drafted, the tiredness of troops getting no respite from the front lines, and the question of how Zaluzhnyi's departure might affect morale.

Whereas Zaluzhnyi was a proponent at this stage of the war of active defense — securing defensive lines while also searching for Russia's weak points and hitting rear areas with long-range strikes — Syrskyi "will try to push the Ukrainian forces. ... He will try to increase counterattacks possibly," Miron said in a telephone interview.

That would align with Zelenskyy's desire to take a more aggressive approach.

Putin uses interview to press his war claims

Associated Press

Russian President Vladimir Putin used an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson to push his narrative on the war in Ukraine, urge Washington to recognize Moscow's interests and press Kyiv to sit down for talks.

For more than two hours, a largely unchallenged Putin showered Carlson with Russian history and Kremlin talking points.

Putin repeated his claim the full-scale invasion in February 2022 — which Kyiv and its allies describe as an unprovoked act of aggression — was to protect Russian interests and prevent Ukraine from posing a threat to Russia by joining NATO.

Released Thursday, it was Putin's first interview with a Western media figure since the invasion.

Appearing confident and at ease, he made occasional friendly jabs at Carlson, who appeared baffled by the history lecture and tried to interject questions, but the 71-year-old Russian leader stayed on topic for over 20 minutes.

Carlson didn't ask Putin about war crimes Russian troops have been accused of in Ukraine, or about his relentless crackdown on dissent.

Putin said it's up to Washington to stop supplying weapons to Ukraine, which he called a U.S. "satellite," and persuade Kyiv to negotiate, saying a deal was the way to end the war.

"We have never refused negotiations," Putin said. "You should tell the current Ukrainian leadership to stop and come to a negotiating table."

Biden says all countries receiving US arms must adhere to international law

The Washington Post

President Biden on Thursday issued a memorandum that lays out the standards countries that receive U.S. weapons must adhere to and, for the first time, requires the administration to submit an annual report to Congress about whether countries are meeting the requirements.

The national security memorandum comes after prominent Democratic lawmakers have raised concerns about Israel's military campaign in Gaza and whether the country, which has received hundreds of millions

of dollars worth of U.S. weapons, has adhered to international law. Nearly half of Senate Democrats have supported a measure that would ensure Israel and other countries are held accountable for meeting those standards.

The memorandum does not include new guidelines or conditions but instead calls for the State Department to receive written assurances from countries receiving U.S. weapons that they will abide by existing U.S. standards. Those include abiding by international law

and facilitating transport of U.S. humanitarian assistance.

The memorandum comes just as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that the Israeli military will continue its Gaza campaign in Rafah, where more than 1 million Palestinians have fled for safety under Israeli guidance. On Thursday, White House spokesman John Kirby said any Israeli operation in Rafah under the current circumstances "would be a disaster for those people, and we would not support it."

Biden refutes special counsel report

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A special counsel report released Thursday found evidence that President Joe Biden willfully retained and shared highly classified information when he was a private citizen, including about military and foreign policy in Afghanistan, but concluded that criminal charges were not warranted.

The report from special counsel Robert Hur resolves a criminal investigation that had shadowed Biden's presidency for the last year. But its biting critical assessment of his handling of sensitive government records and unflattering characterizations of his memory will spark fresh questions about his competency and age that cut at voters' most deep-seated concerns about his candidacy for reelection.

In remarks at the White House Thursday evening, Biden denied that he improperly shared classified information and angrily lashed out at Hur for questioning his mental acui-

ty, particularly his recollection of the timing of his late son Beau's death from cancer.

The searing findings will almost certainly blunt his efforts to draw contrast with Donald Trump, Biden's likely opponent in November's presidential election, over a criminal indictment charging the former president with illegally hoarding classified records at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida and refusing to return them to the government. Despite abundant differences between the cases, Trump immediately seized on the special counsel report to portray himself as a victim of a "two-tiered system of justice."

Yet even as Hur found evidence that Biden willfully held onto and shared with a ghostwriter highly classified information, the special counsel devoted much of his report to explaining why he did not believe the evidence met the standard for criminal charges, including a high probability that the Justice Department would not be able to prove Biden's intent be-

yond a reasonable doubt, citing among other things an advanced age that they said made him forgetful and the possibility of "innocent explanations" for the records that they could not refute.

"I did not share classified information," Biden insisted. "I did not share it with my ghostwriter." He added he wasn't aware how the boxes containing classified documents ended up in his garage.

And in response to Hur's portrayal of him, Biden insisted to reporters that "My memory is fine," and said he believes he remains the most qualified person to serve as president.

"How in the hell dare he raise that?" Biden asked, about Hur's comments regarding his son's death, saying he didn't believe it was any of Hur's business.

When asked about the report earlier Thursday in a private moment with a handful of House Democrats ahead of his speech at their suburban Virginia retreat, Biden responded angrily, according to two people

familiar with his comments, saying, "You think I would forget the day my son died?" The people did not want to address the matter publicly and spoke of condition of anonymity.

Biden pointedly noted that he had sat for five hours of in-person interviews in the immediate aftermath of Hamas' October attack on Israel, when "I was in the middle of handling an international crisis."

"I just believed that's what I owed the American people so they could know no charges would be brought and the matter closed," Biden said.

The investigation into Biden is separate from special counsel Jack Smith's inquiry into the handling of classified documents by Trump after Trump left the White House. Smith's team has charged Trump with illegally retaining top secret records at his Mar-a-Lago home and then obstructing government efforts to get them back. Trump has said he did nothing wrong.

Trump wins Nevada's GOP presidential caucuses

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Former President Donald Trump won Nevada's Republican presidential caucuses Thursday after he was the only major candidate to compete, winning his third straight state as he tries to secure his party's nomination.

Former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, his last major rival still in the race, skipped the caucuses even though they are the only contest in Nevada that counts toward the GOP nomination. Haley cited what she considered an unfair process favoring Trump and instead ran in Nevada's symbolic state-run presidential primary on Tuesday, when she finished behind the "none of these candidates" option.

Trump will win most, if not all, of the state's 26 delegates. He needs to accrue 1,215 delegates to formally clinch the party's nomination and could reach that number in March.

From Nevada, the GOP contest pivots to the South Carolina primary in Haley's home state on Feb. 24. Trump remains popular in the deeply conservative state but Haley, who won two elections as South Carolina's governor, is hoping her local roots give her an edge. Trump is eyeing a massive delegate haul during the March 5 Super Tuesday contests, which would move him closer to becoming the GOP's presumptive nominee.

Trump, delivering a brief victory speech in Las Vegas, basked

in reports of long lines in the Western state and told his supporters he was eager to declare victory in the upcoming South Carolina primary.

"We're leading everybody," he said. "Is there any way we can call the election for next Tuesday? That's all I want."

Though Trump has been the front-runner, Nevada's caucuses were seen as especially skewed in his favor due to the intense grassroots support caucuses require candidates to harness around a state in order to win. Nevada's state party gave him a greater edge last year when it barred candidates from running both in the primary and caucuses and also restricted the role of super PACs like the groups that

were key to Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' campaign before he dropped out.

Caucuses typically require voters to show up for an in-person meeting at a certain day or time, while elections can offer more flexibility to participate, with polls open for most of the day on Election Day along with absentee or early voting. Nevada Republicans said they wanted certain rules in place like a requirement that participants show a government-issued ID.

Trump's supporters waited in long lines Thursday. At one caucus site at a Reno-area elementary school, a line of nearly 1,000 people stretched around the corner and down the street 20 minutes after the caucuses opened.

Storms dump snow in Ariz. after hitting Calif.

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Heavy snow shut down parts of major interstates in northern Arizona on Thursday while low-lying clouds delayed dozens of flights in Phoenix, after storms earlier this week battered California and left a muddy mess.

The mountainous region of northern Arizona recorded 2 feet of snowfall or more in some locations with more expected into the weekend. Snow, ice and whiteout conditions forced partial closures of Interstates 40 and 17 in and around Flagstaff, northern Arizona's largest city. I-17 later reopened but portions of I-40 remained closed Thursday night.

Farther south, rain hit the state's desert regions. A low cloud ceiling briefly shut down all flights in and out of Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport — the state's largest air-

port. The Federal Aviation Administration issued a ground stop for 45 minutes Thursday morning, delaying more than 100 flights, according to the flight-tracking website FlightAware. The rainy weather also disrupted the first-round play at the Phoenix Open golf tournament.

In California, the clear skies over most of the state were welcomed after days of wind, rain and heavy snowfall that caused power outages, street flooding and hundreds of destructive mudslides. The extremely wet weather marked a major turnaround from a very slow start to winter.

It was prime ski weather in the Sierra Nevada, where more snow fell Thursday at one Lake Tahoe ski resort and at Mammoth Mountain south of Yosemite National Park. Mammoth had already reported as much

as 5 feet of snow since Sunday.

An area east of Los Angeles, aptly named Snow Valley in the San Bernardino Mountains, got almost as much snow as parts of the eastern Sierra, the National Weather Service said. Several times, snow completely buried an eagle named Jackie, whose care for three eggs in a nest is widely watched via a webcam, the Friends of Big Bear Valley said on its Facebook page.

The five-day rainfall total in downtown Los Angeles topped 9 inches, more than half of the 14.25 inches it normally gets per year, while other parts of the city received more than a foot.

The exceptional precipitation in California began last weekend, when extraordinary low pressure spinning off the coast hauled in an atmospheric river. Northern California was blasted with fierce winds, and the

huge plume of moisture then rained on the south for days.

A new front then roared down the California coast on Wednesday, unleashing downpours and damaging winds that included a weak tornado near Grover Beach in San Luis Obispo County.

State officials tallied nine storm-related deaths, not including five Marines killed in the crash of a military helicopter late Tuesday night east of San Diego. Officials have not said if the weather was a factor.

The storms also spawned destructive mudslides — more than 500 in the city of LA alone, where at least 16 buildings have been deemed uninhabitable and 33 others have been yellow-tagged, meaning residents can go in to retrieve belongings but cannot stay. Experts say soils are so saturated the threat of landslides will persist.

CIA lets go whistleblower who spurred complaints

Associated Press

The CIA this week terminated a woman whose whistleblower account of being assaulted in a stairwell at the spy agency's headquarters prompted a flood of colleagues to come forward with their own complaints of sexual misconduct. The woman's attorney called the action a brazen retaliation.

While the CIA said that accusation was "factually inaccurate," it wouldn't comment further on the case and declined to explain why the 36-year-old did not make it through the agency's clandestine officer training program known as "the Farm" and, unlike many of her classmates, was not hired into another job.

The woman's termination came less than six months after she filed a federal civil

rights lawsuit alleging the CIA retaliated against her for reporting what she said was a 2022 stairwell assault in Langley, Va., to law enforcement and testifying about it in a closed congressional hearing.

The lawsuit accused the agency of giving her harsher performance reviews and "slut shaming" her by improperly releasing her personal information during the state prosecution last year of Ashkan Bayatpour, a then-fellow CIA trainee convicted of assaulting her with a scarf.

The woman's attorney, Kevin Carroll, told the AP that the CIA has now "unlawfully ended a young woman's career only because she had the moral courage, lacking in her managers, to stand up and be a witness about her sexual assault."

Turk, Italian, Swede back from private trip to space

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Astronauts from Turkey, Italy and Sweden returned to Earth on Friday, ending a private three-week mission to the International Space Station.

The trio were accompanied by a retired NASA astronaut who now works for Axiom Space, the Houston company that arranged the chartered flight. The crew returned in a SpaceX capsule that parachuted into the Atlantic off the Florida coast.

Turkey celebrated Alper Gezeravci's launch from Cape Canaveral last month. A former fighter pilot and captain for Turkish Airlines, he became the first person from his country to fly in space.

Gezeravci was joined on the trip by Italian Air Force Col. Walter Villadei, Sweden's Mar-

cus Wandt, a former fighter pilot chosen as a reserve astronaut by the European Space Agency in 2022 and Michael Lopez-Alegria, their escort.

Turkey, Italy and Sweden financed the mission, paying roughly \$55 million apiece. It was Axiom's third private mission to the space station; the fourth is planned later this year.

Before leaving the space station, Gezeravci thanked his country for its "bold and determined decision" to send a citizen into space as part of its 100th anniversary as a republic.

While in orbit, the astronauts conducted science experiments and chatted with schoolchildren and officials from their countries.

They enjoyed a few extra days at the space station, waiting for the weather to improve in the splashdown zone.

Use of motion key for Chiefs, 49ers

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — When the Super Bowl was in the balance in the fourth quarter a year ago, coach Andy Reid's Kansas City Chiefs put a twist on their frequent pre-snap motion.

The result?

Two wide-open touchdown passes that helped the Chiefs beat the Philadelphia Eagles 38-35 for a Super Bowl title.

Kansas City returns to the big stage on Sunday to take on San Francisco in a game that should feature players on the move at the snap at a staggering rate based on how Reid and 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan use motion to create mismatches for their offenses.

"I'm sure he's going to have some wrinkles for us," Niners defensive end Nick Bosa said about Reid. "Hopefully we can anticipate some of them."

Reid was able to catch the Eagles off-guard a year ago with how he used motion on two key plays near the goal line in the fourth quarter with a concept Kansas City called "corndog."

On the first play from the 3, wide receiver Kadarius Toney was lined up on the right side and faked as if he was going to go in jet motion to the other side of the field. Cornerback Darius Slay passed him off to a defender on the other side but Toney quickly reversed field and was wide open in the right flat for the TD that gave Kansas City its first lead of the game.

The Chiefs then scored on a similar play to wide receiver Skyy Moore on the other side of the field on the next drive and went on to win the game.

The Niners have the scars from past run-ins against Reid's Chiefs, including the jet motions and sweeps they used repeatedly in a 44-23 regular-season win in 2022 for big runs around the perimeter.

Then there was a wrinkle lifted from Michigan's 1948 Rose Bowl playbook that led to a key fourth-down conversion in the first Super Bowl matchup between these teams.

Multiple players in the backfield spun simultaneously, mov-

ing Mahomes away from the center and leading to a direct snap to running back Damien Williams for a first down.

"He gives you all different types of looks, funky looking plays, different misdirections," 49ers All-Pro linebacker Fred Warner said. "Coach Reid is one of the best at creating different plays as there's been in this league. So there's going to be different things we've seen in the game that we've never seen before, but we've got to be able to just line up and play and get through the down."

Reid even has history with some funky pre-snap movement in this stadium where the Super Bowl will be played, using a play nicknamed "Snow Globe" last season against the Raiders when the entire huddle spun in a circle before rushing up to the line for a quick snap.

The key for the Niners is to ignore the bells and whistles and try to defend the play.

"They want to get you enamored with all of the motion and all of a sudden they run it down

your throat," defensive coordinator Steve Wilks said.

The use of pre-snap motion has been on the rise throughout the NFL over the past decade, going from a usage rate of just 37.5% of plays in 2014 to 56.1% this season for the highest rate on record, according to Sportradar.

The 49ers and Chiefs were among the most frequent users with San Francisco ranking second in use of motion at 76.4% of plays and Kansas City fourth at 63.7%, according to game-charting data from Sports Info Solutions.

The Niners were the most efficient offense with motion in terms of expected points added per play, according to SIS, with Kansas City ranking 10th despite a drop this season in overall offensive production.

Perhaps because of the familiarity of facing offenses in practice that are so proficient in the use of motion, both teams rank in the top 10 in defending it, with the Chiefs ranking fifth and the 49ers ninth, according to SIS.

Lamar Jackson is near-unanimous choice for MVP

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Accepting the AP NFL Most Valuable Player award in person was bitter-sweet for Lamar Jackson.

Jackson was a near-unanimous choice for his second MVP award announced at NFL Honors on Thursday night, but the quarterback's Baltimore Ravens fell one win short of playing in Sunday's Super Bowl.

"I'd rather send in a video to win the award," Jackson said.

"To be here for the award, it's an honor, but I'd rather be in the Super Bowl accepting this award."

The All-Pro QB received 49 of 50 first-place votes from a nationwide panel of voters that includes media members who regularly cover the NFL, former players and coaches.

Jackson led the Ravens (14-5) to the NFL's best record in the regular season, but they lost to the Kansas City Chiefs in the

AFC championship game. The 27-year-old Jackson is the fourth player to win his second MVP before turning 28, joining Patrick Mahomes (27), Brett Favre (27) and Jim Brown (22).

"It's an honor. I guess I'm in elite company," Jackson said.

San Francisco 49ers running back Christian McCaffrey ran away with the AP Offensive Player of the Year award. He'll try to add a Super Bowl ring to his trophy case when the 49ers

take on the Chiefs on Sunday.

Cleveland Browns edge rusher Myles Garrett beat out T.J. Watt for AP Defensive Player of the Year. Houston Texans quarterback C.J. Stroud won the AP Offensive Rookie of the Year award in a landslide. Defensive end Will Anderson Jr., Stroud's Houston teammate, won the AP Defensive Rookie of the Year award, outgaining both Jalen Carter and Kobie Turner by two first-place votes.

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Some shooters in the playoff race after trade deadline day

Associated Press

Bojan Bogdanovic left Detroit to join a now even-more-formidable contender in New York. Gordon Hayward is leaving Charlotte for one of the NBA's best surprise stories this season in Oklahoma City. Doug McDermott was once traded by Indiana to San Antonio, and now, the Spurs have traded him back to the Pacers.

None of those shooters were making playoff plans when Thursday started.

Trade deadline day in the NBA gave them and plenty of other players an entirely new outlook, plus might have even reshaped the start of the playoff push as well.

The Knicks made some big moves with eyes on contending in the Eastern Conference, Philadelphia added a sharpshooter in Buddy Hield with hopes that it can get back on track when — or if — reigning MVP Joel Embiid returns from injury, while Phoenix and Dallas added frontcourt depth. The Suns landed Royce O'Neale from Brooklyn and the Mavericks are bringing in P.J. Washington from Charlotte.

"Lots of people got better!!! That's fun for competition..." Embiid wrote on social media.

Bogdanovic averaged 20.2 points this season for the Pistons, who have the NBA's worst record so far at 7-43. He and Alec Burks are headed to the Knicks, a team that entered Thursday a game out of the No. 2 spot in the East and managed to add without really subtracting — the price was Quentin Grimes, Evan Fournier and Ryan Arcidiacono.

"The shooting piece was so important," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. "I just think the more we can open up the floor, particularly as you go forward, that's a key ingredient."

Grimes began the year as a starter, then played off the bench. Fournier only appeared in three games and Arcidiacono made 20 appearances — without scoring a single point in any of them.

Hayward joins an Oklahoma City team that started Thursday as the No. 1 seed in the Western Conference. The Thunder are 35-16, entering the day with tie-breaker edges over two other teams — Minnesota and Denver — with the same record and a half-game up on the Los Angeles Clippers at 34-16.

Hield left Indiana in a trade to the 76ers, and the Pacers seemed to try and replace his shooting by bringing back McDermott in a move with San Antonio. McDermott spent three seasons, 2018 through 2021, with Indiana, so the trade was a homecoming of sorts.

"He's going to go down as one of the best 3-point shooters in the history of this league, and he'll make an awful lot of them because he doesn't miss," Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said, referring to Hield. "He rarely misses a game, either. So it's a good opportunity for him, and we move forward from there."

Another homecoming: Kelly Olynyk is headed back to his native Canada, the veteran forward getting acquired by Toronto in a deal with Utah.

Milwaukee made notable moves, one by landing Patrick Beverley from the 76ers.

"He is a very, very high-IQ player, especially defensively, and even offensively with his movement and setting picks," Bucks coach Doc Rivers said. "He's also an instigator. He's a big talker defensively, not meaning trash talk, meaning he talks on defense. And I think those are some of the things that we need."

The move pairs Beverley

with Bucks guard Damian Lillard. Those two exchanged some heated words last season when Lillard was with the Portland Trail Blazers and Beverley was with the Los Angeles Lakers.

As he live-streamed a video Thursday after learning about the trade, Beverley noted that "I've got to get my relationship right with Dame." Lillard indicated that shouldn't be an issue.

"Now that we're teammates, we're not just going to become overnight best friends, but I think we both have that respect for each other that's going to allow the door to be open for us to be able to work together and try to accomplish that ultimate goal," Lillard said. "And that's the only thing that matters."

The Bucks then sent center Robin Lopez to Sacramento; it is expected that Lopez will be waived by the Kings. Lopez still attended the Bucks' Thursday night loss to Minnesota.

"I enjoyed being teammates with Patrick Beverley for all of an hour and 45 minutes I'll never forget those times," Lopez wrote on X, the social media site formerly known as Twitter.

Meanwhile, Dejounte Murray — maybe one of the most talked-about players over the past few weeks of trade speculation — remained in Atlanta, and plenty of other teams stood pat on Thursday. Defending NBA champion Denver didn't make a move on deadline day, nor did reigning East champion Miami, though the Heat did their trade-season work a couple weeks ago by bringing in Terry Rozier from Charlotte for Kyle Lowry.

LeBron James' Los Angeles Lakers didn't make any trade-deadline deals, nor did Golden State, which entered the season with championship hopes and is now in a dogfight at the bottom of the West playoff picture.

New bronze statue honors Lakers star Kobe Bryant

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles Lakers unveiled a statue of Kobe Bryant on Thursday, honoring their late superstar with a 19-foot bronze likeness outside their downtown arena.

The 4,000-pound statue depicts Bryant in his white No. 8 jersey with his right index finger raised as he walked off the court following his 81-point performance against the Toronto Raptors in January 2006.

Bryant's widow, Vanessa, said during the dedication ceremony that the statue is the first of three that will be created to honor the five-time NBA champion and top scorer in Lakers history. Another statue will feature Bryant in his No. 24 jersey, which he wore for the second half of his career, while a third will depict Bryant and his daughter Gianna, who died with him and seven others in a helicopter crash in January 2020.

"This statue may look like Kobe, but really it's what excellence looks like," Kareem Abdul-Jabbar said. "What discipline looks like. What commitment looks like. ... It captures a person frozen in time, while at the same time acknowledges that the reason there is a statue in the first place is because that person is timeless. We're all here today to honor a man who represents not just extraordinary sports achievement, but also timeless values that inspire us all to try harder to be not just better, but our best."

The first statue was unveiled at a ceremony attended by dozens of Lakers greats and hundreds of season ticket holders. Vanessa Bryant spoke at the ceremony after remarks from team owner Jeanie Buss, former teammate Derek Fisher, Abdul-Jabbar and longtime Lakers coach Phil Jackson.

Warriors' Curry hits season-high 11 3s

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Stephen Curry made his first seven 3-pointers and scored 29 of his 42 points in the first half in the Golden State Warriors' 131-109 victory over the Indiana Pacers on Thursday night.

A night after scoring just nine points at Philadelphia, Curry was 15 of 22 from the field, had a season-high 11 3s on 16 attempts and had his fifth 40-point game of the season. The Warriors have won three straight and went 4-1 on a five-game trip.

Pascal Siakam had 16 points and eight rebounds for Indiana. Myles Turner added 15 points and seven rebounds, while All-Star guard Tyrese Haliburton scored five points in 26 minutes. He did have 11 assists.

Mavericks 122, Knicks 108: Luka Doncic had 39 points, 11 assists and eight rebounds to lead visiting Dallas past New York, with Knicks down to just seven players in the second half because of injuries and trades.

Former Knicks guard Tim Hardaway Jr. added 19 points and Derrick Jones Jr. had 18 for the Mavericks, who won their third straight after making a pair of trades earlier Thursday to land big men P.J. Washington and Daniel Gafford. Kyrie Irving finished with 16 points.

Donte DiVincenzo scored 36 points for the Knicks, who have lost two of three following a nine-game winning streak.

Josh Hart had a season-high

23 points and added 12 assists and 10 rebounds for his second career triple-double, both in the past five games.

Nuggets 114, Lakers 106: Jamal Murray scored 29 points, Michael Porter Jr. added 27 and visiting Denver snapped Los Angeles' three-game winning streak.

Nikola Jokic had 24 points, 13 rebounds and nine assists for the defending NBA champion Nuggets. They opened a three-game trip with their third straight victory and eighth in 10 games.

Anthony Davis scored 32 points and LeBron James had 25 for the Lakers. James added nine rebounds and seven assists, while Austin Reaves had 15 points and 10 assists.

Timberwolves 129, Bucks 105: Anthony Edwards had 26 points and nine assists and visiting Minnesota shot 21 of 41 from 3-point range to trounce slumping Milwaukee.

Karl-Anthony Towns scored 19 points, Mike Conley added 18, Naz Reid 17 and Rudy Gobert 16 as the Timberwolves spoiled the home debut of Bucks coach Doc Rivers, who dropped to 1-5.

A.J. Green scored a career-high 27 points for the Bucks.

Suns 129, Jazz 115: Kevin Durant scored 31 points, Bradley Beal had 30 and host Phoenix — with All-Star Devin Booker sidelined by a sore left hip — beat Utah.

The Suns never trailed, win-

ning their third straight game and 12th of 15. They also swept the four-game, regular-season series from the Jazz.

Eric Gordon scored 19 points on 7-of-8 shooting, Jusuf Nurkic had 16 points and eight rebounds and Grayson Allen added eight points and a career-high 14 assists. The Suns shot 59% from the field.

Lauri Markkanen led Utah with 22 points, and John Collins had 21.

Pistons 128, Trail Blazers 122, OT: Jalen Duren had 27 points and 21 rebounds and visiting Detroit won consecutive games for the first time since October, overcoming Jerami Grant's career-high 49 points to beat Portland in overtime.

Jaden Ivey added 26 points and Cade Cunningham had 23 to help the NBA-worst Pistons improve to 8-43. They beat Sacramento 133-120 on Wednesday night, then rallied from 23 points down to top Portland with both teams significantly short-handed because of injuries and trades.

Cavaliers 119, Nets 95: Donovan Mitchell scored 27 points and visiting Cleveland beat short-handed Brooklyn for its eighth straight victory and 16th in 17 games.

Evan Mobley added 14 points and 12 rebounds, Jarrett Allen had 14 points and 10 rebounds and Darius Garland also scored 14 points.

Cleveland shot 53% from the

field and had a 45-33 rebounding edge.

Mikal Bridges led Brooklyn with 26 points. The Nets were busy at the trade deadline. They sent Spencer Dinwiddie to Toronto for Dennis Schroeder and Thaddeus Young, and moved Royce O'Neale to Phoenix for Keita Bates-Diop, Jordan Goodwin and two second-round picks. They acquired the rights to Vanja Marinkovic from Memphis.

Magic 127, Spurs 111: Franz Wagner scored 34 points and host Orlando overcame a 30-point second half by San Antonio's Devin Vassell.

After going scoreless in the first half, Vassell hit all nine of his shots in a 23-point third quarter, helping the Spurs cut it to 10 points after trailing by 23. But the Magic put the game away with an 8-0 run early in the fourth.

Jalen Suggs added 17 points for the Magic. Paolo Banchero had 16.

Bulls 118, Grizzlies 100: DeMar DeRozan scored 30 points, Andre Drummond added 21 points and 13 rebounds and visiting Chicago rallied to beat Memphis.

Nikola Vucevic had 20 points and 10 rebounds and Coby White also scored 20 points for the Bulls. They have won two straight and three of four.

Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 28 points for Memphis. The Grizzlies have lost seven in a row.

Larsson scores 27 to lead No. 8 Arizona past Utah

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Pelle Larsson had 27 points and eight assists to lead No. 8 Arizona to a 105-99 victory over Utah in triple overtime Thursday night.

Caleb Love added 19 points and 10 rebounds to help the Wildcats (18-5, 9-3 Pac-12) earn their third road win in conference play. Keshad Johnson

had 17 points and Kylan Boswell scored 16. Oumar Ballo grabbed 16 rebounds to go with 10 points.

Branden Carlson led the Utes with 27 points and 15 rebounds. Keba Keita had 18 points and Gabe Madsen added 17. Deivon Smith finished with 14 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists.

After rallying from a double-digit deficit, Utah (15-8, 6-6)

could not overcome 10-of-21 shooting at the free-throw line.

UAB 76, No. 20 Florida Atlantic 73, OT: Yaxel Lendeborg had 17 points and a season-high 21 rebounds, and Efreem Johnson made a big 3-pointer in overtime to lift host UAB over Florida Atlantic.

It was the second victory for the Blazers (15-8, 7-3 AAC)

against a ranked American Athletic Conference opponent in less than two weeks. They also beat then-No. 19 Memphis on Jan. 28.

Florida Atlantic had a chance to tie, but Johnell Davis missed a contested 3 in the final seconds. The Owls (18-5, 8-2) fell a game behind league-leading South Florida in the standings.

Bruins bounce back to blank Canucks

Associated Press

BOSTON — Brad Marchand and Danton Heinen scored short-handed in the first period, and the Boston Bruins beat the Vancouver Canucks 4-0 on Thursday night in a matchup of the NHL's top two teams.

Linus Ullmark stopped 17 shots for his first shutout of the season. Morgan Geekie and Pavel Zacha also scored, and Charlie Coyle set up both short-handed goals as the Bruins bounced back from a 4-1 loss to Calgary at home Tuesday.

It was the eighth victory in 10 games for Boston, which tied Vancouver atop the league standings with 73 points.

Thatcher Demko made 21 saves for the Canucks, but his nine-game winning streak was snapped. Vancouver had won 10 of 12, with one loss coming in overtime and the other in a shootout.

Hurricanes 5, Avalanche 2: Martin Necas scored a natural hat trick in the first 17 minutes, the first three-goal game of his career, and host Carolina beat Colorado despite changing goalies twice.

The Hurricanes led 3-0 with 3:09 remaining in the first period thanks to Necas, whose hat trick was the fastest to begin a game in franchise history.

Michael Bunting and Seth Jarvis also scored, and Teuvo Teravainen had a career-high four assists as Carolina avoided

what would have been its first two-game pointless stretch in two months.

Pyotr Kochetkov stopped 16 shots while playing the first and third periods. He was pulled in favor of Antti Raanta, who lasted only the second period before departing with a lower-body injury. Raanta was unscathed upon in nine shots.

Zach Parise, a recent free-agent acquisition, and Samuel Girard scored in a seven-second span in the final minute of the first period for the Avalanche.

Panthers 4, Capitals 2: Ryan Lomberg scored the game-winning goal with 6:52 left, Matthew Tkachuk had three points and host Florida defeated Washington.

The goal was Lomberg's third of the season and his first since Nov. 14, snapping a 35-game drought with a quick shot from the slot off of a feed from Dmitry Kulikov. It gave the Panthers their fifth win in six games and their first since entering the All-Star break.

Tkachuk, Sam Reinhart and Eetu Luostarinen also scored for the Panthers. Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 21 shots, and Florida coach Paul Maurice got the 849th win of his regular-season career — tying Ken Hitchcock for fifth-most in NHL history.

Alex Ovechkin got the 833rd goal of his career and Anthony Mantha also scored for Wash-

ington. Darcy Kuemper made 37 saves.

Ovechkin has goals in three straight games since ending an eight-game drought on Jan. 27.

Flames 5, Devils 3: Jacob Markstrom made 37 saves, Connor Zary and Andrew Mangiapane each had a goal and an assist, and visiting Calgary beat New Jersey for its third straight win following a four-game skid.

Mikael Backlund, Kevin Rooney and Andrei Kuzmenko also scored for the Flames, who were coming off a 4-1 win Tuesday at Boston to start a four-game trip. Calgary defenseman Noah Hanifan had two assists.

Ondrej Palat scored twice, Nico Hischier also had a goal and Jesper Bratt contributed three assists for the Devils.

Flyers 4, Jets 1: Travis Konecny had a goal, an assist and a fight in the first period — known as a “Gordie Howe hat trick” — to lead host Philadelphia over slumping Winnipeg.

Morgan Frost added a goal and an assist, and Ryan Poehling and Tyson Foerster also scored for the Flyers, who have won both games since the All-Star break after losing five in a row. Samuel Ersson made 28 saves.

The rebuilding Flyers are a surprising third in the East's Metropolitan Division.

Kyle Connor scored for the Jets, who have dropped five straight. Winnipeg has fallen to

third place in the West's Central Division.

Islanders 6, Lightning 2: Mathew Barzal and Bo Horvat each had a goal and an assist in New York's victory over visiting Tampa Bay.

Noah Dobson, Kyle Palmieri, Ryan Pullock and Casey Cizikas also scored for the Islanders, who won their second in a row since the All-Star break. Ilya Sorokin finished with 16 saves in his 16th win of the season.

Nikita Kucherov and Brandon Hagel scored for Tampa Bay, but the Lightning lost their second consecutive game. Jonas Johansson made 18 saves.

Golden Knights 3, Coyotes 2: Jonathan Marchessault scored 19 seconds into the game, Adin Hill made 20 saves against his former team and visiting Vegas topped Arizona.

Marchessault, Nicolas Hague and Chandler Stephenson had goals in the first 6:17 for the Golden Knights, who have won seven of nine and have points in eight of those.

Jason Zucker and Clayton Keller scored for the Coyotes, who were playing for the first time since Jan. 27. They have lost four in a row.

Hill is 4-0 and has given up seven goals since returning from a lower-body injury suffered Dec. 17. He has won seven of his past eight starts. He had 19 wins in 49 games with the Coyotes from 2018-21.

Sahith Theegala takes the early lead in Phoenix Open

Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Sahith Theegala spent time with his parents in the players' dining room and grabbed a bite to eat during what ended up being a long weather delay.

With no room to sit in the clubhouse at TPC Scottsdale, Theegala went out to his car to get warm, listen to music and play chess on

his phone.

The break did nothing to slow him down.

Theegala returned to birdie his first hole following the delay, shooting a 6-under 65 to take the early lead in the unfinished first round of the Phoenix Open on Thursday.

“The weather was, it was not good, (but) those last four holes

felt great, so I think there might be some good scores (Friday) with the wave that just teed off,” Theegala said. “It's going to be cold, but hopefully no rain and wind. We'll see. I played great and that's all I can do, really.”

Five days after weather shortened the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am to 54 holes, storms followed the PGA Tour to the desert.

A chilly morning gave way to wind and heavy rain that left pools of water on the greens at TPC Scottsdale. The Stadium Course was deemed unplayable around noon, leading to a delay of 3½ hours.

About half the field was able to finish following the delay, leaving the rest to return Friday morning to resume their first rounds.