

## Putin opponent Navalny dies in prison

*Associated Press*

Alexei Navalny, who crusaded against official corruption and staged massive anti-Kremlin protests as President Vladimir Putin's fiercest foe, died Friday in the Arctic penal colony where he was serving a 19-year sentence, Russia's prison agency said. He was 47.

The stunning news of Navalny's death — less than a month before an election that will give Putin another six years in power — brought renewed criticism and outrage directed at the Kremlin leader who has cracked down on all opposition at home.

People laid flowers at monuments to victims of Soviet-era political repressions in some Russian cities, but there was no immediate indication that Navalny's death, which will deal a

heavy blow to the beleaguered and fractured opposition, would spark large protests.

Navalny felt unwell after a walk Friday, according to the Federal Penitentiary Service, and lost consciousness. An ambulance arrived, but he could not be revived. The service said the cause of death was "being established."

Navalny had been behind bars since January 2021, when he returned to Moscow after recuperating in Germany from nerve agent poisoning that he blamed on the Kremlin. Since then, he received three prison sentences, all of which he rejected as politically motivated.

Praise for Navalny's bravery poured in from Western leaders and others who have opposed Putin's rule. The opposition leader's health has deteriorated recently and the cause of death may never be known, but many world leaders said they held Russian authorities ultimately responsible for his death.

If confirmed, "his death in a Russian prison and the fixation and fear of one man only underscores the weakness and rot at the heart of the system that Putin has built. Russia is responsible for this," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said while at a conference in Germany.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Navalny "has probably now paid for this courage with his life."

Standing at Scholz's side, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy — whose country is fending off Russian invasion — said: "Putin doesn't care who

dies in order for him to hold on to his position."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin was informed of Navalny's death. The opposition leader's spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh said on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, that the team had no confirmation yet.

Shortly after the death was reported, the Russian SOTA social media channel shared images of the opposition politician reportedly in court yesterday. In the footage, Navalny can be seen standing up laughing and joking with the judge via video link.

Navalny was moved in December from a prison in central Russia to a "special regime" penal colony — the highest security level of prisons in the country — above the Arctic Circle.

## Ukraine makes security deals with Germany, France

*Associated Press*

BERLIN — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a bilateral security agreement with Germany and planned to sign another with France on Friday, securing a strong signal of long-term backing as Kyiv works to shore up Western support nearly two years after Russia launched its full-scale war.

Zelenskyy met in Berlin with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who said Berlin was providing another \$1.2 billion package of military aid, including 36 howitzers, 120,000 rounds of artillery ammunition and two more air-defense systems.

Scholz described the long-term security accord as a "his-

toric step." It's Ukraine's second such bilateral agreement after one signed last month with the U.K.

Zelenskyy plans to sign another one with President Emmanuel Macron in France later Friday. He said more were in the works with other countries. "Ukraine has never yet had more valuable and stronger documents," the president said.

The security agreements appear aimed primarily at sending a message of long-term solidarity as Ukraine has gone back on the defensive in the war, hindered by low ammunition supplies and a shortage of personnel.

"Two years after the beginning of this terrible war, we are

sending a crystal-clear message today to the Russian president: We will not ease off in our support for Ukraine," Scholz said. He put his country's deliveries and pledges of military aid so far at a total 28 billion euros.

The German agreement, which is valid for 10 years, underscores Germany's "intention to provide long-term military support to the Ukrainian security and defense forces." It says Germany and Ukraine "will work together on ensuring a sustainable force capable of defending Ukraine now and deterring future aggression in the future."

In case of future Russian aggression, Germany "would provide Ukraine as appropriate,

with swift and sustained security assistance" and modern military equipment as needed, as well as seeking agreement on imposing "economic and other costs on Russia," the accord states. It goes on state that Ukraine "will continue to implement an ambitious reform program," which is essential to its ambitions to join the European Union and NATO.

The agreement follow commitments by the Group of Seven most advanced economies, which include Germany, France and the U.K., at a NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, in July. The Group of Seven vowed at the time to provide weapons and military equipment, including combat air power.

# Harris repudiates Trump's worldview

*Associated Press*

MUNICH — Vice President Kamala Harris on Friday warned of the dangers of growing authoritarianism and isolationism in a not-so-veiled repudiation of Donald Trump's worldview and threats to renege on security guarantees for NATO allies should he return to the White House.

At the Munich Security Conference Harris offered a broad defense of the Biden administration's approach to global challenges, especially in leading international support for Ukraine in its war with Russia. Her comments came as the Ukraine risks losing U.S. support due to congressional dysfunction and positions taken by Trump and many of his supporters.

Amid an atmosphere of deep angst at the conference that was

punctuated by the news Friday of the death in prison of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, Harris said the United States would not back down on supporting democracy and multilateralism as well as defending international rules and norms from attempts to subvert them.

"Isolation is not insulation," she said. "In fact, when America has isolated herself, threats have only grown. In these unsettled times it is clear America cannot retreat. America must stand strong for democracy. We must stand in defense of international rules and norms and we must stand with our allies."

"However, there are some in the United States who disagree," she said. "They suggest it is in the best interest of the American people to isolate ourselves from the world, to flout

common understandings among nations, to embrace dictators and adopt the repressive tactics and abandon commitments to our allies in favor of unilateral action."

"Let me be clear: that worldview is dangerous, destabilizing and indeed shortsighted," Harris said without mentioning Trump by name. "That view would weaken America and undermine global stability and undermine global prosperity. President Biden and I therefore reject that view."

Earlier, U.N. chief Antonio Guterres delivered a stark and somber assessment of the current state of the world, lamenting not only the war in Ukraine but also the current situation in Gaza, where Israel appears poised to launch a major operation against Hamas in the south-

ern city of Rafah.

"It's clear that our world is in deep trouble," Guterres said. "Global governance in its present form is entrenching divisions and fueling discontent."

"Today we see countries doing whatever they like, with no accountability. Impunity seems to be the name of the game," he said, noting in particular the war in Ukraine.

Harris sounded many of the same concerns and her comments were peppered with blunt criticism of Trump and his allies. Earlier this month, Trump sent shivers through Europe when he said he would not come to the defense of NATO allies that do not meet defense spending commitments.

Harris said the Biden administration's "sacred commitment to NATO remains ironclad."

## 5 patients die as oxygen runs out at hospital in Gaza

*Associated Press*

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — Five patients in intensive care died after their oxygen ran out in southern Gaza's main hospital that was stormed by Israeli troops, causing chaos for hundreds of staff and wounded people inside, health officials said Friday. Troops were searching the complex, where the military said it believes the remains of hostages abducted by Hamas might be located.

The raid came after troops had besieged Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis for nearly a week, with staff, patients and others inside struggling under heavy fire and dwindling supplies, including food and water. The Israeli military said Friday it had detained dozens from the facility, including some it al-

leged were involved in Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

Also Friday, an assailant opened fire at a bus stop on a busy intersection in southern Israel, killing two people and wounding four before being shot dead by a bystander. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

Later Friday, Israeli security forces arrived at the Jerusalem home of a Palestinian man who was previously identified on social media as being linked to the attack.

Negotiations over a ceasefire in Gaza, meanwhile, appear to have stalled, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday pushed back hard against the U.S. vision for after the war — particularly its calls for the creation of a Palestinian state. After

speaking overnight with President Joe Biden, Netanyahu wrote on X that Israel will not accept "international dictates regarding a permanent settlement with the Palestinians."

He said that if other countries unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state, it would give a "reward to terrorism." Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected creation of a Palestinian state.

Netanyahu has vowed to continue the offensive and expand it to the Gaza city of Rafah, near Egypt, until Hamas is destroyed and scores of hostages taken during the militants' Oct. 7 attack are freed. In their phone call, Biden again cautioned Netanyahu against moving forward with a military operation in Rafah before coming up with a "credible and executable plan" to

ensure the safety of Palestinian civilians, the White House said.

Two Israeli airstrikes on Rafah overnight killed at least 13 people, including nine members of the same family, according to hospital officials and relatives.

With the war showing no sign of ending, the risk of a broader conflict grew as Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group had deadliest exchange of fire along the border since the start of the Israel-Hamas war. Israel launched airstrikes into southern Lebanon for a second day on Thursday after killing 10 civilians and three Hezbollah fighters on Wednesday in response to a rocket attack that killed an Israeli soldier and wounded several others.

# 3 House chairs announce retirement plans

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a single week, the Republican chairs of three House committees announced they would not be seeking reelection, raising questions about whether the chaos that has reigned this Congress is driving out some of the GOP's top talent.

What makes the retirements particularly noteworthy is that none of the chairs were at risk of losing their position due to the term limits that House Republicans impose on their committee leaders. They conceivably could have returned to the same leadership roles in the next Congress, but chose instead to leave and give up jobs they had worked years to obtain.

"They would clearly rather be home with their family than in Washington with a dysfunctional Congress," said Republican strategist Doug Heye. "I would have said this to you 10 years ago, but it's just gotten worse. Congress has become a bad workplace."

The three are Reps. Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington, Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin and Mark Green of Tennessee.

McMorris Rodgers was the first to announce she would be leaving after four years as the top GOP member on the Energy and Commerce Committee, one of the most prestigious panels on Capitol Hill.

The second retirement announcement came from the new chair of a special committee focused on China. Gallagher, announced "with a heavy heart," he would not seek reelection.

Gallagher's announcement came days after he voted against impeaching Homeland Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, frustrating the right flank of the GOP and generating a likely primary challenge. But Gallagher told the local Fox affiliate in his Wisconsin district that he and his wife were thinking about his leaving Congress long before the impeachment vote. He also said the pushback was

nothing compared to what he endured when he refused to object to the Electoral College count in 2021.

And, on Wednesday, Rep. Green, now in just his second year as chair of the Homeland Security Committee, announced he would not seek reelection. The move came one day after he led the Mayorkas impeachment vote on the House floor. He said he wanted to get in front of a pending story about his retirement that had leaked to the press.

Green came the closest to acknowledging the chaos of the last 14 months played a role in his decision.

"Well, the work to productivity ratio may have had a little bit to do with it," Green said.

McMorris Rodgers said chairing the Energy and Commerce Committee has been the best position that she's had in her 10 terms in Congress. She said there were a lot of factors in her decision "and it was mostly about my family."

"It was a difficult decision. I've worked very hard and I'm proud of what we accomplished, but for me, this was the time," she said.

Gallagher also said it was time for him to go.

"The Framers intended citizens to serve in Congress for a season and then return to their private lives. Electoral politics was never supposed to be a career and, trust me, Congress is no place to grow old. And so, with a heavy heart, I have decided not to run for reelection," Gallagher said.

Rep. Frank Lucas, R-Okla., said he believes the exodus includes the possibility that Republicans could be serving in the minority next year if they lose the House in November.

"Who wants to finish your career here in the minority?" Lucas said. "It's also a frustration with the difficulty of legislating at this time because of issues within factions and the balanced nature of the House membership."

# Trump prosecutor fiercely rebuts misconduct claims

Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Fulton County district attorney's office opted not to put Fani Willis back on the witness stand Friday, avoiding the spectacle of more deeply personal testimony from the top prosecutor as she fights an effort to derail Donald Trump's 2020 Georgia election interference case.

While Willis will not answer more questions in court, a defense attorney who is trying to have her removed from the case is expected to call other witnesses to try to rebut the district attorney's testimony about her romantic relationship with special prosecutor Nathan Wade.

Misconduct allegations have taken center stage in the case, which was supposed to be about efforts to overturn Georgia's

presidential election results but has become embroiled in controversy over the love lives of the prosecutors seeking to hold Trump accountable.

During fiery and sometimes combative testimony on Thursday, Willis was grilled by lawyers over the relationship defense attorneys allege presents a conflict of interest that should force Willis and her office off the case. Willis and Wade have both acknowledged they were in a relationship, but say their personal lives have no bearing on the case.

Willis forcefully pushed back against claims of impropriety, at times getting visibly upset Thursday as lawyers questioned her about everything from her finances to trips she has taken with Wade. The judge

at one point had to call a break in testimony as tempers flared. Willis accused a defense attorney of trying to smear her, raising papers in front of her and shouting, "It's a lie!"

"Do you think I'm on trial? These people are on trial for trying to steal an election in 2020. I'm not on trial no matter how hard you try to put me on trial," Willis told defense attorney Ashleigh Merchant.

It's unclear when the judge might rule on whether Willis and her office should be disqualified from the case. Judge Scott McAfee said during a hearing Monday that Willis could be disqualified "if evidence is produced demonstrating an actual conflict or the appearance of one."

Willis, who had previously

tried to avoid testifying, agreed to do so Thursday after a former friend and co-worker testified that Willis and Wade's relationship began earlier than they had claimed.

Robin Yeartie, who previously worked in the district attorney's office, testified that she saw Willis and Wade hugging and kissing before he was hired as special prosecutor in November 2021. Wade and Willis both testified that they didn't start dating until 2022 and that their relationship ended months ago.

During personal and uncomfortable testimony that spanned hours, Wade also admitted to having sex with Willis during his separation from his estranged wife, even though he had claimed in a divorce filing that wasn't the case.

# Informant charged with lying about Bidens

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An FBI informant has been charged with fabricating a multimillion-dollar bribery scheme involving President Joe Biden, his son Hunter and a Ukrainian energy company, a claim that is central to the Republican impeachment inquiry in Congress.

Alexander Smirnov falsely reported to the FBI in June 2020 that executives associated with the Ukrainian energy company Burisma paid Hunter and Joe Biden \$5 million each in 2015 or 2016, prosecutors said in an indictment. Smirnov told his handler that an executive claimed

to have hired Hunter Biden to “protect us, through his dad, from all kinds of problems,” according to court documents.

Prosecutors say Smirnov in fact had only routine business dealings with the company in 2017 and made the bribery allegations after he “expressed bias” against Joe Biden while he was a presidential candidate.

Smirnov, 43, appeared in court in Las Vegas Thursday after being charged with making a false statement and creating a false and fictitious record. He did not enter a plea. The judge ordered the courtroom cleared after federal public defender

Margaret Wightman Lambrose requested a closed hearing for arguments about sealing court documents. She declined to comment on the case.

The informant’s claims have been central to the Republican effort in Congress to investigate the president and his family, and helped spark what is now a House impeachment inquiry into Biden. An attorney for Hunter, who is expected to give a deposition later this month, said the charges show the probe is “based on dishonest, uncredible allegations and witnesses.”

The top Democrat on the House Oversight and Accounta-

bility Committee, Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, called for an end to the Biden impeachment inquiry.

Raskin said the allegations from the Republicans against Biden “have always been a tissue of lies built on conspiracy theories.” He called on Speaker Mike Johnson, Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer and House Republicans “to stop promoting this nonsense and end their doomed impeachment inquiry.”

Comer, R-Ky., downplayed the importance of the informant, who had figured centrally in the start of the probe.

## Government workers eye possible Trump roadblocks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former President Donald Trump has plans to radically reshape the federal government if he returns to the White House, from promising to deport millions of immigrants in the U.S. illegally to abolishing government agencies and firing tens of thousands of workers and replacing them with loyalists.

Liberal organizations in Washington are backing President Joe Biden and say they expect Trump to lose. But they’re quietly trying to install roadblocks just in case.

A collection of activists, advocates and legal experts is promoting new federal rules to limit presidential power while urging Biden’s White House to do more to protect his accomplishments and limit Trump in a possible second term. All of that is happening

with far less fanfare than plans by Trump supporters to create a conservative government-in-waiting via an effort known as “Project 2025.”

The Office of Personnel Management, the federal government’s chief human resources agency, will finalize a rule by April against reclassifying tens of thousands of workers so they can be more easily fired, according to OPM spokesperson Viet Tran. A future administration would likely have to spend months or years unwinding the rule.

“My impression is the Biden administration is taking very seriously that potential threat and is trying to do things now,” said Michael Linden, a former executive associate director of the White House Office of Management and Budget under Biden.

But he added, “Nobody should be under

any illusion that there’s anything that this president can do in advance to prevent the next president from doing things that are very damaging, potentially catastrophically.”

“There isn’t any magic bullet,” Linden said.

The White House is reluctant to talk about a second Trump term before Election Day, as that would imply it has plans for if Biden loses.

Trump “is already telegraphing plays straight out of the authoritarian playbook — gutting the civil service of people he deems disloyal and plotting revenge on his political enemies,” said Kevin Munoz, a spokesman for Biden’s campaign. “There’s one way of stopping Trump’s dangerous and un-American plans: reelecting President Biden.”

## 2 juveniles charged in shootings at Chiefs parade

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Two juveniles have been charged with crimes connected to the shooting at the Kansas City Chiefs’ Super Bowl rally, authorities said Friday.

A news release from the Jackson County Family Court said the juveniles are being detained in the county’s Juvenile Detention Center “on gun-related and

resisting arrest charges.” The release said it is “anticipated that additional charges are expected in the future as the investigation by the Kansas City Police Department continues.”

A mother of two was killed and 22 people were injured by gunfire Wednesday afternoon, when shots erupted amid the throng of fans gathered at a rally outside Union Station after a pa-

rade through the city. Police Chief Stacey Graves said Thursday that victims ranged from ages 8 to 47, with half under 16.

Police initially detained three juveniles but released one who they determined wasn’t involved in the shooting. Police are looking for others who may have been involved and are calling for witnesses, victims and people with cellphone video of

the violence to call a hotline.

The shooting outside Union Station occurred despite the presence of more than 800 police officers who were in the building and surrounding area, including on top of nearby structures, said Mayor Quinton Lucas, who attended with his wife and mother and ran for safety when the shots were fired.

# All-Star weekend arrives in Indianapolis

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Welcome back, LeBron James. Welcome for the first time, Paolo Banchero, Scottie Barnes, Jalen Brunson and Tyrese Maxey.

All-Star weekend in Indianapolis is here, with some familiar names, some new faces, a nod to nostalgia and a bit of unwinding for everyone before the stretch run of the season. Most of the 54 players who will be part of the weekend's on-court festivities — and quite a few more are coming as well — began arriving on Thursday.

The rundown of events, and there are dozens, officially opened Thursday night with a tip-off party. Indiana All-Star guard Tyrese Haliburton showed up in the ultimate Hoosier State style, in an IndyCar — the state may be hoops-crazy, but auto racing is pretty big here as well — driven by Indiana native Conor Daly, a two-time top-10 finisher at the Indianapolis 500.

Haliburton shared the stage with another legend of basketball in Indiana — Larry Bird, who handed Haliburton a cere-

monial golden basketball.

"The fans are excited. I'm excited," Haliburton said. "It's a chance to showcase our city."

For James, it's his 21st All-Star weekend in his 21 NBA seasons. He didn't make the All-Star Game as a rookie; he made the weekend as part of the rookie game. He's made every All-Star Game since, now the first player to be picked for the showcase in 20 different seasons. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was a 19-time selection.

"I'm humbled and very blessed, obviously," James said. "I don't take it for granted, being an All-Star. The fact that I still get to represent this franchise, one, my family — which is most important, my family name on the back of the jersey, that's very important to me when it comes to acknowledgment and accolades and things of that nature — and also the fans, who've been down with me for the last two decades-plus."

There is something for everyone. There are all the traditional NBA on-court events — the Rising Stars and celebrity games on Friday; the dunk contest, 3-

point shootout and skills competition on Saturday; then the All-Star Game itself on Sunday.

Added to the slate for Saturday: a 3-point contest between NBA shooting king Stephen Curry and WNBA 3-point contest record-holder Sabrina Ionescu.

There's a game between a pair of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as the NBA continues to give HBCU institutions part of the All-Star spotlight. This year, the game is Virginia Union against Winston-Salem State on Saturday afternoon.

This weekend, a glass LED court is set to be part of the show on Friday and Saturday. There's even a fan event called NBA Crossover, set up in a 350,000-square-foot space where ticketholders can try virtual reality headsets, test out the latest offerings from Jordan Brand, play with an airless basketball, even get a haircut while playing video games. And there's a brunch honoring icons of the game on Sunday, an event that's almost as tough a ticket to get as the game itself.

"Honestly, it's just amazing to be an All-Star," Banchero said. The Orlando forward was at All-Star weekend last year for rookie and skills events — this year, he's got events on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, having made the big game for the first time.

Banchero is one of four first-time All-Stars, joining New York's Brunson, Philadelphia's Maxey and Toronto's Barnes. Plenty of other players are part of the weekend for the first time.

"I'm excited to get there, excited to let it all sink in," said San Antonio's Victor Wembanyama, the No. 1 pick in last year's draft who has the Rising Stars games and the skills competition on his on-court calendar this weekend.

Above all else, it's a weekend for the fans. The All-Stars who will play Sunday combined to get more than 60 million votes from fans around the world. The game will be shown in more than 210 countries and territories, broadcast in 60 languages, and fans from at least 34 different nations have bought tickets to come to Indianapolis this weekend.

## MLB commissioner says he is retiring in January 2029

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said Thursday he will retire when his current term ends in January 2029.

Speaking at a spring training news conference, Manfred noted he will be 70 years old and will have been commissioner for 14 years when his term ends on Jan. 25, 2029. "You can only have so much fun in one life-

time," Manfred said.

Manfred, 65, succeeded Bud Selig in January 2015 and was given a five-year term as baseball's 10th commissioner.

Owners voted in November 2018 to offer Manfred a new deal through the 2024 season, then voted last July to approve his latest term.

"I have been open with them about the fact that this is going to be my last term," Manfred

said. "I said it to them before the election in July and I'm absolutely committed to that."

Manfred beat out Boston Red Sox Chairman Tom Werner in the first contested vote for a new commissioner in 46 years. The third candidate, MLB Executive Vice President of Business Tim Brosnan, withdrew just before the start of balloting.

Future candidates have not publicly emerged. Dan Halem,

who joined MLB in 2007 as general counsel for labor, has been deputy commissioner since 2017. He will be 58 in May.

"I'm sure the selection process is going to look like it looked the last time," Manfred said. "There'll be a committee of owners that'll be put together and they'll identify candidates, an interview process and ultimately someone or a slate of people will be put forward."

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# Johnson qualifies for 21st Daytona 500

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — The panic set in for Jimmie Johnson on the final lap of his qualifying race for the Daytona 500. The seven-time NASCAR champion and newest Hall of Fame inductee recognized he was dangerously close to missing the cut for “The Great American Race.”

Johnson, now co-owner of Legacy Motor Club, didn't have the speed in time trials to earn a spot Wednesday in the season-opening race. It meant he had to race his way into the 40-car field Thursday night at Daytona International Speedway.

He only needed to beat J.J. Yeley in the qualifying race — and Yeley was driving a car that barely even made it to Daytona and only announced Yeley as the driver Wednesday, two days after Greg Biffle said he had pulled out as the driver over non-payment from 2022.

But a late spin put Johnson in

a precarious position, and the desperation set in on the backstretch of the last lap. He knew he needed help from another driver, understood how challenging his final two turns would be, and yet his mind was racing about what would happen if he failed to qualify.

“I'm like, ‘I'm not going to make it, not going to make the Daytona 500,’” Johnson said. “I'm going to have to call all our partners. I'm going to have to stand in the suite during the 500 and shake hands, not drive a car. This is running through my mind — ‘I have to figure out a way.’”

He pulled it off with a three-wide move through the final turn that has Johnson locked in to his 21st Daytona 500. Johnson won the race twice, in 2006 and 2013, while driving for Hendrick Motorsports.

Tyler Reddick of 23XI Racing won the 150-mile race that is part of how the field is set Sun-

day for the season opener. Christopher Bell of Joe Gibbs Racing won the second race as Toyota swept the two duels.

Kaz Grala in a Ford for Front Row Motorsports earned the final spot in the race in the second qualifier by finishing higher than B.J. McLeod, who had a guaranteed spot in the field until Live Fast Motorsports sold its charter to Spire Motorsports at the end of last season.

“That was so much more stressful than it needed to be for us,” Grala said.

Johnson put the 500 on what he expects to be a nine-race schedule this season. In his second season as co-owner of Legacy, Johnson switched the team from Chevrolet to Toyota.

But the Toyotas lacked speed in time trials and backed Johnson into a difficult situation Thursday night.

“I've never been through anything like this. In my first year down here, we fortunately won

the pole,” Johnson said of his 2002 Daytona 500 debut. “To fight like we did in those closing laps, I mean, I've only done that for a race win here. Never had that level of anxiety and fight for a Duel or anything else except for a proper win.”

A Johnson spin with 11 laps remaining put him in danger and set up a restart with six laps remaining. Yeley was 14th, Johnson was 18th and desperately begging for a partner to line up behind the No. 84 Toyota and help push him past Yeley.

The help didn't come until the closing seconds.

Martin Truex Jr., a fellow Toyota driver, dropped back to give Johnson some aid. Ross Chastain then checked up in traffic and Yeley dipped into an outside line to try to get around Chastain. With the push from Truex, Johnson slid into the center lane behind Chastain and the trio sailed past Yeley to the finish line.

# Cantlay leads after first round at Riviera with a 64

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Thousands of fans watching Tiger Woods in his 2024 debut missed out on the best golf Thursday at the Genesis Invitational. In the group ahead of Woods was Patrick Cantlay, looking as though he wants to be the next Southern California native to win at Riviera.

Cantlay opened with three birdies in four holes and never really slowed until a sycamore tree halted his great run. He still managed a 7-under 64, giving him a one-shot lead.

Jason Day and Luke List played bogey-free for a 65, and they were joined by Cam Davis of Australia, who birdied three of his last five holes.

Jordan Spieth started as strongly as Cantlay and had to settle for a 66.

The smallest field at Riviera

— 70 players as a signature event — left no shortage of entertainment. The most memorable was Woods hitting a shank from the middle of the 18th fairway and then using the same club — 8-iron — to squeeze a shot through a small opening in the eucalyptus trees and onto the green. He made bogey and shot 72.

Justin Thomas had to play a shot off the concrete boundary wall of the driving range for it to ricochet back toward the rough. Sam Burns was headed toward a big number when he left a shot in the bunker behind the 10th green, only to hole out for a par so unlikely he flung his putter toward his bag.

Not to be overlooked was Rory McIlroy, who was poised to be closer to the top until he went double bogey-triple bogey on the back nine, the latter on the

par-3 16th when he left one in the bunker and then three-putted from 8 feet.

Cantlay — and for most of the day, Spieth, who played alongside him — made it look simple. Both went out in 30 to set the pace.

“Our group had good momentum,” Cantlay said. “Jordan and I were a bunch under on the front nine and a day where I putted really, really well. Made every putt I should have and a couple longer ones. It was a good start.”

Cantlay's tee shot on the par-3 16th clipped a tree and came down short of the bunkers, even short of the temporary green, leaving him some 50 yards from an impossible spot. He didn't bother getting the yardage, instead hitting into a front bunker and dropping no more than a shot.

“A spot I've never been,” Cantlay said with a grin. “I've been on most places on his golf course. But eight birdies and one bogey, great start.”

Max Homa grew up in the LA area and won in 2021. John Merrick, another Virginia Country Club product who went to UCLA, won in 2012.

Woods showed the kind of rust he expected having not played an official PGA Tour event since the Masters, after which he had surgery to fuse his right ankle. That shank was a shocker, and perhaps more concerning was Woods saying his back was acting up in the final hour, leading to the shank.

“My back was spasming the last couple holes and it was locking up,” Woods said. “I came down and it didn't move and I presented hosel first and shanked it.”

# Thompson scores 35 points off the bench for Warriors

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Klay Thompson came off the bench for the first time since his rookie season to knock down seven 3-pointers and score a season-high 35 points, leading the Golden State Warriors to a 140-137 victory over the Utah Jazz on Thursday night.

Thompson was a reserve for the first time since March 11, 2012. Rookie guard Brandin Podziemski replaced him in the starting lineup and finished with 13 points, eight assists and six rebounds.

Draymond Green chipped in a season-high 23 points for the Warriors. Andrew Wiggins added 19 points and seven rebounds. Stephen Curry had 16 points and 10 assists.

Thompson scored 17 points in the Warriors' 84-point first half, but they needed a missed 3-pointer by Collin Sexton to hold on for their eighth win in 10 games.

Sexton led the Jazz with 35 points and nine assists. Rookie

Keyonte George added a career-high 33 points while making a career-high nine 3-pointers. Lauri Markkanen finished with 20 points while John Collins tallied 18. They had 13 rebounds apiece.

**Grizzlies 113, Bucks 110:** Ziaire Williams and GG Jackson scored 27 points apiece, and host Memphis held on to beat Milwaukee in the last game for both teams before the All-Star break.

Vince Williams added 18 points and 12 rebounds for Memphis. Ziaire Williams' points were a career high.

Giannis Antetokounmpo led the Bucks with 35 points and 12 assists, his 43rd double-double of the season. Damian Lillard finished with 24 points and seven assists. Bobby Portis added 15 points and Brook Lopez had 14 points, 11 rebounds and four blocks.

Memphis held a nine-point lead with 49 seconds left, but consecutive 3-pointers from Malik Beasley brought the

Bucks as close as 113-110 with 29.2 left. Milwaukee had the last possession, but a scramble at midcourt for the ball took up a lot of the remaining clock, and Lillard's 3-pointer at the horn was short as Memphis won its second straight.

**Timberwolves 128, Trail Blazers 91:** Anthony Edwards had 34 points and visiting Minnesota built a 30-point lead after the most lopsided first quarter in the NBA this season, handing Portland a sixth straight loss.

Karl-Anthony Towns added 23 points for the Western Conference-leading Timberwolves, who led 44-14 after one quarter in their fourth straight win.

Jerami Grant had 20 points for the Trail Blazers, who closed the gap to single digits in the third quarter. But the Timberwolves pushed the lead to 112-81 midway through the final period on Monte Morris' jumper.

The teams also met Tuesday night, with Minnesota pulling away in the fourth quarter for a 121-109 victory.

## Iowa's Clark sets NCAA scoring mark

Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Caitlin Clark became the NCAA women's career scoring leader and set Iowa's single-game scoring mark with 49 points, leading the No. 4 Hawkeyes to a 106-89 win over Michigan on Thursday night.

Clark added 13 assists for her 58th career double-double. Clark, who moved past Kelsey Plum's total of 3,527, now has 3,569 career points. She shot 16 of 31 from the field, including 9 of 18 from 3-point range in the 12th 40-point game of her career. Clark eclipsed the single-game scoring mark of 48 points set by Megan Gustafson in 2018.

Kate Martin scored 20 points and Hannah Stuelke had 13 for the Hawkeyes (23-3, 12-2 Big Ten), who remained in a tie for second place in the Big Ten with Indiana, one game behind leader Ohio State.

Clark, who needed eight points to pass Plum, struck early. Her 35-foot 3-pointer with 7:48 left in the first quarter provided the record-breaking points.

## No. 2 Purdue comes back to defeat Minnesota 84-76

Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Zach Edey overcame a slow start with 24 points and 15 rebounds as No. 2 Purdue rallied from a 10-point deficit to defeat Minnesota 84-76 on Thursday night.

The Boilermakers (23-2, 12-2 Big Ten), who trailed by 10 after the opening possession of the second half, turned to their 7-foot-4 senior All-American center to help lead the comeback. The reigning national player of the year shook off 3-of-9 shooting in the first half by moving closer to the basket with three dunks, the last slam pushing

Purdue ahead 57-55 with 12:27 remaining.

Point guard Braden Smith had 16 points, nine assists and eight rebounds for Purdue, which improved to 43-3 at home in the last three years, including 7-0 in Big Ten play this season. Mason Gillis hit four 3-pointers and finished with 14 points. Lance Jones added 12.

Dawson Garcia led the Gophers (15-9, 6-7) with 24 points.

**No. 18 Saint Mary's 103, Pepperdine 59:** Augustus Marcilionis scored a career-high 28 points and Alex Ducas beat the halftime buzzer with a half-court shot to lead visiting Saint

Mary's past Pepperdine for its 13th straight win.

The Gaels (21-6, 12-0 West Coast Conference) celebrated their return to the AP Top 25 for the first time since the opening week of the season with another dominant victory to match No. 1 UConn for the longest active winning streak in the country.

Ducas added 18 points and Aidan Mahaney scored 13 for Saint Mary's, which has opened a 2½-game lead in the conference over San Francisco and Gonzaga.

Jevon Porter had 13 points to pace the Waves (10-17, 3-9), who have lost seven of eight.

**No. 24 Florida Atlantic 80, Temple 68:** Johnell Davis scored 17 points, Alijah Martin and Brandon Weatherspoon each had 16 and host Florida Atlantic beat Temple in a battle of the Owls.

FAU (20-5, 10-2 American Athletic) pulled away with an early 15-2 run. Weatherspoon hit two 3-pointers during the spree, and Nick Boyd had four 3s in the half. Boyd and Vladislav Goldin each finished with 12 points.

Temple (8-17, 1-11) has lost 10 straight since defeating Wichita State at home Jan. 7. Jordan Riley led Temple with 19 points.

# Matthews leads Maple Leafs past Flyers

Associated Press

TORONTO — Auston Matthews had a natural hat trick in the second period and William Nylander scored 54 seconds into overtime to give the Toronto Maple Leafs a 4-3 victory over the Philadelphia Flyers on Thursday night.

Matthews pushed his NHL-leading goals total to 45, completing his fifth hat trick of the season and 12th of his career in a 7:49 span in the second period. He's on a 71-goal pace through 51 games, looking to become the first NHL player to hit 70 since Teemu Selanne and Alexander Mogilny each had 76 in 1992-93.

Ilya Samsonov made 29 saves. Mitch Marner had three assists, and Timothy Liljegren had two.

Travis Konecny had a goal and an assist for Philadelphia. Travis Sanheim and Garnet Hathaway also scored and Samuel Ersson stopped 24 shots.

**Canucks 4, Red Wings 1:** Elias Lindholm scored twice, Thatcher Demko made 27 saves and NHL-leading Vancouver beat visiting Detroit for the team's third straight victory.

Nikita Zadorov scored his first goal with Vancouver, J.T. Miller added a goal and Elias Pettersson had three assists.

J.T. Compher scored for Detroit, and Alex Lyon stopped 17 shots as the Red Wings lost their second in a row.

The Canucks improved to 37-12-6, good for 80 points and a six-point lead over Florida, Boston and Dallas.

**Rangers 7, Canadiens 4:** Chris Kreider scored a hat trick, Adam Fox had four assists and Jonathan Quick made 31 saves as host New York downed Montreal to match a season high with its sixth straight victory.

Mika Zibanejad added a goal and two assists for the Rangers, who also got goals from Will Cuyille, Vincent Trocheck and Kaapo Kakko. Artemi Panarin added three assists.

The Rangers, who equaled

their season best for goals, scored four times in 4:10 during the second period after Montreal took a 1-0 lead in the first.

Cole Caufield had two goals for Montreal. Jake Evans and Juraj Slafkovsky also scored for the Canadiens.

**Sharks 6, Flames 3:** Filip Zadina had two goals and two assists for a career-high four points in visiting San Jose's victory over Calgary.

Luke Kunin also scored twice, Justin Bailey had a goal and two assists for his first career multi-point game and Mikael Granlund added a goal. MacKenzie Blackwood made 31 saves.

Nazem Kadri, Mikael Backlund and Andrei Kuzmenko scored for Calgary and rookie Dustin Wolf stopped 25 shots.

**Panthers 4, Sabres 0:** Anthony Stolarz stopped 45 shots for his seventh career shutout and Florida became the 11th NHL team to win 10 consecutive road games with the win over Buffalo.

Carter Verhaeghe opened the scoring midway through the first period and added an empty-netter. Anton Lundell scored by tipping in Matthew Tkachuk's point shot on a delayed penalty with 2:44 left in the second period.

Ryan Lomberg followed Verhaeghe's empty-netter with a goal with 11 seconds remaining.

Florida extended its franchise-record road winning streak that is tied for the sixth-longest among NHL teams, and two short of matching the record held by Detroit (2005-06) and Minnesota (2014-15).

**Kraken 4, Bruins 1:** Matty Beniers had a goal and two assists as Seattle concluded a five-game road trip with a win over Eastern Conference-leading Boston.

Jordan Eberle, Eeli Tolvanen and Jared McCann also scored for Seattle. Joey Daccord stopped 36 shots to snap his three-game losing streak.

David Pastrnak scored for the Bruins, and Jeremy Swayman made 22 saves.

**Stars 9, Predators 2:** Sam Steel scored 35 seconds after the puck dropped, and visiting Dallas scored four goals in the first 16 minutes on the way to a rout of Nashville.

The Stars' Matt Duchene scored two goals against his old team. Another former Nashville player, Craig Smith, scored in the early flurry for the Central Division leaders.

Wyatt Johnson made it 4-0 at 15:53 as he finished with two goals and two assists.

Tyler Seguin and Ty Dellandrea had a goal and two assists apiece as Dallas won its third straight. Miro Heiskanen also had a goal.

Cole Smith and Tommy Novak scored for Nashville.

**Blues 6, Oilers 3:** Robert Thomas and Jake Neighbours each had a goal and two assists and host St. Louis beat Edmonton for the team's eighth win in 10 games.

Jordan Binnington made 36 saves, highlighted by two dazzling saves on Zach Hyman during an Edmonton power play in the first period.

Jordan Kyrro, Torey Krug and Pavel Buchnevich each added a goal and an assist and Brandon Saad also scored for the Blues.

Leon Draisaitl, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Corey Perry scored for Edmonton and Connor McDavid had three assists.

**Penguins 4, Blackhawks 1:** Sidney Crosby scored twice, Reilly Smith and Bryan Rust added goals, and visiting Pittsburgh beat Chicago to snap a three-game losing streak.

The Penguins had lost to Minnesota, Winnipeg and Florida in succession, but controlled their third road game in four starts from the outset.

Crosby's first goal came just 15 seconds into the game.

Blackhawks star rookie Connor Bedard had an assist in his

return after a 14-game absence because of a broken jaw. After a sluggish first period, he set up Philipp Kurashev with a nifty pass through traffic midway through the second. Kurashev dumped it past sprawling goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic.

Smith made it 2-1 at 12:40 of the first, beating Arvid Soderblom with a wrist shot on the glove side.

**Ducks 5, Senators 1:** Mason McTavish scored twice against his hometown team to help visiting Anaheim beat Ottawa.

The 21-year-old McTavish grew up in nearby Carp, Ontario. He has 15 goals this season, his third with the Ducks.

Frank Vatrano, Pavel Mintyukov and Cam Fowler also scored for Anaheim. John Gibson stopped all 15 shots he faced through two periods before leaving because of an upper-body injury. Lukas Dostal made 18 saves in the third period.

Claude Giroux scored for Ottawa and Joonas Korpisalo made 15 saves.

**Lightning 6, Avalanche 3:** NHL points leader Nikita Kucherov had two goals and an assist for host Tampa Bay.

Kucherov picked up his 93rd point on a goal that made it 4-3 at 8:13 of the third.

Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon, second in points, increased his total to 89 with two assists.

Steven Stamkos, Brayden Point, Anthony Cirelli and Nick Perbix also scored for the Lightning, who got 28 saves from Andrei Vasilevskiy.

Defenseman Bowen Byram scored twice for the Avalanche.

**Kings 2, Devils 1:** Quinton Byfield scored on a power play with 5:37 left and visiting Los Angeles rebounded from a seven-goal loss to beat New Jersey.

Anze Kopitar scored a short-handed goal and David Rittich made 27 saves as the Kings won for only the fifth time in their last 20 games (5-9-6).

Tyler Toffoli scored on a power play for New Jersey.