

Navy expands drinking water oversight

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

Navy Installations Command has expanded its role in overseeing and evaluating the service's drinking water systems at all bases in the United States and its territories, the service said in a news release Tuesday.

"Historically, various Navy commands managed their specific water systems," the release states. "In order to ensure consistent management, policy, and oversight across the Navy, these functions and responsibilities were placed under [Navy Installations Command]."

The Navy Installations commander, Vice Adm. Scott Gray, approved the new policy, which was implemented Feb. 2. He is also the Navy's executive agent for management of Drinking Water Ashore, according to the release.

The safety and monitoring of

Navy water has drawn public scrutiny after a jet fuel leak in Hawaii in late 2021 contaminated the system that provided tap water to roughly 93,000 residents of military housing communities on and near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

Hundreds of residents and former residents affected by the contamination have sued the Navy in federal court, alleging the service did not adequately inform them about the tainted water.

It will take years to restore the soil and aquifer around the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility contaminated by that leak and many more in previous decades.

The Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit advocacy group that promotes the use of fewer chemicals in agriculture, said in a 2020 report that tap water or groundwater at 328

U.S. military installations showed the presence of PFAS, a "forever" chemical used in a plethora of products since the 1940s.

Navy installations in Washington, Virginia, Pennsylvania and Florida were cited in that report.

The Navy's news release Tuesday did not refer to water quality at any particular installation as being the genesis for the new policy.

The policy was implemented to standardize oversight, assessment, operation and maintenance at all Navy facilities, Coleen San Nicolas-Perez, a spokeswoman for Navy Installations Command, told Stars and Stripes by email Tuesday.

"There are lessons learned incorporated as a result of the [Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam] drinking water concerns, but it also includes assessments

and recommendations from systems across the Navy," she said.

"We take program assessments seriously and by evaluating our programs and procedures we can then make necessary improvements to include implementation of a new or updated policy," she said.

The new policy sets up a framework for operating and maintaining the drinking water systems.

Most prominently, it establishes drinking water committees at the installation, region and headquarters levels to ensure water quality management and proper handling of any deficiencies or problems, the news release states.

The committees will include public works, environmental, medical and communications personnel, according to the release.

DOD lacks plan to maintain weapons sent to Ukraine

By **JOHN VANDIVER**
Stars and Stripes

STUTT GART, Germany — Big-ticket weapons systems sent to Ukraine could be rendered useless on the battlefield because the Pentagon lacks a plan for Ukrainian troops to maintain them, according to a Defense Department watchdog agency report, which also warned that sustaining Kyiv's armored vehicles could harm the U.S. Army's own combat readiness.

"The lack of foresight in this matter is concerning, and should be rectified promptly," Inspector General Robert Storch said in a statement Tuesday, adding that the department is developing a plan now.

But the oversight on keeping functional equipment such as Patriot interceptors, Bradley Fighting Vehicles, Strykers and Abrams tanks puts at risk Ukraine's ability to effectively fight Russia and also complicates the U.S. military's own combat preparedness, the IG said.

One senior Army official told the IG that continued reliance on existing U.S. Army stocks "may require a choice between continued support for Ukraine and meeting the minimum readiness requirements for U.S. Army units," the IG report said.

Not having maintenance requirements for the weapons systems it provides to Ukraine

prevents DOD from predicting costs or assessing the impacts for U.S. military units that also operate these systems, Storch said.

As a result, the Pentagon may need to commit more resources "at significant cost" to U.S. taxpayers or risk the ability to perform other U.S. missions, the report said.

The IG issued joint reports Tuesday, one detailing problems associated with hundreds of armored vehicles issued to Ukraine and another examining issues related to Patriot air defense systems provided.

The reports concluded that without an effective sustainment strategy, Ukraine's military won't develop the knowl-

edge base to maintain the equipment. That means it won't be able to use the hardware once U.S. sustainment support ends, the IG said.

The finding comes amid uncertainty about the durability of American political support for defending Ukraine from Russia, given the ongoing political disagreements in Washington about the merits of continuing to send billions of dollars in arms to Kyiv.

The IG issued multiple recommendations for each of the weapons systems, including that an action plan be developed in the coming weeks to deal with the issue.

DOD generally concurred with the findings.

Chaos of war halts Gaza food deliveries

Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — The World Food Program said Tuesday it has paused deliveries of food to isolated northern Gaza because of increasing chaos across the territory, hiking fears of potential starvation. A study by the U.N. children's agency warned that one in six children in the north are acutely malnourished.

Entry of aid trucks into the territory has been more than halved in the past two weeks, according to U.N. figures. Overwhelmed U.N. and relief workers said intake of trucks and distribution have been crippled by Israeli failure to ensure convoys' safety amid its bombardment and ground offensive and by a breakdown in security, with hungry Palestinians frequently overwhelming trucks to take food.

The weakening of the aid operation threatens to deepen misery across the territory, where Israel's air and ground offensive, launched in response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, has killed over 29,000 Palestinians, obliterated entire neighborhoods and displaced more than 80% of the population of 2.3 million.

Heavy fighting and airstrikes have flared in the past two days in areas of northern Gaza that the Israeli military said had been largely cleared of Hamas weeks ago. The military on Tuesday ordered the evacuation of two neighborhoods on Gaza City's southern edge.

The north, including Gaza City, has been isolated since Israeli troops first moved into it in late October. Large swaths of the city have been reduced to rubble, but several hundred thousand Palestinians remain largely cut off from aid.

They describe famine-like conditions, in which families limit themselves to one meal a day and often resort to mixing animal and bird fodder with grains to bake bread.

"The situation is beyond your imagination," said Soad Abu Hussein, a widow and mother of five children sheltering in a school in Jabaliya refugee camp.

The World Food Program said it was forced to pause aid to the north because of "complete chaos and violence due to the collapse of civil order."

It said it had first suspended deliveries to the north three weeks ago after a strike hit an aid truck. It tried resuming this week, but convoys on Sunday and Monday faced gunfire and crowds of hungry people stripping goods and beating one driver.

WFP said it was working to resume deliveries as soon as possible. It called for the opening of crossing points for aid directly into northern Gaza from Israel and a better notification system to coordinate with the Israeli military.

Soon after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, Israel blocked entry of all food, water, fuel, medicine and other supplies into Gaza. Under U.S. pressure, it began to allow a trickle of aid trucks to enter from Egypt at the Rafah crossing, and in December opened one crossing from Israel to southern Gaza, Kerem Shalom.

The trucks have become virtually the sole source of food and other supplies for Gaza's population. But the average number entering per day has fallen since Feb. 9 to 60 a day from more than 140 daily in January, according to figures from the U.N. office for humanitarian coordination, known as OCHA.

High Court lets military's split-jury verdicts stand

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

The Supreme Court has declined to hear two cases challenging the constitutionality of split-jury guilty verdicts in military court.

Justices on Tuesday denied two petitions calling for a review of more than a dozen cases in which the U.S. military's top appeals court ruled that unanimous verdicts are unnecessary for criminal convictions at courts-martial.

The court did not issue a statement explaining the decision. At least four justices must grant a petition for the court to hear the case.

Lawyers representing the service members in their final appeal attempt before the nation's high court argued their clients have a constitutional right to a unanimous verdict by a military jury.

Under the Uniform Code of

Military Justice, a two-thirds majority is required for a guilty verdict in a general court-martial, the most serious type of military trial.

That law has come under a flurry of challenges since April 2020, when the U.S. Supreme Court banned split jury verdicts in state criminal cases. The 6-3 decision in *Ramos v. Louisiana* said state courts are also bound by the long-standing requirement in federal courts that all jurors must agree for a defendant to be convicted.

"If, as *Ramos* held, unanimous verdicts are necessary in the civilian criminal justice system 'to ensure impartiality,' it ought to follow that they are equally necessary to achieve the same result in a court-martial," lawyers in *Jonathan M. Martinez et al v. United States* wrote in a September 2023 filing before the Supreme Court.

US Air Force B-52 patrols with Philippine fighters

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

An Air Force B-52H Stratofortress and three Philippine FA-50 fighters flew a joint patrol over the South China Sea this week, a move Chinese state media labeled a political show.

The Philippine air force posted photos and video of Monday's patrol on social media the next day. It covered an area 90 nautical miles west of Candon, Ilocos Sur province, and 50 nautical miles northwest of Lubang, Mindoro province, the service wrote on Facebook.

"This cooperative activity aims to bolster cooperation between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and their U.S. coun-

terparts," the post said. "With this activity, the [Philippine air force] underscores its commitment and readiness to support the AFP's efforts in safeguarding the national territory and sovereign rights, and upholding regional peace and security."

The B-52, deployed to Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, on a Bomber Task Force mission, did not land in the country, the Philippine Daily Inquirer reported Wednesday.

The exercise followed naval drills between the U.S. and Philippines earlier this month and took place during a period of increased tension between Manila and Beijing in the South China Sea.

Alabama ruling may impact fertility firms

Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — The Alabama Supreme Court has ruled that frozen embryos can be considered children under state law, a decision critics said could have sweeping implications for fertility treatment in the state.

The decision was issued in a pair of wrongful death cases brought by three couples who had frozen embryos destroyed in an accident at a fertility clinic. Justices, citing anti-abortion language in the Alabama Constitution, ruled that an 1872 state law allowing parents to sue over the death of a minor child “applies to all unborn children, regardless of their location.”

“Unborn children are ‘children’ ... without exception based on developmental stage, physical location, or any other ancillary characteristics,” Justice Jay Mitchell wrote in Friday’s majority ruling by the all-Republican court.

Mitchell said the court had

previously ruled that fetuses killed while a woman is pregnant are covered under Alabama’s Wrongful Death of a Minor Act and nothing excludes “extrauterine children from the Act’s coverage.”

The ruling brought a rush of warnings about the potential impact on fertility treatments and the freezing of embryos, which had previously been considered property by the courts.

“This ruling is stating that a fertilized egg, which is a clump of cells, is now a person. It really puts into question, the practice of IVF,” Barbara Collura, CEO of RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association, told The Associated Press on Tuesday. The group called the decision a “terrifying development for the 1-in-6 people impacted by infertility” who need in-vitro fertilization.

She said it raises questions for providers and patients, including if they can freeze future em-

bryos created during fertility treatment or if patients could ever donate or destroy unused embryos.

Sean Tipton, a spokesman with the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, said at least one Alabama fertility clinic has been instructed by its affiliated hospital to pause IVF treatment in the immediate wake of the decision.

Dr. Paula Amato, president of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, said a decision to treat a frozen fertilized egg as the legal equivalent of a child or gestating fetus could limit the availability of modern health care.

“By insisting that these very different biological entities are legally equivalent, the best state-of-the-art fertility care will be made unavailable to the people of Alabama.

“No health care provider will be willing to provide treatments if those treatments may lead to

civil or criminal charges,” Amato said.

Gabby Goidel, 26, who is pursuing IVF treatment in Alabama after three miscarriages, said the court ruling came down on the same day she began daily injections ahead of egg retrieval.

“It just kind of took me by storm. It was like all I could think about and it was just a very stressful thing to hear. I immediately messaged my clinic and asked if this could potentially halt us. They said we have to take it one day at a time,” Goidel said.

She said her clinic is continuing to provide treatment for now, but said it will let her know if they have to change course.

Goidel said she turned to IVF and preimplantation genetic testing after the multiple miscarriages related to genetic issues.

“Without IVF, I would have to probably go through several more miscarriages before I even had an option of having a baby that is my own,” she said.

Saturated California gets more rain, snow and wind

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Much of saturated California faced the threat of flooding Tuesday with winter storms blowing through, but so far the state has escaped the severity of damage from mudslides, wind and rain spawned by an atmospheric river only weeks ago.

While the rainfall was focused on Southern California, thunderstorms and strong winds were reported across wide swaths of the state, and mountain snow fell in the north. Some flood watches and warnings were expected to remain in effect into Wednesday.

Heavy downpours flooded streets and sidewalks in San Francisco, and mudslides closed roads to the north and south of the city. The heaviest rain came through the Los Angeles area

Tuesday, with an additional 1 to 2 inches on top of the 2 to 5 inches that fell in recent days, said Bob Oravec, lead forecaster with the National Weather Service in Maryland.

“It’s heavy but not quite as heavy as previously,” he said. “But it’s been a wet month across southern California. The ground is saturated, so any additional rain can bring the chance of flash flooding.”

The LA area has received around 10 inches of rain so far this month, with parts of the coastline and mountain areas farther north receiving more than 1 foot of precipitation, Oravec said.

The upside, he said, is there’s some light at the end of the tunnel: The region isn’t expected to see more rain at least until the following weekend.

2 charged with murder after shooting at Chiefs’ parade

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Two men charged with murder in last week’s shooting after the Kansas City Chiefs’ Super Bowl parade were strangers who pulled out guns and began firing within seconds of starting an argument, according to court documents released Tuesday.

Missouri prosecutors said at a news conference that Lyndell Mays, of Raytown, Mo., and Dominic Miller, of Kansas City, Mo., have been charged with second-degree murder and several weapons counts in the shooting that left one person dead and roughly two dozen others injured.

Both men were shot during the melee. Both have been hospitalized since, Jackson County prosecutor Jean Peters Baker

said during a news conference.

The argument began when two groups of people grew agitated over the belief that people in the other group were staring at them, according to affidavits from police. Surveillance video shows Mays and someone with him aggressively approached the other group, police say.

The video showed Mays was the first to begin shooting despite being surrounded by crowds of people, including children, according to one of the affidavits.

When investigators told Miller they had video of him chasing someone in Mays’ group and shooting, Miller admitted to firing four to five shots, the affidavit said. A bullet from Miller’s gun killed Lisa Lopez-Galvan, officials said Tuesday.

Trump compares indictments to imprisonment, Navalny death

Associated Press

GREENVILLE, S.C. — Donald Trump doubled down Tuesday on comparing his criminal indictments with the circumstances of Russian dissident Alexei Navalny, the top political opponent of Russia's autocratic leader Vladimir Putin who died in a remote arctic prison after being jailed by the Kremlin leader.

Appearing on a Fox News Channel town hall pre-taped before a live audience in Greenville, S.C., Trump bemoaned Navalny's death, which President Joe Biden and other Western leaders have blamed on Putin.

Trump then pivoted to himself, repeating his assertions that the prosecutions against him are driven by politics despite no evidence that Biden or the White House ordered them.

"Navalny is a very sad situation and he's very brave, he was a very brave guy," Trump said

in response to a question from Fox News Channel's Laura Ingraham. "He went back, he could have stayed away, and frankly probably would have been a lot better off staying away and talking from outside of the country as opposed to having to go back in, because people thought that could happen, and it did happen.

"And it's a horrible thing, but it's happening in our country, too," Trump continued, suggesting his criminal indictments — which include two cases stemming from his efforts to overturn his 2020 defeat — are proof that the U.S. is "turning into a communist country in many ways."

"I got indicted four times ... all because of the fact that I'm in politics," Trump said. "They indicted me on things that are so ridiculous."

He extended the comparison to his loss in a civil fraud trial last week, in which a New York

judge ordered Trump to pay \$355 million in penalties after finding he lied about his wealth for years. With interest, Trump owes the state about \$454 million.

"It is a form of Navalny," Trump said. "It is a form of communism, of fascism."

He did not give a clear answer when asked whether he would post a bond covering the judgment, which is one way he'd be able to avoid having to pay the full amount while he appeals.

Trump made no mention of Putin, part of his long-standing pattern of refusing to denounce and often complimenting the Russian leader going back to when he was in the White House. But his remarks come as House Republicans have refused to provide more funding to Ukraine in its defense against Russia's invasion and as many in the Republican Party grow more accepting of Russian expansionism.

Biden says money for Ukraine benefits US

Associated Press

MESQUITE, Texas — At a construction site outside of Dallas, there are hopes that Congress can finally pass nearly \$95 billion in foreign aid including funding for Ukraine — because factory jobs in the United States depend on that money.

Aerospace and defense company General Dynamics' new factory in the Dallas suburb of Mesquite is expected to initially employ 150 people to produce munitions. Set to open in June, construction is nearing completion, with newly planted trees and shrubs already in place at the complex overlooking one of the area's busiest interstates.

"We want to increase our wages and increase our skill levels and job opportunities," said Kim Buttram, Mesquite's director of economic development, who added that the factory is expected to have over 300 jobs when it's at full production.

As President Joe Biden pushes House Republicans to pass needed aid, he wants voters to understand that nearly two-thirds — or nearly \$40 billion — of the money for Ukraine would actually go to U.S. factories spread out across the country including plants in Lima, Ohio and Scranton, Pennsylvania as well as Mesquite.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has refused to put the bill up for a vote on the House floor on the premise that it does not meet the needs of the American public.

The supplemental spending measure contains a total of \$95 billion in foreign aid, including money for Ukraine, Israel and other countries. Of the \$60.7 billion for Ukraine, \$38.8 billion would go to U.S. factories that make missiles, munitions and other gear.

Ex-FBI informant charged with lying about Bidens had Russian contacts

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — A former FBI informant charged with making up a multimillion-dollar bribery scheme involving President Joe Biden, his son Hunter and a Ukrainian energy company had contacts with Russian intelligence-affiliated officials, prosecutors said Tuesday.

Prosecutors revealed the alleged contact as they urged a judge in Las Vegas to keep Alexander Smirnov behind bars while he awaits trial. But U.S. Magistrate Judge Daniel Albrechts allowed Smirnov to be released from custody on electronic GPS monitoring.

He is accused of falsely tell-

ing his FBI handler that executives with the Ukrainian energy company Burisma paid Hunter and Joe Biden \$5 million each around 2015 — a claim that became central to the Republican impeachment inquiry in Congress.

Smirnov, 43, hid his face and did not speak to reporters Tuesday night when he walked out of the courthouse with his lawyers and girlfriend at his side. He wore a GPS monitor on his left ankle and had changed into street clothes and out of the yellow jail garb he had worn in court.

Defense attorney David Chesnoff said he looks forward

to defending Smirnov at trial.

According to prosecutors, Smirnov admitted in an interview after his arrest last week that "officials associated with Russian intelligence were involved in passing a story" about Hunter Biden.

They said Smirnov's contacts with Russian officials were recent and extensive, and said Smirnov had planned to meet with one official during an upcoming overseas trip.

Prosecutors said Smirnov falsely reported to the FBI in June 2020 that executives associated with Burisma paid millions of dollars to Hunter and Joe Biden in 2015 or 2016.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

2 found dead in college dorm, student arrested

CO DENVER — A student was arrested Monday on murder charges over the shootings of two people who were found dead in a dorm room last week at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs, police said.

The Colorado Springs Police Department said they arrested Nicholas Jordan, 25, without incident on two counts of first-degree murder. Jordan was a student at the school at the time of the shooting, said university spokesperson Jenna Press.

The victims were identified as Celie Rain Montgomery, 26, and Samuel Knopp, 24, a student at the university about 69 miles south of Denver. Montgomery was not currently enrolled.

Friday's shooting appeared to be an "isolated incident" between people who knew each other, not a random attack at the school, police said. While the coroner's office will determine how they died, each victim was shot at least once, police previously said.

Court rejects appeal over \$500 mask fines

DC WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Tuesday rejected appeals from three Republican U.S. House members who challenged fines for not wearing face coverings on the House floor in 2021.

The justices did not comment on leaving in place \$500 fines issued in May 2021 to U.S. Reps. Marjorie Taylor Greene of

Georgia, Thomas Massie of Kentucky, and Ralph Norman of South Carolina.

The mask requirement was part of the House's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the mandate remained in place even after the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued guidance noting that "fully vaccinated people can resume activities without wearing a mask or physically distancing."

Hiker rescued from mountain after 10 hours

NH SARGENT'S PURCHASE — A team of rescuers used the Cog Railway to shave off time but it still took more than 10 hours to save a hiker in conditions that included sustained winds topping 90 mph on New Hampshire's Mount Washington, officials said.

The hiker from Portsmouth, N.H., didn't have appropriate gear for the difficult winter conditions and continued his solo trek after he saw other groups turn around because of the dangerous gusts and wind chill of minus-52 degrees Fahrenheit, Sgt. Glen Lucas, a New Hampshire Fish and Game conservation officer, said in a statement.

The hiker reported that he'd fallen and global positioning coordinates showed he was in a ravine at approximately 4,500 feet of elevation at close to noon on Saturday, Lucas said.

Rescuers spent more than three hours warming the hypothermic hiker — stripping off his frozen clothing and equipping him with new gear — after he was eventually located in an emergency shelter near the the

Lake of the Clouds Hut operated by the Appalachian Mountain Club. The hiker was returned to his vehicle at close to midnight, Lucas said.

Probe of drugs delivered by drone nets 11 arrests

WV WELCH — Eleven suspects have been arrested in an investigation into illegal drugs allegedly delivered by drones into a federal prison in southern West Virginia. Another man under investigation who fled officers was later found dead, authorities said.

McDowell County Sheriff James Muncy said his office was contacted in November by officials at the medium-security Federal Correctional Institution, McDowell in Welch to help with increased drone use in the area. In December, the sheriff's office started receiving multiple tips about drone deliveries.

Muncy said in a statement Friday that the arrests were made from mid-December through early February. The charges included introduction or attempts to introduce contraband into a correctional facility, possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, unlawfully operating a drone, terroristic acts and felony conspiracy. Muncy didn't say what drugs were allegedly flown into the facility or whether any of those arrested are inmates.

High school asks National Guard to restore order

MA BROCKTON — Officials have asked Gov. Maura Healey to send in the Massachusetts National Guard to stop violence and ad-

dress security concerns at a troubled high school in a city south of Boston, some school committee members said Monday.

Four of the seven members of the Brockton School Committee backed the National Guard request amid teacher shortages and budget deficits, but city officials weren't unanimous in their support. The governor's office acknowledged the concerns about Brockton High School, where teachers reported fighting and drug use in the hallways, and verbal abuse of staff.

Brockton Mayor Robert Sullivan, who serves as chair of the school committee, said he forwarded the request to the governor on Friday, even though he opposed it. "National Guard soldiers are not the answer," he said.

D.C. United fans protest trip to Saudi Arabia

DC WASHINGTON — Five D.C. United fan groups said Monday they'll remain quiet for the first four matches this season to protest the Major League Soccer team's partnership with Saudi Arabia.

D.C. United took a preseason trip to the Middle Eastern country, playing four exhibition games there from Jan. 30 to Feb. 9.

In a joint statement, the groups said they will refrain from banging drums or bringing flags and banners as a sign of protest.

"The club's stated values of being 'relentless, deliberate and decisive' must also include a deliberate respect for human rights," the groups said in a post on social media.

— From wire reports

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GMs in no rush to sign big free agents available

Associated Press

GLENDALE, Ariz. — Cleveland's new manager, Stephen Vogt, isn't sure why this year's free-agent market has entered a deep freeze even as temperatures heat up during spring training in Arizona and Florida.

He just wants to see it thaw as quickly as possible.

"Those guys should be in camp," Vogt said. "I don't know who is at fault, I don't know why, I don't need to know. But our game's at its best when the best players are on the field.

"I hope those guys sign soon."

The guys Vogt is referring to are a half-dozen high-quality free agents who remain unsigned as the calendar nears March.

The résumés are impressive: two-time Cy Young Award-winning lefty Blake Snell, former MVP Cody Bellinger, six-time All-Star J.D. Martinez, four-time Gold Glove third baseman Matt Chapman, two-time All-Star shortstop Tim Anderson and left-hander Jordan Montgomery, who helped the Rangers to a World Series title last fall.

Vogt — of course — doesn't make front-office decisions. Fifteen of the 30 general managers who do, however, were at Cactus League media day on Tuesday.

Nobody seemed particularly desperate to make moves.

"It ebbs and flows, but there have been years, like I remember I was in Cleveland, and we signed Nick Swisher and Michael Bourn late in camp," Cubs general manager Carter Hawkins said. "So it's not out of the ordinary."

This year's free-agent market peaked in December, when the Los Angeles Dodgers spent more than \$1 billion to sign two-way superstar Shohei Ohtani and right-handed pitcher Yoshinobu Yamamoto. The defending National League champion Arizona Diamondbacks were also among the teams active early, signing lefty Eduardo Rodriguez to an \$80 million, four-year deal.

D-backs general manager Mike Hazen said he didn't want to speculate on other teams' strategies.

"I can't answer for everybody else," Hazen said. "I feel like we've made a decent amount of transactions. We're looking to help build our team any way we can and we've ended up getting a couple of deals done."

The Los Angeles Angels and San Diego Padres are two teams that have spent big in the past, but seem to be taking a more cautious approach in 2024. The Boston Red Sox have been fairly quiet, too, and third baseman Rafael Devers said Tuesday that his team could use some help.

"Everybody has a different perspective," Angels GM Perry Minasian said. "Every offseason is different. I don't think there's any offseason that's the same, because it's a different pool of players. For me, we're worried about what we have, not what we don't have."

The Padres had the third-highest payroll in baseball last season at \$258 million, but finished 82-80 and missed the playoffs. The franchise has been in cost-cutting mode since then. San Diego still has a talented

roster with a lineup that includes Fernando Tatis Jr., Manny Machado and Xander Bogaerts. General manager A.J. Preller seems content to see where that group leads the Padres this summer, even though the team hasn't ruled out adding players.

"That's a pretty good place to start," Preller said. "From our standpoint, it's a good foundation."

The 39-year-old Vogt is just two seasons removed from his 10-year playing career and has some personal experience with late signings. He signed with the Giants just as spring training began in 2019 and signed with the A's a week before the season started in 2022.

"It's weird," Vogt said. "You feel like you've got to hurry up and get there. You feel like you've missed the 8-ball. You believe you're going to get a job, but there's also that 'What if I never get the call?' It can weigh on you.

"There's a lot of good players out there who are probably thinking the same thing."

Blue Jays slugger Guerrero focused on offseason prep

Associated Press

DUNEDIN, Fla. — Vladimir Guerrero Jr. was the big winner earlier this month in salary arbitration.

Now the Toronto Blue Jays slugger feels that his hard work during the offseason will propel him to a big season on the field.

"I believe I had a great offseason," Guerrero said through an interpreter after the Blue Jays' first full-squad workout on Tuesday. "I achieved all the goals that I wanted to achieve. Being in shape like I used to be before previous years, and I really believe that I achieved that goal. I feel great right now."

Guerrero won a record \$19.9 million in salary arbitration when a three-person panel picked his request rather than the Toronto Blue Jays' \$18.05 million offer.

A three-time All-Star first baseman, Guerrero hit .264 with 26 homers and 94 RBIs last year, when he had a \$14.5 million

salary. He is eligible for free agency after the 2025 season.

Guerrero acknowledged he played in pain during a lot of games, but he blamed himself for that. He was slowed by issues with his right knee and left wrist.

"That's not an excuse," he said. "Sometimes you got to go on the field and grind it even when everything hurts. Also, I probably will blame that because I didn't have the best preparation in the offseason last year."

When asked specifically what hurt, Guerrero smiled and said, "from head to toe."

"Stay healthy through the season," Guerrero said. "Making sure that every time I take the field, I go out there painless so I can give 100% to my team, my teammates."

Guerrero feels like he did before what is considered to be his best season, 2021, when he tied for the major league lead with 48 home runs and hit .311 with 111 RBIs.

Guerrero topped the previous high arbi-

tration awarded from a hearing — the \$14 million Seattle outfielder Teoscar Hernández received last year. He has no bitterness about progress.

"It was a new experience for me, of course," Guerrero said. "But I don't feel bad at all. I understand this as part of the business. No hard feelings."

A son of Hall of Famer Vladimir Guerrero, the younger Guerrero turns 25 next month. He has a .279 average with 130 homers and 404 RBIs in five seasons with the Blue Jays.

"I think, obviously, he's in great shape physically and it allows him to be a little bit more durable and be a little bit more, you know, fresh every single day," Toronto manager John Schneider said. "He plays a ton, so I think really kind of just taking ownership of that this offseason and showing up the way he did is exactly what we were hoping for."

Creighton snaps No. 1 UConn's streak

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Creighton went into its game against UConn having lost all six of its previous meetings with No. 1-ranked teams by at least 10 points.

The No. 15 Bluejays finally broke through on their seventh try, building a double-digit lead in the first half and knocking off the Huskies 85-66 Tuesday night.

“We played a really good game and we beat an incredible team, a team that has a legitimate chance to win a national championship,” Creighton coach Greg McDermott said. “But we’re pretty good as well.”

Creighton (20-7, 10-6 Big East) led by 23 points with 10 minutes left but saw its lead cut to 10 before holding the defending national champions scoreless on five straight possessions, rebuilding their cushion and prompting students to leave their seats to prepare to storm the court — which they did as soon as the buzzer sounded.

UConn (24-3, 14-2) had its 14-game winning streak end three days after it beat then-No. 4 Marquette by 28 points for one of the most impressive victories of the season — and one day after it was voted as the first unanimous No. 1 this season.

“It kind of felt like we just ran into a buzz saw there,” UConn coach Danny Hurley said.

Steven Ashworth scored 16 of his 20 points in the first half, Trey Alexander finished with 16 points and Ryan Kalkbrenner added 15. The Bluejays made 14 of 28 3-pointers. They were just 6-for-26 on 3s in their 62-48 loss at UConn last month.

“When I watched that Marquette-UConn game, I’ve got to admit I wasn’t feeling warm and fuzzy about our chances,” McDermott said.

Conditions seemed right for the Bluejays. They came into the game off a pair of 22-point wins and on a three-game winning streak, McDermott said his team’s offensive flow has been as good as it’s been all season,

and a rowdy sellout crowd was on hand.

The Huskies were playing their third game in seven days, and Hurley said his players’ body language wasn’t good in team huddles once the Bluejays took the lead and built on it.

“We’ve had a great run, but it just kind of felt like today we ran into them playing great and us not playing as well as we need to here in Omaha,” Hurley said. “We were definitely stunned. We knew this was a dangerous game.”

UConn’s Tristen Newton scored 17 of his 27 points in the second half, including 10 during the 18-5 spurt that helped pull the Huskies within 74-64.

The Huskies made a season-low three 3s on 16 attempts. They had come into the game off a Big East-record three straight wins by at least 25 points.

The Bluejays made just two of their first nine shots, trailed by eight points early and had leading scorer Baylor Scheierman on the bench for eight minutes in

the first half after he picked up two fouls. He finished with 12 points.

The Huskies had problems of their own. Donovan Clingan, their 7-foot-2, 280-pound center, was called for two quick fouls and played just 11 minutes in the half, and UConn went through a 2-for-10 spell while Creighton was finding its rhythm.

A few big shots from reserves Francisco Farabello and Jasen Green sparked an 18-2 run. Farabello made two straight 3s and Green hit one from the corner to wipe out the Huskies’ lead.

Then Ashworth struck from over 30 feet to begin a personal run of 13 straight points for the Bluejays, who made 14 of their last 19 shots of the half and went to the locker room with a 43-29 lead.

“When you’re in your home gym, there’s a feeling of confidence, and the fans were a huge part of that,” Ashworth said. “Definitely a home-court advantage, and in that first half we got on a little bit of a heater.”

Saint Mary's extends longest active win streak to 14

Associated Press

MORAGA, Calif. — Mitchell Saxen scored 20 points, Alex Ducas added 18 and No. 18 Saint Mary’s extended the longest active winning streak in the nation to 14 straight games with a 70-66 victory over San Francisco on Tuesday night.

The Gaels (22-6, 13-0 West Coast Conference) remained the only team in the country unbeaten in conference play but it didn’t come easy against their cross-bay rivals.

They overcame a four-point deficit late and snapped a six-game winning streak for the Dons (21-7, 10-3).

“It really just gets down to toughness and physicality,” Saxen said. “We’ve been in that spot before, down four late in

the second half early in the season and haven’t gotten things done. But we showed a lot of maturity as a team and stayed on our front foot, stayed aggressive and had a ton of belief in each other and pulled it out.”

Aidan Mahaney added 12 points, including a key 3-pointer late that needed a replay review to count after officials originally ruled it was tipped in after bouncing high off the rim.

The Gaels won the game with their physicality, outrebounding the Dons 36-23 and getting to the foul line 32 times.

“When you go plus-13 (rebounding) in a tight game like that, that does lead to fouls,” Saint Mary’s coach Randy Bennett said. “That does lead to get to the free-throw line and we

did. I would say that’s the best thing we did tonight.”

No. 5 Tennessee 72, Missouri 67: Dalton Knecht scored 15 of his 17 points in the second half, Tobe Awaka had 18 points and 10 rebounds, and the visiting Volunteers overcame a slow start to beat the Tigers.

Jonas Aidoo added 14 points and Zakai Zeigler 10 as Tennessee (20-6, 10-3), which trailed by seven in second half before rallying, closed within a half game of No. 13 Alabama in the conference race.

No. 25 BYU 78, No. 11 Baylor 71: Aly Khalifa had 14 points, seven assists and seven rebounds to lead the Cougars to their third home victory over a Top 25 opponent this season.

Jaxson Robinson scored 16

points and Trevin Knell added 13 for BYU (19-7, 7-6 Big 12).

Jalen Bridges finished with 15 points and eight rebounds to lead Baylor (19-7, 8-5).

Utah State 68, No. 19 San Diego State 63: Darius Brown II scored a season-high 25 points and the host Aggies took sole possession of first place in the Mountain West Conference.

Great Osobor had 17 points and seven assists for Utah State (22-5, 10-4).

Jaedon LeDee scored 23 points for the Aztecs (20-7, 9-5).

No. 23 Texas Tech 82, TCU 81: Pop Isaacs scored 19 points and put the host Red Raiders ahead to stay with a three-point play with 39 seconds remaining after they had rallied from a double-digit deficit.

Panthers move into first place in East

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Anton Lundell scored 1:36 into overtime and the Florida Panthers beat the Ottawa Senators 3-2 on Tuesday night to jump over the idle Boston Bruins and into the top spot in the Eastern Conference.

Aaron Ekblad and Brandon Montour also scored while Sergei Bobrovsky made 28 saves in the Panthers' sixth straight victory.

Thomas Chabot and Tim Stutzle scored for the Senators while Joonas Korpisalo stopped 31 shots in Ottawa's third loss in its past four games.

Ekblad missed Saturday's 9-2 Panthers win against the Tampa Bay Lightning with a lower-body injury, then promptly scored 19 seconds into his return to the lineup.

Avalanche 3, Canucks 1: Ryan Johansen broke out of a scoring slump with two goals, Alexandar Georgiev stopped 24 shots and host Colorado beat NHL-leading Vancouver.

Johansen tied the game in the second period and scored the go-ahead goal early in the third for his first goals since Dec. 29. Artturi Lehkonen sealed it with an empty-net goal with 27.6 seconds remaining.

Nathan MacKinnon had an assist on Lehkonen's goal, giving him at least a point in all 27 home games this season.

J.T. Miller had a goal for a Canucks team that's dropped three games in a row for the first time this season, and Thatcher Demko made 24 saves.

Islanders 5, Penguins 4 (OT): Adam Pelech beat Alex Nedeljkovic 57 seconds into overtime to lift visiting New York past skidding Pittsburgh.

Pelech's winner was his first goal since last April as the Islanders recovered in the extra period after squandering a late lead.

Brock Nelson, Mathew Barzal, Simon Holmstrom and Mike Reilly also scored for the Islanders and Ilya Sorokin stopped 37 shots.

Valtteri Puustinen and Drew O'Connor scored 54 seconds apart in the third period as the Penguins erased a two-goal deficit. Marcus Pettersson and Lars Eller also scored for Pittsburgh, which is 1-4-1 in its last six games. Nedeljkovic made 28 saves.

Predators 5, Golden Knights 3: Tommy Novak scored his fourth goal in five games and visiting Nashville defeated Vegas.

Luke Evangelista, former Knight Cody Glass, Cole Smith and Gustav Nyquist also scored for the Predators. Roman Josi and Ryan McDonagh each had two assists for Nashville. In his first start since Jan. 27, Kevin Lankinen stopped 23 shots.

The victory marked the first time the Predators have won consecutive games since Jan. 12 and 13.

Alex Pietrangelo, William Karlsson and Michael Amadio scored for the Golden Knights. Adin Hill made 35 stops.

Capitals 6, Devils 2: Alex Ovechkin and Connor McMichael each scored twice, and host Washington beat New Jersey to boost the team's playoff chances and deal its division rival a tough blow in its pursuit.

Ovechkin's goals give him 838 in his NHL career. He has 16 this season, eight in the past eight games to reignite talk of him breaking Wayne Gretzky's record.

Charlie Lindgren made 37 saves, and Dylan Strome and Michael Sgarbossa scored as Washington won a second consecutive game.

Alexander Holtz scored late in the first for New Jersey and Erik Haula added a goal late in the third. Nico Daws allowed six goals on 26 shots.

Jets 6, Wild 3: Gabriel Vilardi scored twice and added an assist as host Winnipeg ended Minnesota's six-game point streak.

Kyle Connor had a goal and pair of assists, while Mason Appleton, Sean Monahan and Nino Niederreiter also scored for the Jets, who rebounded from a 6-3 Monday loss to the Calgary Flames.

Adam Lowry and Dylan DeMelo each contributed a pair of assists. Laurent Brossoit made 36 saves for Winnipeg.

Marco Rossi scored twice and Kirill Kaprizov notched a goal and assist for the Wild. Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 24 of the 29 shots he faced for Minnesota, which is 5-1-1 in its last seven games.

Rangers 3, Stars 1: Igor Shesterkin made 41 saves and host New York beat Dallas for its eighth straight win.

Adam Fox, Kaapo Kakko and Vincent Trocheck scored for the Rangers in the matchup of division leaders.

Miro Heiskanen scored for Dallas, which lost for the second time in two days. The Stars lost to the Boston Bruins 4-3 on Monday in a shootout.

Kings 5, Blue Jackets 1: Quinton Byfield had a highlight-reel goal, Pierre-Luc Dubois had his second two-goal game of the season and host Los Angeles extended its winning streak to four with a victory over Columbus.

Byfield, who also had an assist, has six goals and 12 points in his last 10 games. Dubois has had a disappointing year with the Kings after being acquired in an offseason trade from Winnipeg, but has three goals and six points in the last six games.

Drew Doughty and Kevin Fiala also scored for the Kings, who have won five of six since Jim Hiller took over as interim coach. Cam Talbot stopped 33 shots.

Nets name Ollie interim coach, try to salvage season

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Brooklyn Nets general manager Sean Marks hasn't given up on his team making the playoffs this season, and now Kevin Ollie will be tasked with leading it there.

Ollie was named Tuesday as Brooklyn's interim coach, replacing Jacque Vaughn, who was fired a day earlier.

The Nets are 11th in the Eastern Conference standings, 2½ games behind Atlanta for the final play-in spot with 28 games re-

maining. Marks said the decision to replace Vaughn with Ollie during the All-Star break was based on "the direction of the team and where it's potentially trending."

Marks spoke with reporters for almost 20 minutes prior to the team's practice Tuesday night, its first under Ollie, who joined the Nets' staff as an assistant ahead of this season.

"He's always carried a great voice in there. He's very direct with the players. He does hold them accountable," Marks said. "I think what makes a good coach is to be able to put

yourself in those players' shoes, be able to tell great stories and be brutally honest with guys and I think those are attributes that Kevin absolutely has."

The 51-year-old Ollie played 13 NBA seasons and led UConn to an NCAA title a decade ago. Ollie coached UConn from 2012-18. The Los Angeles native then spent two years (2021-23) as head of coaching and basketball development for Overtime Elite, a developmental league for young players, before joining the Nets.