

## Airman set self on fire in protest of Israel

By J.P. LAWRENCE  
*Stars and Stripes*

An airman who set himself on fire outside the Israeli Embassy in Washington has died, police and Air Force statements said Monday.

Aaron Bushnell, 25, died after being transported to a local hospital, the Metropolitan Police Department said in an email. Bushnell in a livestreamed video appeared to douse himself in accelerant Sunday at 1 p.m. before igniting the fire.

Bushnell said in his video that he was protesting U.S. support for Israel's offensive against Hamas.

The person involved in the incident was an active-duty airman, Rose Riley, an Air Force spokeswoman, confirmed Monday in a statement. A military directory

lists Bushnell as a senior airman.

Police are working with the U.S. Secret Service and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to investigate the incident, the police statement said Monday.

Metropolitan Police in an earlier statement said its officers had responded to the scene outside the Israeli Embassy to assist U.S. Secret Service officers and that its bomb squad also had been called to examine a suspicious vehicle. Police said no hazardous materials were found in the vehicle.

Bushnell's video was livestreamed on Twitch, which said it had suspended his channel for violating the platform's community guidelines.

A LinkedIn profile with a picture matching Bushnell's other

social media accounts says he was in the Air Force for almost four years, with a specialty in computer information systems.

Bushnell's act is the second-known instance of self-immolation in America over the Israel-Hamas war. In December, a person set their body ablaze outside the Israeli consulate in Atlanta and used gasoline as an accelerant, according to Atlanta's fire authorities. A Palestinian flag was found at the scene, and the act was believed to be one of "extreme political protest."

In the video, Bushnell described his protest in similar terms.

"I will no longer be complicit in genocide," Bushnell said in his video.

The war began Oct. 7, when Hamas killed 1,200 Israelis and

took about 200 hostages. The Gaza health ministry operated under Hamas says that more than 29,000 people have died in the ensuing Israeli offensive. The figure does not differentiate between fighters and civilians.

Bushnell's death happened as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is seeking Cabinet approval for a military operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah while a temporary cease-fire deal is being negotiated.

Israel's military offensive in Gaza has drawn criticism, including genocide allegations against the country brought by South Africa to the International Court of Justice. Israel has adamantly denied the genocide allegations and says it is carrying out operations in accordance with international law.

## Hungary's parliament votes to ratify Sweden's NATO bid

*Associated Press*

BUDAPEST, Hungary — Hungary's parliament voted Monday to ratify Sweden's bid to join NATO, bringing an end to more than 18 months of delays that have frustrated the alliance as it seeks to expand in response to Russia's war in Ukraine.

The vote, which passed with 188 votes for and six against, came as a culmination of months of wrangling by Hungary's allies to convince its nationalist government to lift its block on Sweden's membership. The government of Prime Minister Viktor Orban submitted the protocols for approving Sweden's entry into NATO in July 2022, but the matter had stalled in parliament over opposition by governing party lawmakers.

Unanimous support among all NATO members is required to

admit new countries, and Hungary is the last of the alliance's 31 members to give its backing since Turkey ratified the request last month.

Orban, a right-wing populist who has forged close ties with Russia, has said that criticism of Hungary's democracy by Swedish politicians had soured relations between the two countries and led to reluctance among lawmakers in his Fidesz party.

But the vote on Monday removed the final membership hurdle for Sweden, which along with neighboring Finland first applied to join the alliance in May 2022.

Addressing lawmakers before the vote, Orban said: "Sweden and Hungary's military cooperation and Sweden's NATO accession strengthen Hungary's security."

Orban criticized Hungary's

European Union and NATO allies for placing increased pressure on his government in recent months to move forward on bringing Sweden into the alliance.

"Several people tried to intervene from the outside in the settling of our disputes (with Sweden), but this did not help but rather hampered the issue," Orban said. "Hungary is a sovereign country, it does not tolerate being dictated by others, whether it be the content of its decisions or their timing."

Last weekend, a bipartisan group of U.S. senators visited Hungary and announced it would submit a joint resolution to Congress condemning Hungary's alleged democratic backsliding and urging Orban's government to immediately lift its block on Sweden's trans-Atlantic integration.

But on Friday, Ulf Kristersson, Sweden's prime minister, met with Orban in Hungary's capital where they appeared to reach a decisive reconciliation after months of diplomatic tensions.

Following their meeting, the leaders announced the conclusion of a defense industry agreement that will include Hungary's purchase of four Swedish-made JAS 39 Gripen jets and the extension of a service contract for its existing Gripen fleet.

Orban said the additional fighter jets will improve Hungary's ability to participate in joint NATO operations.

"To be a member of NATO together with another country means we are ready to die for each other," Orban said. "A deal on defense and military capacities helps to reconstruct the trust between the two countries."

# Navy unveils robotics warfare specialty

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy on Thursday introduced a new enlisted specialty for sailors to operate and maintain current and future unmanned robotic weapons and vehicles.

The Navy established the new robotics warfare, or RW, rating for active-duty sailors who would be charged with planning and controlling robotic systems, which the service considers crucial to future warfighting, according to a Navy announcement. The message described

the new specialty's founding as a "major milestone" in the service's work toward building a hybrid fleet of complementary manned and unmanned vessels and aircraft.

"This dedicated robotics rating will accelerate development of deep expertise in rapidly advancing autonomous technologies," the message reads.

Service officials said it was not yet clear how many sailors would serve in the RW rating. The Navy said it would start as "a small and highly selective rating."

Though the new specialty will be open to sailors ranked E-4 to E-9, the announcement said most chosen for the job would come with experience in unmanned vehicle divisions who have established robotics skills.

Those chosen for RW will join the new specialty after their current assignment is completed or when their current billet is converted to RW, according to a Navy fact sheet about the new specialty.

The Naval Education and Training Command is working to establish a training pipeline

for future RW sailors, according to the fact sheet. The service expects to begin training recruits to serve as robotics warfare sailors by 2026.

The service intends to open up the specialty to Navy reservists at some time in the future, officials said.

Those seeking to join the RW community should submit applications through the Navy's Career Waypoints, or C-WAY, system as soon as possible because "applications will be processed as they are received," according to the service.

## Experts see benefits, perils in military use of ChatGPT

*The Washington Post*

Pentagon officials were hanging onto every word as Matthew Knight, OpenAI's head of security, explained how the latest version of ChatGPT had succeeded in deciphering cryptic conversations within a Russian hacking group, a task that human analysts had found challenging.

"These logs were in Russian shorthand internet slang," Knight said. "We had a Russian linguist on our team who had trouble getting through it. You know, a strong Russian speaker. But GPT-4 was able to get through it."

The promises and the perils of advanced artificial-intelligence technologies were on display at a recent Pentagon-organized conclave to examine the future uses of artificial intelligence by the military. Government and industry officials discussed how tools like large language models, or LLMs, could be used to help maintain the U.S. government's strategic lead over rivals — especially China.

In addition to OpenAI, Amazon and Microsoft were among

the companies demonstrating their technologies.

Not all of the issues raised were positive. Some speakers urged caution in deploying systems that researchers are still working to fully understand.

"There is a looming concern over potential catastrophic accidents due to AI malfunction, and risk of substantial damage from adversarial attack targeting AI," South Korean Army Lt. Col. Kangmin Kim said at the symposium. "Therefore, it is of paramount importance that we meticulously evaluate AI weapon systems from the developmental stage."

He told Pentagon officials that they needed to address the issue of "accountability in the event of accidents."

Craig Martell, head of the Pentagon's Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office, or CDAO, told reporters Thursday that he's aware of such concerns.

"I would say we're cranking too fast if we ship things that we don't know how to evaluate," he said. "I don't think we should ship things that we don't know how to evaluate."

Though LLMs like ChatGPT are known to the public as chatbots, industry experts have said chatting is not likely to be how the military would use them.

They're more likely to be used to complete tasks that would take too long or be too complicated if done by human beings.

That means they'd probably be wielded by trained practitioners using them to harness powerful computers.

"Chat is a dead end," said Shyam Sankar, chief technology officer of Palantir Technologies, a Pentagon contractor. "Instead, we reimagine LLMs and the prompts as being for developers, not for the end users. ... It changes what you would even use them for."

Looming in the symposium's background was the United States' technological race against China, which has growing echoes of the Cold War.

The U.S. remains solidly in the lead on AI, researchers said, with Washington having hobbled Beijing's progress through a series of sanctions. But U.S. officials worry that

China may have already reached sufficient AI proficiency to boost its intelligence-gathering and military capabilities.

Pentagon leaders were reluctant to discuss China's AI level when asked several times by members of the audience, but some of the industry experts invited to speak were willing to take a swing at the question.

Alexandr Wang, CEO of San Francisco-based Scale AI, which is working with the Pentagon on AI, said Thursday that China had been far behind the U.S. in LLMs just a few years ago, but had closed much of that gap through billions of dollars in investments.

He said the U.S. looks poised to stay in the lead, unless it made unforced errors like failing to invest enough in AI applications or deploying LLMs in the wrong scenarios.

"This is an area where we, the United States, should win," Wang said. "If we try to utilize the technology in scenarios where it's not fit to be used, then we're going to fall down. We're going to shoot ourselves in the foot."

# Biden summons leaders for Ukraine aid, funding meeting

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden will convene the top four congressional leaders at the White House on Tuesday to press lawmakers on passing an emergency aid package for Ukraine and Israel, as well as averting a looming government shutdown next month, according to a White House official.

The top four leaders include House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. During the meeting, the president will discuss the “urgency” of passing the aid package, which has bipartisan support, as well as legislation to keep the federal government operating through the end of September, said the White House official, who was granted anonymity to discuss a meeting not yet publicly confirmed.

The Republican-led House is

under pressure to pass the \$95 billion national security package that bolsters aid for Ukraine, Israel as well as the Indo-Pacific. That legislation cleared the Senate on a 70-29 vote earlier this month, but Johnson has been resistant to putting up the aid bill for a vote in the House.

“This is one of those instances where one person can bend the course of history. Speaker Johnson, if he put this bill on the floor, would produce a strong, bipartisan majority vote in favor of the aid to Ukraine,” Jake Sullivan, the White House national security adviser, said Sunday on ABC’s “This Week.” Sullivan stressed that Ukrainians need weapons and ammunition to fend off Russian forces, and that in his personal conversations with the speaker, he “has indicated that he would like to get the funding for Ukraine.”

Separate from the national security package, the first tranche of government funding is due to

expire Friday. The rest of the federal government, including agencies such as the Pentagon, Department of Homeland Security and the State Department, expires on March 8.

In a letter to his colleagues sent Sunday, Schumer said there was not yet an agreement to avoid a partial shutdown of the agencies whose funding expires this week. That includes the departments of Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, Agriculture and Veterans Affairs.

“While we had hoped to have legislation ready this weekend that would give ample time for members to review the text, it is clear now that House Republicans need more time to sort themselves out,” Schumer wrote in the letter. The Senate majority leader called on Johnson to “step up to once again buck the extremists in his caucus and do the right thing” by greenlighting funding to keep the government open.

# Alabama lawmakers look to fix IVF issue

*Associated Press*

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Lawmakers began scrambling for ways to protect Alabama in vitro fertilization services after multiple providers paused treatment in the wake of a state Supreme Court ruling that frozen embryos could be considered children under a state law.

Facing a wave of shock and anger from the decision, legislators prepared separate proposals in the House and Senate that would seek to prevent a fertilized egg from being recognized as a human life or an unborn child under state laws until it is implanted in a woman’s uterus.

Justices ruled last week that three couples who had frozen embryos destroyed in a mishap at a storage facility could pursue wrongful death claims for their “extrauterine children.” Justices cited language that the GOP-controlled Legislature and voters added to the Alabama Constitution in 2018 saying that the state recognizes the “rights of the unborn child.”

Senate Minority Leader Bobby Singleton, a Democrat, said Republicans helped create the situation in their push to enact some of the most stringent anti-abortion laws in the country. The result, he said, was eliminating a path for people to become parents.

“At the end of the day, the Republican Party has to be responsible for what they have done,” Singleton said.

Former President Donald Trump joined the calls for Alabama lawmakers to act Friday and said he would “strongly support the availability of IVF.”

State Republican lawmakers said they were working on a solution.

# Quick dismissal likely as Mayorkas impeachment moves to the Senate

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — For the third time in five years, senators will be sworn in as jurors for an impeachment trial. But the chamber is expected to spend far less time on the charges against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas than the ones brought against former President Donald Trump — or maybe no time at all.

The Republican-controlled House impeached Mayorkas by a single vote margin on Feb. 13, recommending that Mayorkas be removed from office over his

handling of the U.S.-Mexico border. With two articles of impeachment, the House charge that Mayorkas has “willfully and systematically” refused to enforce existing immigration laws and breached the public trust by lying to Congress and saying the border was secure.

Democrats say the charges amount to a policy dispute, not the “high crimes and misdemeanors” laid out as a bar for impeachment in the Constitution.

The 214-213 vote, a narrowly successful second try after the House had rejected the effort a

week earlier, was the first time in nearly 150 years a Cabinet secretary had been impeached. And while the Senate is now obligated to consider the charges, Senate leaders have shown little interest in spending much time on the matter. Two-thirds of the Senate would be needed to convict Mayorkas, and not a single Democrat has signaled support for the impeachment push.

Still, there is a process that senators have to follow under the rules for impeachment, and all Democrats would likely have to stick together to dismiss the charges completely.

# Ukrainian troops pushed back in east

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian troops have pulled out of a village in the east of the country, an army spokesman said Monday, as Russian forces display advantages in manpower and ammunition on the battlefield at the start of the war's third year.

The latest setback for Kyiv's soldiers was in the village of Lastochkyne, where they fell back to nearby villages in an attempt to hold the line there, Dmytro Lykhovii, a spokesman for one of the Ukrainian troop groupings, said on national television.

Lastochkyne lies to the west of Avdiivka, a suburb of Donetsk city that the Kremlin's forces captured on Feb. 18 after a four-month battle. The outnumbered defenders were overwhelmed by Moscow's military might, and Ukraine chose to pull out its troops and mount a defense elsewhere.

Russia's Ministry of Defense said its troops had "liberated"

Lastochkyne.

Russian state-owned news agency RIA Novosti quoted local commander Andrei Mordvichev as saying troops had pushed Ukrainian forces back by 6 miles and were continuing with their offensive. The agency said a key Ukrainian supply route ran through Lastochkyne.

It was not possible to independently verify each side's claims.

Though not in itself a major loss, abandoning the village illustrates the battlefield challenges Ukraine is currently facing.

The new phase of the war has brought some bleak developments for Ukraine.

Moscow's troops are driving on, smashing towns and cities with their superior firepower, despite suffering high losses of troops and equipment, Ukraine says.

Western analysts say the Russians are attacking in strength along four parallel axes in the

northeast, aiming to press deeper into the Ukraine-held western part of the Donetsk region and also penetrating into the Kharkiv region north of it.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustan Umerov complained Sunday that half of promised Western military support to Ukraine fails to arrive on time.

That, he said, makes it hard to undertake proper military planning and ultimately costs the lives of soldiers.

Western leaders have sworn to stand by Ukraine as long as they need to defeat Russia's full-scale invasion of Feb. 24, 2022, and Bulgarian Prime Minister Nikolay Denkov arrived in Kyiv on Monday to show his support.

More than 20 European heads of state and government and other Western officials were due to meet in Paris on Monday to discuss the war at what French President Emmanuel Macron called a "critical" juncture. He says Kyiv needs more military

resources and likely will require them over an extended period of time.

President Joe Biden was also seeking to remove political roadblocks on providing more aid to Ukraine, convening the top four congressional leaders at the White House on Tuesday.

In other developments, Moscow-installed officials in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region claimed that Russian troops had destroyed a U.S.-made Abrams tank for the first time since they were deployed in Ukraine last fall, RIA Novosti reported.

Russia launched seven missiles of various types and 14 Shahed drones over Ukraine early Monday morning. Ukraine's air force said it intercepted nine drones and three missiles.

A guided aerial bomb killed a married couple at home in the northeastern Sumy region of Ukraine, regional authorities said.

# Israel accused of blocking aid to Palestinians in Gaza

*Associated Press*

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — Israel has failed to comply with an order by the United Nations' top court to provide urgently needed aid to desperate people in the Gaza Strip, Human Rights Watch said Monday, a month after a landmark ruling in The Hague ordered Israel to moderate its war.

In a preliminary response to a South African petition accusing Israel of genocide, the U.N.'s top court ordered Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in Gaza. It stopped short of ordering an end to its military offensive that has triggered a humanitarian catastrophe in the tiny Palestinian enclave. Israel vehemently denies the charges against it, saying it is fighting a war in self-defense.

One month later and nearly five months into the war, preparations are underway for Israel to expand its ground operation into Rafah, Gaza's southernmost town along the border with Egypt, where 1.4 million Palestinians have flooded into in search of safety.

Early Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the army had presented to the War Cabinet its operational plan for Rafah as well as plans to evacuate civilians from the battle zones. It gave no further details.

The situation in Rafah, where dense tent camps have sprouted to house the displaced, has sparked global concern and Israel's allies have warned that it must protect civilians in its battle against Hamas.

Also Monday, Palestinian

Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said he was submitting his government's resignation. The move, which still must be accepted by President Mahmoud Abbas, could open the door to U.S.-backed reforms in the Palestinian Authority, which the U.S. wants to rule postwar Gaza but in a revitalized shape.

In its ruling last month, the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to follow six provisional measures, including taking "immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip."

Under the orders, Israel also must submit a report on what it is doing to adhere to the mea-

asures within a month. While Monday marked a month since the court's orders were issued, it was not immediately clear whether Israel had handed in such a report. The Israeli Foreign Ministry had no immediate comment.

Human Rights Watch said Israel was not adhering to the court's order on aid provision, citing a 30% drop in the daily average number of aid trucks entering Gaza in the weeks following the court's ruling. It said Israel was not adequately facilitating fuel deliveries to hard-hit northern Gaza and blamed Israel for blocking aid from reaching the north, where the World Food Program said last week it was forced to suspend aid deliveries because of increasing chaos in the isolated part of the territory.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Man suspected in slaying of woman found in fridge**

**CA** LOS ANGELES — A Minnesota man has been arrested on suspicion of killing a 31-year-old woman who was beaten, bound and stuffed inside the refrigerator at her Los Angeles apartment, authorities said.

The 41-year-old suspect, who was on probation for narcotics offenses, was taken into custody at his home in Minneapolis on an unrelated federal warrant, according to the Los Angeles Police Department. Officials didn't say what led homicide detectives to him.

The man has agreed to be extradited to California to face charges in the slaying of Maleesa Mooney, police said.

Officers found Mooney dead in downtown Los Angeles after her family asked for a welfare check because they hadn't heard from her. Blood was pooling under the refrigerator and the body inside was bound with electrical cords and clothing, according to a coroner's report obtained by ABC 7.

**Death of beloved owl, Flaco, devastates fans**

**NY** NEW YORK — Tributes poured in for Flaco, the beloved Eurasian eagle-owl that became a feel-good New York story after escaping its Central Park Zoo enclosure and flying free around Manhattan.

Flaco was found dead on a New York City sidewalk Friday night after apparently flying into a building. It was a heartbreaking end for the birders who documented the owl's daily

movements and the legions of admirers who eagerly followed along.

"Everybody feels the same, they're devastated," said Nicole Blair, a New York City artist who devoted much of her feed on the X platform to photos and memes featuring the celebrity owl.

Staff from the Wild Bird Fund, a wildlife rehabilitation center, declared Flaco dead shortly after the collision.

Flaco was freed from his cage at the zoo a little over a year ago by a vandal who breached a waist-high fence and cut a hole through a steel mesh cage. The owl had arrived at the zoo as a fledgling 13 years earlier.

Flaco sightings soon became sport. The majestic owl with a nearly 6-foot wingspan spent his days perched on tree branches, fence posts and fire escapes and nights hooting atop water towers and preying on the city's abundant rats.

**Bill: Drivers may refuse to sign tickets, no arrest**

**GA** ATLANTA — Georgia lawmakers are seeking to change state law to say that officers don't have to arrest people who refuse to sign traffic tickets after a church deacon died in August after initially refusing to sign a citation and struggling with an Atlanta police officer.

The state House voted 156-10 to pass House Bill 1054, which removes the requirement for a driver to sign a citation, allowing an officer to instead write that someone refused to sign and then give the driver the ticket.

Under the measure, people who refuse to sign citations

would not be allowed to prepay the ticket and would be required to show up for court. A judge could suspend the driver's license of people who skip court dates.

**Bill eyes defining woman, man based on ova, sperm**

**AL** MONTGOMERY — Alabama lawmakers are advancing legislation that would strictly define who is considered female and male based on their reproductive systems. Opponents said the move could erode the rights of transgender and intersex people in the state.

"There are only two sexes, and every individual is either male or female," declares the Senate bill approved in committee.

It defines sex based on reproductive anatomy and said schools and local governments can establish single-sex spaces, such as bathrooms, based on those definitions.

The bill states that a female is someone who, barring accident or anomaly, has a "reproductive system that at some point produces ova" and male as someone who, barring accident or anomaly, has a "reproductive system that at some point produces sperm."

**Feds: Japan crime boss eyed trafficking nuke item**

**NY** NEW YORK — A leader of a Japan-based crime syndicate conspired to traffic uranium and plutonium from Myanmar in the belief that Iran would use it to make nuclear weapons, U.S. prosecutors alleged.

Takeshi Ebisawa, 60, and his confederates showed samples of nuclear materials that had

been transported from Myanmar to Thailand to an undercover Drug Enforcement Administration agent posing as a narcotics and weapons trafficker who had access to an Iranian general, according to federal officials. The nuclear material was seized and samples were later found to contain uranium and weapons-grade plutonium.

The nuclear material came from an unidentified leader of an "ethnic insurgent group" in Myanmar who had been mining uranium in the country, according to prosecutors.

**Ex-Marine, crypto lawyer to challenge Warren**

**MA** BOSTON — Republican John Deaton, a former U.S. Marine and cryptocurrency attorney, announced that he is challenging Democratic U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren as she runs for her third term in office.

Deaton, who was born in Detroit and recently moved to Massachusetts, released a campaign video highlighting his hardscrabble upbringing, his years in the Marines serving as a judge advocate at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz., and his career as a lawyer in part representing mesothelioma victims.

Deaton cast himself as a fighter for the working and middle classes.

Deaton, a virtual unknown in Massachusetts politics, faces a steep climb against Warren, a former Harvard law professor who has twice won a Senate seat, but came in third in Massachusetts in her 2020 bid for president.

— From wire reports

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# Loyola Chicago back on winning track

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Loyola Chicago was reeling after a rough loss to South Florida early this season when coach Drew Valentine decided to have a heart-to-heart conversation with his team.

That moment of reflection wound up becoming a turning point in the season.

Six years removed from a Final Four run that made a 98-year-old nun a celebrity, Loyola is winning big again. The Ramblers are as hot as any team in the Atlantic 10 and have their sights set on the NCAA Tournament.

Loyola (20-7, 12-2) is tied with Richmond for the league lead, with No. 16 Dayton one game back. It's a welcome change for the Ramblers after finishing last in the Atlantic 10 a year ago following a move from the Missouri Valley Conference. After beating George Mason 80-59 on Saturday, they doubled their win total after going 10-21.

"This program is built on championships," guard Braden Norris said. "It's great ... the turnaround that we've had, but we're here to win a regular-season championship — we're in a

great place — and then go on to Brooklyn and win three games in a row there (in the conference tournament) and then see what we can do in the (NCAA) Tournament. That's our goal."

Things weren't looking so good for Loyola after they "got punked," as Valentine put it, in a lackluster loss at South Florida in mid-December. The Ramblers were 6-5, with losses to two teams ranked in the top 10 at the time in FAU and Creighton. They're 14-2 since have won seven straight.

"I think it was just like a look-in-the-mirror type of moment for us," forward Philip Alston said. "We all kind of just told each other that we were going to really take this to the next level. I think we did."

Loyola remains the only school from Illinois to win the NCAA title, with a team that plowed over racial barriers and captured the prize in 1963. The Ramblers came close again with a Final Four run in 2018, hitting several last-second shots with Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt — now 104 — by their side for their first tournament appearance since 1985.

They returned to the Sweet 16 in 2021 and got back to the

NCAA Tournament the following year, in Valentine's first season after former coach Porter Moser left for Oklahoma.

Valentine obviously had quite an act to follow when, at age 29, Loyola promoted him after four years as an assistant with the Ramblers. They went 25-8 and won the Missouri Valley Tournament in his first year before bottoming out in the Atlantic 10. Loyola struggled to replace star Lucas Williamson, who played on the Final Four team, along with several other key players and went 4-14 in league play last season.

It was, Valentine said, "not fun" and enough to make him question whether he was doing things the right way. His conclusion? He was doing things the right way.

The 32-year-old Valentine played a big role in Loyola's rise as an assistant. He helped recruit some of the Ramblers' best players and basically coordinated a defense that ranked among the nation's stingiest.

Valentine's father Carlton is a successful high school coach in Michigan who played at Michigan State in the 1980s. Younger brother Denzel starred for the Spartans and

went on to the NBA.

"I have such a strong foundation with my beliefs and how I was raised in the game," Drew Valentine said. "So I just doubled down on it. We went to work with our roster and, I think, got our roster to the point where we could be competitive. It also helped that our resources went up; I think you can read between the lines on that. And I think our roster improved because of that. The guys that came back, they believe in this place."

Guard Des Watson could see it when when he made his recruiting visit. He chose to transfer to Loyola over Dayton after two years at Davidson and is averaging a team-leading 13.1 points in his first season with the Ramblers.

"A lot of people were questioning why would I come to Loyola? We beat Loyola last year when I was at Davidson last year. 'Why would you go to that coaching staff?'" Watson said. "There's certain stuff you can just hear in people's voice and you just know. With Drew, I could hear in his voice that he was ready for a switch and he was ready to turn the team into something different."

## No. 3 Purdue overcomes slow start, downs Michigan

Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Zach Edey took advantage of Michigan's attempts to defend him with only one player.

Edey matched his season high with 35 points and had 15 rebounds, helping No. 3 Purdue bounce back from a rough start to beat the Wolverines 84-76 on Sunday.

The 7-foot-4 Edey made 14 of 18 shots and scored 35 points for the third time this season, falling three short of equaling his career high.

The Boilermakers (25-3,

14-3 Big Ten) are closing in on winning a second straight conference championship, building a 2½-game lead over No. 12 Illinois with three regular-season games left on their schedule.

The Wolverines (8-20, 3-14) moved closer to clinching last place in the Big Ten with their fifth straight loss and 10th setback in 11 games under their embattled coach.

Dug McDaniel had 19 points and six assists for the Wolverines, who had four more scorers reach double digits.

**No. 7 Marquette 88, Xavier 64:** Kam Jones celebrated his 22nd birthday by scoring 34 points for a second straight game and the host Golden Eagles trounced the slumping Musketeers.

Tyler Kolek added 11 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds to help Marquette (21-6, 12-4 Big East) win for the 10th time in 11 games. Oso Ighodaro had 12 points and David Joplin got 10.

Xavier (13-14, 7-9) lost its fourth straight. Trey Green scored 16 points, Quincy Oli-

vari 14, Dailyn Swain 11 and Dayvion McKnight 10 for the Musketeers.

**St. John's 80, No. 15 Creighton 66:** Daniss Jenkins scored a season-high 27 points and the host Red Storm shredded the Bluejays for their biggest victory under Hall of Fame coach Rick Pitino.

Jordan Dingle added 18 points and St. John's (16-12, 8-9 Big East) finally closed out a top-quality conference opponent following a string of blown leads.

# Nuggets win, Jokic has 3rd straight triple-double

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Nikola Jokic insists he's not changing anything during his latest run of triple-double dominance, just finding the flow of the game as it comes.

Doing it all for Denver on both ends yet again, Jokic has the defending champions off to a 3-0 start after the All-Star break following a three-game skid right before it.

Jokic had 32 points, 16 rebounds and 16 assists for his third straight triple-double and 18th of the season after his long buzzer-beater against Golden State sealed the last meeting, leading the Nuggets past the Warriors again in a 119-103 victory Sunday night.

"We had three losses before All-Star break. Now we have three wins. It's how the game is, a game of runs. In season you have a good period, bad period, you want to have a longer good period than bad and a short bad period," Jokic said. "I think we are just going in the right direction. That is the most important thing."

Jokic hit a Stephen Curry-like 40-footer as Denver rallied for a 130-127 win at Chase Center on

Jan. 4, then topped Curry and Co. to sweep the four-game season series. On Sunday, Jokic shot 13-for-24 on the way to his 122nd career regular-season triple-double.

Klay Thompson scored 23 points all in the first half and Curry overcame a slow start missing his first seven 3-point tries before finishing with 20 points — all but four scored in the second half. He hit his only 3 with 3:26 left in the third in a 1-for-10 performance from deep. The two-time MVP passed both Dwyane Wade (23,165) for 32nd place and Adrian Dantley (23,177) for 31st on the NBA's scoring list.

**Suns 123, Lakers 113:** Grayson Allen scored 24 points, Kevin Durant added 22 and host Phoenix pulled away late in the fourth quarter to beat Los Angeles.

Allen and Royce O'Neale hit 3-pointers on back-to-back possessions to put the Suns up 116-104 with three minutes left. Jusuf Nurkic added 18 points, 22 rebounds and seven assists.

**Bucks 119, 76ers 98:** Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 30 points, Damian Lillard added 24 and visiting Milwaukee won in

Doc Rivers' return to Philadelphia.

Rivers was fired by Philadelphia after last season. He coached the 76ers from 2020-23, never getting past the second round of the playoffs, and Sunday was his 12th game since taking over in Milwaukee.

**Thunder 123, Rockets 110:** Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 36 points and Chet Holmgren added 29 to lead visiting Oklahoma City past Houston.

The Thunder won their fifth straight to move back into a tie with Minnesota for the Western Conference lead.

**Kings 123, Clippers 107:** De'Aaron Fox scored 33 points, Domantas Sabonis had his NBA-leading 20th triple-double and visiting Sacramento handed Los Angeles its first two-game losing streak since December.

Sabonis finished with 17 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists. Harrison Barnes added 22 points for the Kings, who won their third in a row.

**Hornets 93, Trail Blazers 80:** Nick Richards had 21 points and 10 rebounds and visiting Charlotte took advantage of Portland's horrible 3-point shooting.

Portland was 3-for-32 from 3-

point range, with two of the makes coming in the final minutes. The Trail Blazers missed 23 in a row at one point in dropping their eighth straight to fall to 15-41.

**Pacers 133, Mavericks 111:** Myles Turner scored a season-high 33 points, Tyrese Haliburton had 17 points and 10 assists and host Indiana beat Dallas to snap the Mavericks' seven-game winning streak.

**Hawks 109, Magic 92:** Dejounte Murray had 25 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds, finishing just short of his first triple-double of the season, and host Atlanta beat Orlando to snap a three-game skid.

**Cavaliers 114, Wizards 105:** Jarrett Allen had 22 points and 12 rebounds, Caris LeVert added 18 points and 12 boards and visiting Cleveland beat Washington to avoid its first three-game skid since December.

**Bulls 114, Pelicans 106:** Nikola Vucevic had 22 points and 13 rebounds and visiting Chicago beat New Orleans to sweep the season series.

**Jazz 128, Spurs 109:** Lauri Markkanen scored 26 points and host Utah beat San Antonio to snap a five-game skid.

# Suarez holds off Busch, Blaney in 3-wide NASCAR finish

Associated Press

HAMPTON, Ga.— Daniel Suarez hoped but wasn't certain he was the winner after the closest finish ever at Atlanta Motor Speedway.

Then came the photo evidence: Suarez edged Ryan Blaney and Kyle Busch in a three-wide blur at the line to win a crashed-filled NASCAR Cup Series race Sunday.

The second career win in 253 Cup races for Suarez set off a celebration that included a long series of congratulations from other drivers for the popular native of Monterrey, Mexico.

"It was a very special moment," said Suarez, who entered this contract year with his future seemingly uncertain with Trackhouse Racing.

"I was just hoping. I saw the tower and

thought I was first. I thought I had it but then they said there was a review."

The review confirmed the first win for Suarez since June 2022 at Sonoma. It was his first victory on a speedway, but he said he's not satisfied after locking up a spot in the playoffs in only the second race of the year.

"Some people actually told me you can relax, now you're in the playoffs," Suarez said. "Hell no! My goal is to win more than one race. This is not relaxing here. ... The goal is for you to not be surprised when the 99 is in victory lane."

Busch, who won Saturday's Trucks race, moved to the middle between Blaney, the 2023 Cup champion, and Suarez to set up the dramatic finish. Blaney was second, only 0.003 seconds behind, and Busch was third.

"It was fun racing, but just a couple inches short," Blaney said. "I'm happy for Daniel, though. That was fun racing him and Kyle. That was fun."

Suarez gave credit to Busch, another Chevrolet driver, for providing a late push.

"It's good to see Daniel get a win," Busch said. "We were helping each other being Chevy team partners and working together there. Shows that when you do have friends and you can make alliances that they do seem to work, and that was a good part of today."

A massive pileup of at least 16 cars on the second lap was the biggest in the history of Atlanta Motor Speedway and set the pace for a procession of wrecks. The crash left many cars heavily taped for the remainder of the afternoon.

# Jackets snap Rangers' winning streak

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Jack Roslovic scored a tiebreaking goal in the second period to lift the Columbus Blue Jackets to a 4-2 victory over New York on Sunday night, snapping the Rangers' franchise record-tying 10-game winning streak.

Dmitri Voronkov and Kirill Marchenko each had a goal and an assist, Ivan Provorov also scored, and Johnny Gaudreau had two assists for Columbus, which had lost three straight at home. Elvis Merzlikins stopped 38 shots as the Blue Jackets won the opener of the teams' home-and-home set that concludes Wednesday in New York.

"We played a real smart hockey game," Blue Jackets coach Pascale Vincent said. "Their transition game is so good. They use the full length of the ice in the offensive zone. Our guys were ready."

Artemi Panarin and Adam Edstrom scored, and Jonathan Quick stopped 37 shots for the Rangers, who lost for the first time since Jan. 26. They still lead the Metropolitan Division with 81 points — seven ahead of second-place Carolina.

"They came at us with a lot of speed," Rangers coach Peter Laviolette said. "They'd get behind us with odd-man rushes. It wasn't one or two — it was too many — and we couldn't capitalize at the other end. That was the difference in the game."

**Red Wings 3, Blackhawks 2 (OT):** Patrick Kane scored on a breakaway 1:43 into overtime in his return to Chicago, lifting Detroit to its fifth straight win.

Kane was all alone when he got the puck before skating in and beating Petr Mrazek for his 12th goal. The dynamic winger then held his arms in the air as the United Center crowd cheered.

Kane starred for the Blackhawks for 16 seasons before he was traded to the New York Rangers a year ago. He signed with Detroit as a free agent and was repeatedly saluted with raucous cheers from a season-high crowd of 21,141 in his first game against his first NHL team.

**Penguins 7, Flyers 6:** Drew O'Connor and Rickard Rakell scored less than two minutes apart in the third period to break open a tie game and host

Pittsburgh held on to beat Philadelphia.

Sidney Crosby had a goal and three assists to give him 129 points (55 goals, 74 assists) in 87 regular-season games against the Flyers, the most by any opponent against Philadelphia. Bryan Rust had two goals and an assist for the Penguins before exiting in the third period with an injury.

Travis Sanheim and Tyson Foerster had two goals each for Philadelphia. Scott Laughton added his eighth on the Flyers' NHL-leading 14th short-handed goal of the season.

**Jets 4, Coyotes 3 (OT):** Kyle Connor scored his second goal of the game on a 3-on-1 break in overtime as host Winnipeg handed Arizona its 12th straight loss.

Connor scored from the right side after two Arizona players fell deep in the other end of the ice after a failed breakaway attempt.

**Sabres 3, Hurricanes 2 (SO):** Casey Mittelstadt scored in the fourth round of the shootout, and host Buffalo won its season-high third straight.

Owen Power forced overtime

by scoring with 4:05 left in regulation, and Jeff Skinner also scored for the Sabres, who had not won three straight since a 3-0 run from April 6-10. Power's goal came in his first game after missing six with an injury to his left arm.

**Lightning 4, Devils 1:** Nikita Kucherov had a goal and three assists and became the first player in the league to reach 100 points this season in leading visiting Tampa Bay past New Jersey.

Kucherov leads the NHL with 102 points. Victor Hedman, Brayden Point and Brandon Hagel were the recipients of Kucherov's 62nd, 63rd and 64th assists of the season and he added his 38th goal. Jonas Johansson made 18 saves in giving Andrei Vasilevskiy a rare day off.

**Predators 4, Ducks 2:** Filip Forsberg broke a tie early in the third period and also had an assist to help visiting Nashville beat Anaheim for its fifth straight victory.

Nashville has 18 road victories, tied for third-most in the NHL. The Predators have points in seven of their last eight games away from home.

# Messi's goal in injury time helps Miami secure draw

Associated Press

CARSON, Calif. — Anyone who thought Lionel Messi and Inter Miami would steamroll over the rest of Major League Soccer this year has already been proven wrong by the upstart LA Galaxy.

Messi was still brilliant enough to keep Miami unbeaten after an early season test from another marquee MLS club.

Messi scored in the second minute of second-half injury time off a pass from Jordi Alba, and Miami salvaged a 1-1 draw with the Galaxy on Sunday night.

Dejan Joveljic scored in the

75th minute for the Galaxy, who were close to delivering a surprising early season blow to Messi and his new MLS powerhouse — but with LA down to 10 men, the Argentine superstar worked another bit of magic.

After executing a give-and-go pass sequence with Alba, his longtime Barcelona teammate, Messi slid forward and chipped a shot into the net above Galaxy goalkeeper John McCarthy.

The goal delivered another thrill to the raucous crowd cheering on both teams at Miami's first road game of the season. Thousands of fans wore Messi shirts among the 27,642

in attendance — a record for a Galaxy regular-season match at their suburban stadium.

"It was their home opener, and the atmosphere was pretty electric," said Miami goalkeeper Drake Callender, whose eight saves included a stop on an early penalty shot from Riqui Puig. "It's still early in the season, so there's things we need to work on, but earning a point on the road is good. We don't want to get comfortable at all. We have a long season ahead."

Inter Miami is a major betting favorite to dominate MLS this season after uniting Messi and Luis Suárez alongside fellow ex-

Barca stars Sergio Busquets and Alba — but everybody on Miami knows it won't be easy.

Miami won its season opener at home last Wednesday, but was frequently outplayed by the rebuilding Galaxy.

The Galaxy are famous for the type of high-profile veteran signings amassed by Miami in the past year, but the LA club is rebuilding without big names this time. The young Galaxy still applied more consistent offensive pressure than the league's new showcase team, racking up 23 shots to Miami's 11 while repeatedly generating chances in the box.