

## Pentagon chief praises AFRICOM troops

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth started his day here Tuesday lifting weights with Green Berets and ended it by giving special recognition to a U.S. Africa Command team that assisted with a recent airstrike on Islamic militants in Somalia.

The Pentagon chief, on his first international trip in his new job, met with rank-and-file troops and two combatant commanders for high-level briefings on threats ranging from militants in Africa to Russia's war in Ukraine.

"No offense, general," Hegseth told AFRICOM's Gen. Michael Langley during a news conference. "I probably connect more with those guys (young troops) than I do with four-star generals."

Hegseth's stop in Stuttgart, home to AFRICOM and U.S. European Command headquarters, came ahead of meetings with NATO allies in Brussels,

where Hegseth said he will deliver President Donald Trump's message that allies need to step up defense spending.

In Europe, there is uncertainty about the America's future troop commitment on the Continent. At the end of Trump's first term, he sought to pull 12,000 troops out of Germany in frustration over Berlin's low levels of military spending.

Concerns over China have raised the prospect of shifting more Pentagon capabilities to the Pacific.

However, Hegseth said Tuesday that it's too early to talk about pulling forces from Europe.

"There are no plans right now in the making to cut anything," Hegseth told reporters at the end of his stop in Stuttgart. "There is an understanding that we're going to review force posture across the world."

The same is the case for the AFRICOM mission in Somalia, Hegseth said. There are now several hundred U.S. special op-

erations troops working with local forces in their long-running campaign against the al-Shabab group and other militants.

At the end of Trump's first term, he withdrew American forces from the country, but they were later sent back in by President Joe Biden. The rationale at the time was that militants were gaining ground without the constant U.S. presence.

"I want to listen to commanders on the ground first and foremost, as does the president," Hegseth said of the Somalia mission.

Hegseth said he would seek to carry out counterterrorism missions in the most effective way but also look to capitalize on remote intelligence capabilities to keep threats in check.

He cited the Feb. 1 airstrike against Islamic State fighters in Somalia, the first since Trump's return to office, as an example.

Trump has "been very clear that we're not trying to have American boots all over the globe where we can do counter-

terrorism effectively over the horizon," Hegseth said. "That's the preference. But we'll review the force posture (in Somalia.)"

Hegseth added that he considers AFRICOM's role critical.

"That's a mission very much worth resourcing," he said. "Africa is very much on the front lines of a fight from Islamists to Christian populations that are under siege in Africa and have been ignored for far too long."

Less than a month into the job, Hegseth has made quick changes to the Defense Department, many of them geared toward eliminating military programs on cultural issues such as diversity, equity and inclusion.

Other measures have involved the elimination of identity-related events, such as Black History Month. Hegseth has argued that such programs are divisive.

He echoed those views during a town hall meeting with troops in which he said his focus is on building a stronger "warrior ethos" in the military.

## Fort Liberty base name is now once again Fort Bragg

By JOSEPH DITZLER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Fort Liberty, the Army's largest post, is once again Fort Bragg but without the Confederate tie.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered the base renamed Monday while en route to Stuttgart, Germany, from Joint Base Andrews, Md., aboard an Air Force C-17 Globemaster III, according to Pentagon chief spokesman John Ulyot.

"Bragg is back," Hegseth said after signing the order that changes the name to Fort Roland L. Bragg, according to a vid-

eo on the Defense Visual Information Distribution Service.

The name change refers not to Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg, for whom the base was named in 1918, but to Pfc. Roland L. Bragg, "a World War II hero who earned the Silver Star and Purple Heart for his exceptional courage during the Battle of the Bulge," Ulyot said in a news release.

"This change underscores the installation's legacy of recognizing those who have demonstrated extraordinary service and sacrifice for the nation," the release states.

Bragg, a building mover and sawmill operator from Sabbathus, Maine, was an Army paratrooper in Europe who "saw considerable action during World War II" and died in Nobleboro, Maine, at age 75 in 1999, according to his obituary on MaineMason.org.

Bragg, a Mason, was captured briefly during the war by a German soldier, also a Mason, who let Bragg escape, his daughter Linda French said in the online obituary.

"The guy said, 'hit me over the head and take off,' and he did and took off with an ambulance,"

French said in the obituary. Bragg drove the ambulance, with other prisoners on board, through enemy fire to safety.

The North Carolina base was renamed Fort Liberty in 2023 after a yearslong process mandated by Congress at the end of President-elect Donald Trump's first term to rid the military of ties to the Confederacy.

Trump promised on the campaign trail last year that he would reinstate Fort Bragg as the Army post's name and work to return Confederate-linked names to eight other Southern bases changed in 2023.

# Transgender recruits halted from service

By MATTHEW ADAMS  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has stopped new transgender recruits from joining the military and halted medical procedures for service members diagnosed with gender dysphoria, according to a new memorandum.

“Effective immediately, all new accessions for individuals with a history of gender dysphoria are paused,” Hegseth wrote in the memo dated Friday and filed Monday with the U.S. District Court in Washington. “All unscheduled, scheduled or planned medical procedures associated with affirming or facilitating a gender transition for service members are paused.”

Hegseth said individuals with gender dysphoria already in the military would be “treated with dignity and respect.”

The move follows four executive orders signed Jan. 27 by President Donald Trump that directly impacted the U.S. military, including revising the Defense Department’s transgender policy.

Trump’s executive order does not ban transgender troops but requires the Defense Department to update medical standards “to establish high standards of readiness, lethality ... and integrity.” It will end the use of pronouns in the military “that inaccurately reflect an individual’s sex” and prohibits men from “sharing sleeping, changing, or bathing in facilities” designated for women. The order also applies to women using facilities for men.

The executive order also directed the Pentagon to determine a policy for service members based on readiness within 30 days.

A U.S. judge last week asked

lawyers for Trump’s administration to ensure six troops who sued to stop the executive order targeting transgender troops are not removed from service before further court proceedings are held, Reuters reported.

Former President Joe Biden ended Trump’s de facto ban on transgender service members and allowed individuals who meet military entrance qualifications to enlist, serve in their self-identified gender and access care deemed medically necessary for gender transition. In July 2017, Trump issued a series of tweets announcing his intention to ban transgender men and women from serving “in any capacity.” The Pentagon’s de facto ban on transgender men and women enlisting in the military went into effect in April 2019, following nearly two years of legal battles.

The Pentagon insisted its poli-

cy was not a blanket ban because of its protections for those transgender service members who came out after the 2016 policy, and a waiver process that could allow some transgender people to join the military. But the policy barred nearly all people diagnosed with gender dysphoria — described by the American Psychiatric Association as “a conflict between a person’s physical or assigned gender and the gender with which he/she/they identify.” It did allow people to enlist with a diagnosis of gender dysphoria who had doctor certification that they had remained stable in their biological sex for 36 months.

The Pentagon in March 2021, when the department unveiled the policy change to allow transgender troops, estimated the number of service members who identified as transgender ranged from 1,000 to 8,000.

## Service academies’ board members ousted by Trump

By PHILLIP WALTER  
WELLMAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

Members of boards that provide oversight at the U.S. service academies are no longer in their posts, after President Donald Trump fired them for what he said was their promotion of “woke leftist” ideology.

In a message Monday on social media platform Truth Social, Trump said he had ordered the immediate dismissal of the boards of visitors at the U.S. Military Academy, the U.S. Naval Academy, the U.S. Air Force Academy and the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. The 15-member boards provide oversight and advice on curriculum, teaching methods, financial matters, morale and discipline.

“Our Service Academies have

been infiltrated by Woke Leftist Ideologues over the last four years,” Trump wrote. “We will have the strongest Military in History, and that begins by appointing new individuals to these Boards.”

It wasn’t immediately clear whether Trump was dismissing the boards in their entirety or just members who were appointed by former President Joe Biden.

Historically, the president appoints six members to each board for three-year terms, while the speaker of the House selects four, the vice president selects three and the House and Senate armed services committees choose one each. In 2021, Biden dismissed 18 Trump-appointed members of the boards, six each at West Point, the Air Force Academy and the Naval Academy.

## North Korea calls US sub docking in South a ‘threat’

By DAVID CHOI  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea’s state-run media lashed out at the United States on Tuesday over the arrival of a fast-attack submarine in South Korea’s largest port, calling it an “undeniable threat” and an effort to escalate tensions on the peninsula.

The nuclear-powered USS Alexandria, a Los Angeles-class vessel based in San Diego, docked Monday at Busan, U.S. Naval Forces Korea spokesman Lt. j.g. Tony Curtis said by email Tuesday. No additional details were immediately available, he said.

The U.S. is “openly ignoring the security concern of [North Korea],” the Korean Central News Agency reported, adding that Pyongyang will “make clearer our ... mode of counteraction against

our rivals.”

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff “has no particular opinion” on the North’s remarks, spokesman Nam Ki-soo said Tuesday.

Commissioned in 1991, the Alexandria is designed to track and engage enemy vessels. The 6,900-ton submarine is more than 360 feet long and has a crew of 143, according to the U.S. Navy’s website. American fast-attack submarines carry conventional, rather than nuclear, weapons.

The last U.S. submarine to visit Busan was the Virginia-class USS Vermont, based at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. It arrived on Sept. 23 in a visit that Submarine Group 7 said reflected America’s “commitment to the region and complements the many exercises ... and other military cooperation activities.”

# Trump wants more money for military

*Bloomberg News*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said he wants to increase the amount of money for the U.S. military, a goal that runs counter to efforts from his top ally — Elon Musk — to slash trillions of dollars of federal spending.

“We want to raise defense spending. I think we have to have it,” Trump said in an interview with Fox News’ Bret Baier, taped last week and broadcast Monday.

Trump added that he might seek to pull back on military budgets in the future, saying that he plans to talk to Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin about curbing defense spending.

Military spending accounted for nearly half of the \$1.8 trillion worth of U.S. discretionary

spending in fiscal year 2024, making it the largest pool of federal money outside of mandatory spending on entitlement programs like Social Security, Medicare and other benefits. The U.S. spends more on defense than the next nine largest countries combined, according to data compiled by the Peter G. Peterson Foundation.

Trump’s suggestion to boost military spending comes at an uncertain moment for federal agencies and the contractors that work with them.

The president said in an interview over the weekend that Musk’s group of cost cutters, known as the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, would soon take a look at the Defense Department’s financial records.

Musk, the world’s richest man, has been critical of many

Pentagon efforts, calling for some weapons programs to be “completely redone” and for “immediate and dramatic changes.”

DOGE teams have fanned out across the federal bureaucracy to review payments, systems and employee communications. The Trump administration has moved quickly to curb spending at some of the first agencies that the DOGE campaign has singled out.

At the most maximal levels, they’ve effectively halted all work at the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, prompting lawsuits challenging the legality of those acts.

Musk’s tactics have generated a series of practical, legal and political questions as to how DOGE — set up as an office in

the White House — could accomplish such ambitious goals with only limited authority.

Musk, the chief executive officer of Tesla Inc. and SpaceX, has said he wants to cut as much as \$2 trillion worth of federal spending, an amount that accounts for more than all U.S. discretionary spending in a single year.

His role in auditing the Pentagon’s expenses has also raised conflicts of interest questions. SpaceX has received billions of dollars in federal contracts, including at the Department of Defense in recent years.

Any attempt to slash defense programs and other spending is likely to touch off a fierce debate in Congress. The U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power to direct federal spending, limiting the White House’s ability to act unilaterally.

## Ukraine offers rare earth deal to Trump for US aid

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine has offered to strike a deal with President Donald Trump for continued American military aid in exchange for developing Ukraine’s mineral industry, which could provide a valuable source of the rare earth elements that are essential for many kinds of technology.

Trump said that he wanted such a deal earlier this month, and it was initially proposed last fall by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as part of his plan to strengthen Kyiv’s hand in future negotiations with Moscow.

“We really have this big potential in the territory which we control,” Andrii Yermak, chief of staff to the Ukrainian president, said in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press. “We are interested to work, to

develop, with our partners, first of all, with the United States.”

Rare earth elements are a set of 17 elements that are essential to many kinds of consumer technology, including cell-phones, hard drives and electric and hybrid vehicles.

China, Trump’s chief geopolitical adversary, is the world’s largest producer of rare earth elements. Both the U.S. and Europe have sought to reduce their dependence on Beijing.

For Ukraine, such a deal would ensure that its biggest and most consequential ally doesn’t freeze military support. That would be devastating for the country, which has been at war for nearly three years.

The idea also comes at a time when reliable and uninterrupted access to critical minerals is increasingly hard to come by globally.

## Military exits recruiting event due to DEI purge

**BY ROSE L. THAYER**

*Stars and Stripes*

Military organizations have backed out of an engineering, science and technology conference set for this weekend as part of a new Pentagon policy that bans diversity-focused events.

The Becoming Everything You Are Conference — formerly known as the Black Engineer of the Year Award Conference — has a record of supporting and celebrating military employment as a civilian or service member and has consistently helped the Defense Department recruit hundreds of young professionals, said Tyrone Taborn, publisher, chairman and CEO of Career Communications Group, which is behind the nearly 40-year-old event.

The conference — held each February in Baltimore — is fo-

cused on careers and mentorship in science, technology, engineering and math. Last year, the Army recruited about 300 people, he said.

But given the push from President Donald Trump’s administration to end all forms of diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, the Defense Department has ordered all its organizations cancel official participation in this weekend’s event.

The federal government had committed to spend about \$1.5 million on the event, Taborn said.

Pentagon officials responded to the cancellations by pointing to a policy released Jan. 31 by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth called “Identity Months Dead at DoD” that bars use of any official resources for celebrations, events or cultural awareness months.



# Netanyahu threatens to exit Gaza ceasefire

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday threatened to withdraw from the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and resume its fight against Hamas if the militant group does not go ahead with the next scheduled release of hostages Saturday.

Hamas said Monday — and reiterated Tuesday — that it planned to delay the release of three more hostages after accusing Israel of failing to meet the terms of the ceasefire, including by not allowing enough

tents and other aid into Gaza.

President Donald Trump has emboldened Israel to call for the release of even more remaining hostages Saturday, but it wasn't immediately clear whether Netanyahu's threat referred to the release of all remaining hostages in Gaza, or just the three scheduled for release Saturday.

Earlier Tuesday, an Israeli official said Netanyahu ordered the army to add more troops in and around the Gaza Strip. Netanyahu also ordered officials "to prepare for every

scenario if Hamas doesn't release our hostages this Saturday," according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a private meeting.

During the first six-week phase of the ceasefire, Hamas committed to freeing 33 hostages captured in its Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel, while Israel said it would release nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. The sides have carried out five swaps since Jan. 19.

The war could resume in early March if no agreement is

reached on the second phase of the ceasefire, which calls for the return of all remaining hostages and an indefinite extension of the truce.

But if Israel resumes the war, it will face a drastically different battlefield. After forcing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to evacuate to southern Gaza in the early stages of the war, Israel allowed many of those displaced people to return to what is left of their homes, posing a new challenge to its ability to move troops through the territory.

# Trump bans federal use of paper straws

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Monday that he is banning federal use of paper straws, saying they "don't work" and don't last very long. He instead wants the government to exclusively move to plastic.

"It's a ridiculous situation. We're going back to plastic straws," Trump said as he signed an executive order to reverse federal purchasing policies that encourage paper straws and restrict plastic ones.

The order directs federal

agencies to stop buying paper straws "and otherwise ensure that paper straws are no longer provided within agency buildings."

The move by Trump — who has long railed against paper straws, and whose 2020 reelection campaign sold Trump-branded reusable plastic straws for \$15 per pack of 10 — targets a Biden administration policy to phase out federal purchases of single-use plastics, including straws, from food service operations, events and packaging by 2027 and from all federal oper-

ations by 2035.

While plastic straws have been blamed for polluting oceans and harming marine life, Trump said Monday that he thinks "it's OK" to continue using them.

Several U.S. states and cities have banned plastic straws, and some restaurants no longer automatically give them to customers.

But plastic straws are only a small part of the problem. The environment is littered with single-use plastic food and beverage containers — water bottles,

takeout containers, coffee lids, shopping bags and more.

Many multinational companies have moved away from plastic straws and have made reducing plastic use across their operations central to their future sustainability goals, making Trump's reversal of policy an outlier in the business world.

More than 390 million straws are used every day in the United States, mostly for 30 minutes or less, according to advocacy group Straws Turtle Island Restoration Network.

# Trump plan to push out federal workers on hold

Associated Press

BOSTON — President Donald Trump's plan to downsize the federal workforce remains on hold after a courtroom hearing Monday afternoon.

It's the latest example of how the Republican president's ambitious plans have become ensnared in the judicial system.

U.S. District Judge George O'Toole Jr. had paused the deferred resignation program, commonly described as a buyout, last week.

On Monday, he said the stay

would remain in place until he issues a ruling. It's unclear when that could happen.

Trump wants to use financial incentives to encourage government employees to quit. Under the plan, employees could stop working and get paid until Sept. 30.

According to the White House, 65,000 workers had taken the government up on its offer as of Friday.

The deferred resignation program has been spearheaded by Elon Musk, who is serving

as Trump's top adviser for reducing federal spending.

But labor unions have said the plan is illegal. They asked for O'Toole to keep it on hold and prevent the Office of Personnel Management from soliciting more workers to sign up.

Elena Goldstein, speaking for the workers, said there were "serious questions" about the plan's rationale and legality.

"OPM seems to be making this up as they are going

along," she said.

She said the program was an "unprecedented action" on an "unprecedented timeline," and she described it as a pretext to remove workers and replace them with people aligned with the administration.

Eric Hamilton, a Justice Department lawyer, called the plan a "humane off ramp" for federal employees who may have structured their lives around working remotely and have been ordered to return to government buildings.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Halftime performer held after unfurling flag

**LA** NEW ORLEANS — A performer in Kendrick Lamar's Super Bowl halftime show who was detained on the field after unfurling a combination Sudanese-Palestinian flag with "Sudan" and "Gaza" written on it will not face charges, New Orleans police said Monday.

The member of the 400-member field cast stood on a car used as a prop for Lamar's performance and held up the flag. The NFL said "the individual hid the item on his person and unveiled it late in the show" and that "no one involved with the production was aware of the individual's intent."

"The individual will (be) banned for life from all NFL stadiums and events," NFL spokesperson Brian McCarthy said in an emailed statement Sunday.

### Researchers use saliva to prove bat migration

**AZ** FLAGSTAFF — Scientists have long suspected that Mexican long-nosed bats migrate through southeastern Arizona, but without capturing and measuring the night-flying creatures, proof has been elusive.

Researchers say they now have a way to tell the endangered species apart from other bats by analyzing saliva the nocturnal mammals leave behind when sipping nectar from plants and residential hummingbird feeders.

Bat Conservation International, a nonprofit group work-

ing to end the extinction of bat species worldwide, teamed up with residents from southeastern Arizona, southwestern New Mexico and west Texas for the saliva swabbing campaign.

The samples of saliva left along potential migration routes were sent to a lab at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, where researchers looked for environmental DNA — or eDNA — to confirm that the bats cycle through Arizona and consider the region their part-time home.

### Man with gun fatally shot by deputy at arcade

**CO** DENVER — A man died after being shot by a sheriff's deputy responding to a reported active shooter inside an arcade and entertainment center in suburban Denver on Saturday night, authorities said.

A sheriff's deputy who was near the Main Event in Highlands Ranch found the man armed with a handgun in the parking lot when he arrived, Douglas County Sheriff Darren Weekly said.

The man refused several orders to drop his weapon and was shot after he turned toward the deputy, he said.

Investigators learned that a woman had been shot and wounded by another woman inside the crowded venue, Weekly said.

Investigators believe the man who was shot by the deputy was connected to the shooting inside, he said.

The woman who was shot is expected to survive and the 23-year-old suspect was taken into custody, the sheriff's office said.

"The situation could have

been much worse," Weekly said.

Main Event offers a variety of activities including bowling, laser tag and mini golf in addition to video games.

### Lawmakers mull ending daylight saving time

**TX** MCALLEN — Texas lawmakers are reviving efforts to eliminate the decades-long practice of changing the clocks twice a year.

Several members of the Texas House and Senate have filed legislation meant to put an end to the seasonal tradition of losing an hour of sleep in the spring due to the start of daylight saving time, only to gain the hour back in the fall when clocks revert back to standard time.

Texas is on standard time right now and will begin observing daylight saving on March 9.

Most of the bills filed aim to adopt daylight saving time year-round, an effort that was pushed during the 2023 legislative session. However, state Sen. Judith Zaffirini, D-Laredo, is trying a different approach. Her bill would adopt standard time year-round in Texas, the only option allowed under federal law.

### Police issue apology for mistaken allegation

**NY** NEW YORK — New York City police apologized for mistakenly accusing a teenager of a fatal shooting at a Brooklyn parade, then failing to retract the false allegation for nearly five months, despite knowing it was incorrect.

In a statement sent to news outlets Sunday, the NYPD said an image it circulated on social media of Camden Lee, a 15-

year-old Brooklyn resident, "mistakenly stated that he was wanted for the fatal shooting" at the West Indian American Day Parade in September.

"The NYPD should have immediately corrected this misstatement," added the department's chief spokesperson, Delaney Kempner.

"We apologize for the error and will continue to seek justice for the victims of this shooting."

### Stricter rules for lobster fishing are scrapped

**ME** PORTLAND — Fishing industry regulators have decided to scrap stricter new lobster fishing standards off New England in the wake of months of protest from lobster fishermen that the rules were unnecessary and would bankrupt harvesters.

The regulators were planning to institute new rules this summer that increased the minimum legal harvest size for lobsters in some of the most important fishing grounds in the world. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Council, which manages the fishery, said the changes were important to preserve the future of a lobster population that has shown recent signs of decline.

Many commercial fishermen adamantly opposed the changes, which would have required them to throw back previously market-ready lobsters.

An arm of the commission voted on Feb. 4 to initiate a repeal of the new rules in the face of "fervent industry concerns about the potential economic impacts" of the changes, the commission said in a statement.

— From wire reports

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# Hockey's long wait for global tournament ends

Associated Press

It has been more than a decade since the NHL last participated in the Olympics and almost nine years since the league's top players took part in an international tournament.

That wait is about to end when the puck drops on the 4 Nations Face-Off involving the United States, Canada, Sweden and Finland. The slimmed-down event taking place in Montreal and Boston lacks history, tradition and some of the top talent from elsewhere on Earth, but the prolonged gap between the 2016 World Cup of Hockey and this makes it a must-see, premier showcase of the sport.

"It's been a while," U.S. captain Auston Matthews said. "It's something that the players have been craving and looking forward to, and I think the fans, as well. I think it's going to be great for the game."

Matthews in red, white and

blue alongside Jack Eichel and Matthew Tkachuk. Sidney Crosby, Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon suiting up with Canada's Maple Leaf on their chests. Sweden and Finland renewing the Scandinavian nations' intense rivalry. Everything from the star power to the format to the anticipation of a return to the Olympics in Milan in 2026 has players and coaches thrilled to be a part of it.

"When you put guys together representing their countries, I think it brings out the best in them," said Crosby, who helped Canada win Olympic gold in 2010 and 2014. "If you look at the rosters, I think there's a lot to get excited about when you look at that and you look at the matchups and best on best — everyone competing against each other internationally. For people that are hockey fans, that's what you love to see. I think for that reason alone and the fact that it's been a while will

just add to it."

Sweden has 2020 playoff MVP and two-time Stanley Cup champion Victor Hedman. Finland has reigning Cup-winning captain Aleksander Barkov, who was very early in his career when he helped his country take home bronze in Sochi 11 years ago.

"I remember every single moment there," said Barkov, who's one of eight Florida Panthers players at the 4 Nations. "We've been talking about this tournament for a long time. Now it's here."

"Hopefully we can go to the Olympics as well in a year from now, but now we have this tournament ahead of us, playing against the best players in the world and it's a great challenge for us as individuals and as a team, as well," Barkov said. "Everyone wants to do really well and everyone wants to win, and that's what we're going to go there and do."

Canada-Sweden on Wednesday will air on TNT, U.S.-Finland on Thursday on ESPN and the Saturday games will be on ABC. TNT has Canada-Finland and Sweden-U.S. on Monday, while the championship game on Feb. 20 will be on ESPN.

The U.S. and Canada are co-favorites on BetMGM Sportsbook.

"Every team's got great depth, great players," U.S. defenseman Adam Fox said. "It's a star-studded tournament."

Unlike the Olympics, there isn't a surefire spot in the quarterfinals of an elimination tournament this time, so every game matters. Each team faces one another in round-robin play, with the top two meeting in the championship.

"I truly believe this is a tournament where you're basically playing three Game 7s," Canada coach Jon Cooper said. "There's no, really, margin for error."

## Teams start 4 Nations Face-Off with little time to spare

Associated Press

BROSSARD, Quebec — The last time Jon Cooper coached an international tournament featuring the NHL's best players, the 2016 World Cup of Hockey came with a training camp and a slate of exhibition games to get ready.

The 4 Nations Face-Off has none of that. Cooper's Canada, the United States, Sweden and Finland took the ice Monday for each team's first practice knowing there's no time to spare. Canada and Sweden get just two practices and a game-day morning skate before playing each other, and the lack of a ramp-up period puts an emphasis on developing chemistry right away.

"This one we have to jump right in," Cooper said. "Being in these situations, it's not always the best players that win.

It's the best team that wins. And I think the team that jells the quickest and kind of plays for each other, especially in such a short tournament, will have the advantage."

Establishing that advantage began Sunday night with team Super Bowl parties. The Philadelphia Eagles crushing the Kansas City Chiefs turned out to be background noise for bonding.

"Unfortunately the Super Bowl wasn't too close of a game, but we still had a great time and it was good to see everyone," Sweden captain Victor Hedman said. "Some of the guys I barely got a chance to hang out with before. No, it's been great. Now you have to switch gears and focus on this and kind of put everything else away."

All four rosters are full of

Stanley Cup champions and All-Stars, but Canada's first practice stood out for the incredible amount of talent on the ice at the same time. The top power-play unit includes Sidney Crosby, Connor McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon, Cale Makar and Sam Reinhart.

That's what U.S. coach Mike Sullivan means when he says, "They're all dream teams." His group and Finland get some extra prep before their opening game Thursday night in Montreal, but the principles of figuring it out fast still apply.

"Becoming a team is the biggest challenge," Sullivan said. "It's going to take more than talent to win. I think a big part of it is becoming a team in the true sense of the word, and that's the challenge. We're going to try to do our best. It's

everything from the chemistry on the ice with our line combinations, defense pairs, whatever it may be, to accepting and embracing roles."

Advantage, Finland? The small Scandinavian country of 5.5 million people might not have big-name talent that jumps off the page, but playing the same style of hockey as a national team has the chance to be a major benefit.

"Finland is known for being together," captain Aleksander Barkov said. "Growing up in the Finnish system, the national team system, you kind of know how to play. But the most important thing (is) we play together no matter what the systems are. Everyone's going to give their best, and that's why Finland has been successful and it's no different here."



# Doncic makes Lakers debut after injury

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Luka Doncic was the last starter introduced by the Los Angeles Lakers, an honor normally reserved for LeBron James. When Doncic jogged into the spotlight on a darkened court through a corridor of his new teammates, his new fans stood and roared while wearing thousands of gold T-shirts with his name and number.

Even a young superstar could feel the magnificence of the moment.

"I was a little nervous before," Doncic said. "I (don't remember) the last time I was nervous before the game. But once I stepped on the court again, it was fun. Just being out there, it felt amazing."

Doncic's debut with the Lakers was brief and successful Monday night, but it piqued the anticipation of everybody involved for his days and years ahead in Los Angeles.

Doncic scored 14 points while playing just 23 minutes, immediately getting into the flow with James and his teammates during Los Angeles' 132-113 victory over the Utah Jazz. Doncic added five rebounds and four assists — none prettier than a three-quarter-court strike to James for a layup late in the first half.

Doncic was grateful to be playing basketball after nearly seven weeks of injury absence, and he was happy to begin to move past the upheaval in his life ever since the Dallas Mavericks shocked the sports world 10 days ago by trading their 25-year-old centerpiece and NBA scoring champion.

Doncic got multiple standing ovations from a Lakers crowd wearing thousands of No. 77 shirts, but his pregame introduction was something he'll remember for a long time.

"Just the amount of cheering there was in the arena was absolutely unbelievable," Doncic said. "That was my favorite part

— and to play again."

Doncic said James texted him in the morning and offered to do anything to help — and Doncic took him up on it by taking the final intro spot. They'll swap for LA's next home game next week, Doncic said with a grin.

"Shows what kind of person he is," Doncic said. "He let me have my moment."

The Slovenian scorer's first bucket was a 3-pointer in the opening minutes on his second shot. Doncic scored 11 points while the Lakers streaked out to a 25-point halftime lead, and he sat down for good with 3:07 left in the third quarter with Los Angeles far ahead in its sixth consecutive victory.

The game was Doncic's first since he strained his left calf on Christmas. After a full week to settle with the Lakers and to return to full strength, Doncic joined James, Austin Reaves, Rui Hachimura and Jaxson Hayes as starters for streaking LA, which had won 11 of 13 even before adding a five-time All-NBA selection to its lineup.

The Lakers have Doncic on a minutes restriction after his injury absence. His legs aren't quite there yet — he went 1-for-7 on 3-point attempts in his debut — but his playmaking immediately meshed with his new teammates.

Doncic's first touch was an alley-oop assist to Hayes, and he hit his 3-pointer moments later. He was serenaded with "Luka! Luka!" chants at the first dead ball, and several times thereafter.

The crowd included Dirk Nowitzki, who overlapped with Doncic for one season in Dallas and served as his mentor. Doncic appeared to be the natural heir to the German Hall of Famer's incredible run in Dallas — until current Mavericks general manager Nico Harrison decided otherwise.

**Warriors 125, Bucks 111:** Stephen Curry scored a season-high 38 points and visiting Gold-

en State pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat Milwaukee.

Jimmy Butler had 20 points, nine rebounds and six assists in his second game with the Warriors.

The Bucks were playing their sixth consecutive game without two-time MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo, who will be out through the All-Star break as he deals with a left calf strain.

Damian Lillard scored 38 points for Milwaukee.

**Cavaliers 128, Timberwolves 107:** Evan Mobley scored 28 points, fellow All-Star Donovan Mitchell added 23 and host Cleveland had little trouble against Minnesota.

The East-leading Cavaliers scored the game's first 16 points. They welcomed new addition De'Andre Hunter and improved to 25-4 at home.

All-Star Anthony Edwards led the Timberwolves with 44 points.

**Hawks 112, Magic 106:** Trae Young scored 11 of his 19 points in the fourth quarter as Atlanta won at Orlando.

Young was 6-for-17 from the field and committed nine turnovers. But he also had eight assists and five rebounds on the same day he was added to the All-Star roster as an injury replacement for Milwaukee forward Giannis Antetokounmpo.

Franz Wagner led the Magic with 35 points. Paolo Banchero added 31 points, including a career-high 20 in the third quarter.

**Spurs 131, Wizards 121:** Victor Wembanyama had 31 points and 15 rebounds to help San Antonio hold off host Washington.

De'Aaron Fox contributed 30 points for the Spurs, and Chris Paul had 10 assists. Rookie Stephon Castle added 16 points.

Tristan Vukcevic led the Wizards with 18 points.

**Celtics 103, Heat 85:** Jayson Tatum scored 33 points, Kristaps Porzingis added 17 and vis-

iting Boston rolled past Miami.

Bam Adebayo scored 22 points and grabbed 12 rebounds for the Heat, who were without Tyler Herro and Jaime Jaquez Jr. — both sidelined by illness.

Andrew Wiggins had 11 points in his Miami debut. The Heat shot 33.7% and have been held under 90 points in each of their past five matchups with the Celtics.

**Nuggets 146, Trail Blazers 117:** Nikola Jokic scored 40 points, Christian Braun added 26 and surging Denver beat visiting Portland for its seventh straight victory.

The seven-game winning streak is the longest of the season for the Nuggets, who played without Michael Porter Jr. for the second straight game due to hamstring tightness.

Donovan Clingan scored a career-high 21 points and Dalano Banton added 22 for the Trail Blazers, who lost their second straight after winning 10 of 11.

**Nets 97, Hornets 89:** Nic Claxton scored 16 points and host Brooklyn pulled away after LaMelo Ball was lost to another ankle injury and beat Charlotte.

Moussa Diabate had a career-high 21 points and grabbed 10 rebounds for the Hornets before he was forced out of the game with a right eye abrasion. Tidjane Salaun scored 16 points.

**Thunder 137, Pelicans 101:** Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points in three quarters as host Oklahoma City routed New Orleans.

Trey Murphy III scored 23 points and Zion Williamson added 17 for the Pelicans.

**Kings 129, Mavericks 128 (OT):** DeMar DeRozan scored a season-high 42 points, including a baseline floater with 2 seconds left in overtime, and visiting Sacramento beat depleted Dallas.

Kyrie Irving scored 30 points for the Mavericks. Irving was added to the All-Star roster earlier in the day, replacing new teammate Anthony Davis.

# Shiffrin, Johnson win team combined at Alpine

Associated Press

SAALBACH-HINTER-GLEMM, Austria — Mikaela Shiffrin won a record-equaling 15th world championship medal and Breezy Johnson became double world champion Tuesday when the American pair took gold in the new team combined event.

Shiffrin was third-fastest in the slalom at the Alpine skiing worlds, just over three hours after Johnson had clocked the fourth-best time in the downhill, as together they beat silver medalists Lara Gut-Behrami and Wendy Holdener of Switzerland by 0.39 seconds.

Stephanie Venier and Katharina Truppe of Austria took bronze.

The gold was Shiffrin's 15th career medal from world championships, and she matches the record set in the 1930s by German skier Christl Cranz.

It's the second gold medal for Johnson, who won the downhill last Saturday, two months after she returned from a 14-month ban for three violations of the "whereabout" anti-doping rules.

"It's pretty crazy. I think if you

would have told us when we met that we would team up to win a world championship medal, I think neither of us would have believed it," said Johnson, who has been friends, and skied, with Shiffrin since their youth.

Shiffrin said: "So many things had to happen in the last ... how long it's been since we were 11. In order for this to happen we needed a new event entirely. This was an amazing day for me up there, nerve-racking because Breezy did her job just spectacularly this morning. It was so much fun to watch all these days, day in day out, she has been executing ... So, really, really unbelievable."

Reacting to Shiffrin's 15th career medal in the worlds, Johnson quipped, "If we keep adding team events, maybe we can get 32 for her or something," before adding, "she is a legend, it's super cool to be hitting my stride and she's obviously been on hers for a decade."

The team combined entails one racer competing in a downhill run and another in a slalom, with their two times added up to determine the final results.

The team combined will make its debut at next year's Milan-Cortina Olympics.

Lauren Macuga had posted the fastest time in the downhill, but her American team dropped to fourth and missed a medal by 0.11 seconds after Paula Moltzen's slalom.

Lindsey Vonn finished the downhill 2.51 seconds off the lead in 21st position out of 26 starters and ended up in 16th with teammate AJ Hurt.

Recovered from an abdominal injury that required surgery in December, Shiffrin competed in her first event at the worlds.

She initially planned to race in the giant slalom, as defending champion, and the slalom but skip the team combined, then changed her mind Monday when she felt not ready yet to compete in Thursday's GS.

With GS training off her schedule, she then decided to enter the team combined.

Vonn had campaigned to race with Shiffrin on an American team that would have united the two most successful skiers in World Cup history, but the coaching staff decided to form

the teams based on "season-best results" in both downhill and slalom.

"It would have been a cool thing if those two greats would have raced together, but at the moment others are stronger in their performance," American speed coach Alex Hoedlmoser said. "We had to make sure to bring the fastest pairings together, and it was very obvious that Breezy was the fastest in the downhill and therefore would race with Mikaela."

After her downhill display, American star Vonn said: "I had no speed at all ... I tried to give my best, as always. Unfortunately it was not my world championships. The skis are fast, but for me something is wrong with my boots and in the turns I don't get any speed. I stayed in my tuck, but I was a turtle the whole way down."

Vonn came out of retirement, after nearly six years, at age 40 this season with a new titanium knee. She scored two top-10 finishes on the World Cup circuit in January, but did not finish the super-G and placed 15th in the downhill at the worlds.

## No. 23 Clemson back in rankings, rolling in ACC with UNC win

Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. — Clemson returned to the national rankings Monday. The 23rd-ranked Tigers showed a few hours later that they plan to be part of the national picture going forward this season.

Clemson followed up a 77-71 win over then-No. 2 Duke on Saturday night by dismantling the Atlantic Coast Conference's other traditional power in North Carolina, 85-65.

"Very proud of this team," said Viktor Lakhin, the Cincinnati transfer who had 22 points with a season-high four 3-pointers and helped the Tigers take control in the opening half by building a 49-33 lead.

"What we're doing, we're obviously not done yet," added Lakhin, who also had 22 points against Duke two nights earlier. "That's why we came here, because of the team's success last year. We just joined to keep it going."

Chase Hunter, the team's top scorer this season, added 19 points and Zackery had 16 in taking down the Tar Heels. Clemson improved to 20-5, Brownell's third straight season with 20 or more wins.

At 12-2 in the Atlantic Coast Conference, the Tigers are a game behind the league-leading Blue Devils and tied in the loss column with surprising Louisville.

Zackery was glad to be back in the Top 25 this week, but whether Clemson was or wasn't doesn't change its focus on what's ahead.

"We know there's a whole thing that we weren't in it," Zackery said. "People were mad about it. But we don't really care about that. We just come out and just prove ourselves every night."

The Tigers outrebounded North Carolina 41-28 — including 15-10 on the offensive end.

"Our inability to keep them off the offen-

sive glass and our inability to get to the offensive glass is something that we just couldn't overcome," Tar Heels coach Hubert Davis said.

**No. 6 Houston 76, Baylor 65:** L.J. Cryer scored 14 points, Milos Uzan added 12 points and six assists, and the host Cougars beat the Bears for their third straight victory.

Terrance Arceneaux had 11 points and J'Wan Roberts scored 10 for Houston (20-4, 12-1 Big 12). Emanuel Sharp also finished with 10 after missing two games with an ankle injury.

The Cougars shot 51% and went 10-for-24 on 3-pointers. They reached 20 wins for the 10th consecutive season.

Norchad Omier scored 19 points and Langston Love added 15 for Baylor (15-9, 7-6), which shot 58% — including 9-for-15 on 3s. VJ Edgcombe had 14 points and Robert Wright III finished with 10.