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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## US downs an Iranian drone near carrier

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A U.S. Navy fighter jet shot down an Iranian drone that was approaching the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln in the Arabian Sea, U.S. Central Command said Tuesday, threatening to ramp up tensions as the Trump administration warns of possible military action to get Iran to the negotiating table.

The drone “aggressively approached” the aircraft carrier with “unclear intent” and “continued to fly toward the ship despite de-escalatory measures taken by U.S. forces operating in international waters,” Central Command spokesman Capt. Tim Hawkins said in a statement Tuesday.

The shootdown occurred within hours of Iranian forces harassing a U.S.-flagged and U.S.-crewed merchant vessel that was sailing in the Strait of Hormuz, the U.S. military said.

The Shahed-139 drone was shot down by an F-35C fighter jet from the Lincoln, which, according to Hawkins, was sailing about 500 miles from Iran’s southern coast. The military’s statement noted that no American troops were harmed and no U.S. equipment was damaged.

Then, hours later, Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps harassed the merchant vessel Stena Imperative, the military said.

According to Hawkins’ statement, two boats and an Iranian Mohajer drone approached the ship “at high speeds and threatened to board and seize the tanker.”

The destroyer USS McFaul responded to the scene and escorted the Stena Imperative “with defensive air support from the U.S. Air Force,” the statement said, adding that the merchant vessel was now sailing safely.

The actions come as tensions are high between the longtime adversaries. They began to rise again as Iran’s government spent weeks quelling protests that began in late December against growing economic instability before broadening into a challenge to the Islamic Republic.

President Donald Trump had promised in early January to “rescue” Iranians from their government’s bloody crackdown on protesters, which later morphed into a pressure campaign to get Tehran to make a deal over its nuclear program. That is even as the Republican president insists Iranian nuclear sites were “obliterated” in U.S. strikes in June.

“We have talks going on with Iran. We’ll see how it all works out,” Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Monday. Asked what his threshold was for military action against Iran,

he declined to elaborate.

“I’d like to see a deal negotiated,” Trump said. “Right now, we’re talking to them, we’re talking to Iran, and if we could work something out, that’d be great. And if we can’t, probably bad things would happen.”

The U.S. shot down the drone hours after Iran’s president said Tuesday that he instructed the country’s foreign minister to “pursue fair and equitable negotiations” with the U.S., marking one of the first clear signs from Tehran it wants to try to negotiate with Washington despite a breakdown of talks last summer.

Turkey had been working behind the scenes to make the talks happen there later this week as U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff is traveling in the region. A Turkish official later said that the location of talks was uncertain but that Turkey was ready to support the process.

## House passes bill to end partial government shutdown

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House on Tuesday passed a roughly \$1.2 trillion spending package to end the partial government shutdown, sending the measure to President Donald Trump and setting the stage for a debate in Congress over Homeland Security funding.

The vote was 217-214, and wraps up congressional work on 11 of the 12 annual appropriations bills, funding the vast majority of the government for the budget year ending Sept. 30.

The last bill still to be worked out covers the Department of Homeland Security, where Democrats are demanding more restrictions on enforce-

ment operations.

Trump has said he will sign the bill when it reaches his desk.

Speaker Mike Johnson needed near-unanimous support from his Republican conference to proceed to a final vote.

He narrowly got it during a procedural vote that was held open for nearly an hour as leaders worked to gain support from a handful of GOP lawmakers who were trying to advance other priorities unrelated to the funding measure.

“We have to work through individual members’ concerns. That’s the game here. It’s a consensus building operation. We do it every day,” Johnson said.

Trump had weighed in Mon-

day in a social media post, calling on Republicans to stay united and telling holdouts “There can be NO CHANGES at this time.”

“We will work together in good faith to address the issues that have been raised, but we cannot have another long, pointless, and destructive Shutdown that will hurt our Country so badly — One that will not benefit Republicans or Democrats. I hope everyone will vote, YES!,” Trump wrote on his social media site.

The measure once signed will end the partial government shutdown that began Saturday.

In addition to funding most of the federal government through

Sept. 30, it includes a short-term funding patch for the Department of Homeland Security through Feb. 13 as lawmakers negotiate potential changes for the agency that enforces the nation’s immigration laws — U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE.

The House had previously approved the final package of spending bills, but the Senate broke up that package so that more negotiations could take place for the Homeland Security funding bill.

Democrats are demanding changes in response to events in Minneapolis, where two American citizens were shot and killed by federal agents.

# Departures possible for families in Bahrain

BY LARA KORTE

*Stars and Stripes*

MANAMA, Bahrain — The last time Elena Coray and her family had to leave Bahrain, she was caught off guard.

It was June, and the Pentagon had just authorized voluntary departures for military families amid tensions with Iran. Coray, however, was out of the loop. Her phone was off, and she was in the commissary with her three kids when her husband, a Navy chief, found her and said it was time to leave.

"He said, 'Babe, your flight's in 30 minutes,'" she said. "Pack snacks."

Now, about seven months after returning to Bahrain, Coray and hundreds of other military families stationed on the island are wondering if they'll have to undergo a repeat of last summer.

Once again, escalating tensions between the U.S. and Iran have put the region on edge. The Pentagon is steadily moving more military assets into the theater — including the Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group — and Iran's supreme leader has threatened to retaliate against American military bases if the U.S. attacks.

It is unclear whether the U.S.

plans to strike. President Donald Trump and Iranian leaders have said they want to negotiate, but Trump also has indicated he'd be willing to take military action if a deal is not made.

For Coray, vice president of the Bahrain Family Readiness Group, the looming threat of conflict means preparing her family and others in case they have to quickly leave the island.

"We're really trying not to fearmonger and not to freak people out," Coray said. "But we can prepare today, right? It's important."

The U.S. maintains some 40,000 troops in the Central Command region — in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Jordan and other countries.

Bahrain, home to U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, has about 8,600 personnel, according to estimates from the International Institute for Strategic Studies, and is one of the few billets in the region that supports accompanied tours.

Last summer, as the U.S. prepared to strike Iran's nuclear facilities, the Pentagon authorized voluntary departures for dependents who wanted to return to the U.S.

Rebecca Rovinsky, whose

husband is in the Navy, said she and her family had been in Bahrain for less than a week when they got the notice about departures. Even though they had barely unpacked, the couple decided it was best for Rovinsky and their kids to evacuate.

A few days later, she boarded a C-130 with her two sons, ages 3 and 7, and their dachshund, Darcy, headed back to the U.S.

Ultimately, Bahrain was not targeted during the 12-day conflict. Iran launched about a dozen missiles at the nearby Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, causing minor damage to the facilities there, and after a few weeks, families returned to the region and normal operations resumed.

But Rovinsky said her anxiety remained.

"There's just a lingering feeling in the back of your brain that things went south very quickly before, and it could happen again," she said in a recent interview with Stars and Stripes from her home in Bahrain.

With the addition of three destroyers in the Lincoln strike group, the U.S. now has at least eight destroyers in the region, including two in the Persian Gulf, one in the Red Sea and two in the Eastern Mediterranean

Sea.

The arrival of the strike group also brought about 5,700 more service members to the region, The Associated Press reported, and it joins three littoral combat ships that were already deployed.

Mala Goodman has lived in Bahrain with her husband, a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps, and their two kids, ages 6 and 3, since 2024. She said the departures last summer felt sudden. This time, however, she said she feels like she has the benefit of experience.

"It just wasn't on my radar," she said of the June conflict. "This one is on my radar."

Goodman, an ombudsman on base, was already in the U.S. on a preplanned trip when families began leaving Bahrain in June. Now, being back on the island, she said she's trying to balance day-to-day family obligations with the knowledge they might have to leave in a hurry.

"What's weird is living in these two realities where it's like, 'Oh gosh, we have Girl Scouts. We've got to get to baseball practice, and so-and-so's birthday party this week.' And also: 'Make sure you have powers of attorney,'" she said.

## DOD, Scouting America near deal on DEI policy

BY JOSEPH DITZLER

*Stars and Stripes*

The Defense Department is "near a final agreement" with Scouting America to continue providing support from the U.S. military, provided the organization "implements the common-sense, core value reforms," the department's chief spokesman said Monday on social media.

"They are on the clock, and we are watching," spokesman

Sean Parnell wrote in a post on X. "We have more to announce soon."

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth warned in November that the Pentagon was planning to end its support of Scouting, saying the organization had changed to something designed to "attack boy-friendly spaces," according to a draft memo to Congress reviewed by NPR.

On Monday, Parnell said the Pentagon had recently re-

viewed its relationship with Scouting America, a "great organization that has — in many ways — lost its way."

The review stemmed from a DOD policy of no tolerance for policies or organizations that embrace diversity, equity and inclusion under a January 2025 executive order by President Donald Trump ending DEI preferences in federal contracting, according to Parnell.

His post did not specify the

reforms under discussion.

Scouting America responded to Parnell's post in an email Tuesday to Stars and Stripes.

"For nearly 116 years Scouting has stood as a cornerstone of American ideals, good citizenship, service, and adventure for American youth," the statement said. "We are encouraged by tonight's social media post by the Pentagon, and we look forward to providing more details as we move ahead."

# All DHS officers in Minneapolis to get body cams

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Every Homeland Security officer on the ground in Minneapolis, including those from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, will be immediately issued body-worn cameras, Secretary Kristi Noem said Monday, in the latest fallout after the shooting deaths of two U.S. citizens at the hands of federal agents.

Noem said the body-worn camera program is being expanded nationwide as funding becomes available.

"We will rapidly acquire and deploy body cameras to DHS law enforcement across the country," Noem said in a social media post on X.

The news of the body cameras comes as Minneapolis has

been the site of intense scrutiny over the conduct of federal officers after two U.S. citizens protesting immigration enforcement activities in the city were shot and killed.

It is the latest apparent effort by the Trump administration to ratchet down tensions after the shootings triggered protests and widespread criticism.

In the immediate hours after Department of Veterans Affairs hospital ICU nurse Alex Pretti's death, Noem went on the offensive, saying several times that Prett "came with a weapon and dozens of rounds of ammunition and attacked" officers, who took action to "defend their lives."

Other administration officials have attempted to paint a similar picture.

Multiple videos that emerged of the shooting contradicted that claim, showing Prett had only his cellphone in his hand as officers tackled him to the ground, with one removing a handgun from the back of his pants as another officer began firing shots into his back.

Homeland Security has said that at least four Customs and Border Protection officers on the scene when Prett was shot were wearing body cameras.

The body camera footage from Prett's shooting has not been made public.

The department has not responded to repeated questions from various sources about whether any of the ICE officers on the scene of the killing of 37-year-old mother of three Renee

Good earlier in January were wearing the cameras.

The shootings, and the narrative coming from some in the administration, sparked demands for accountability, including among some Republicans.

President Donald Trump sent his border czar Tom Homan to Minneapolis to take control of operations there, displacing Border Patrol commander Gregory Bovino, who has become a lightning rod for criticism in the various operations he's joined in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles.

The Justice Department has also opened a federal civil rights investigation into Prett's shooting, which it has not done in the case of Good.

## Clintons to testify in Epstein investigation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton finalized an agreement with House Republicans on Tuesday to testify in a House investigation into Jeffrey Epstein this month, bowing to the threat of a contempt of Congress vote against them.

Hillary Clinton will testify before the House Oversight Committee on Feb. 26 and Bill Clinton will appear on Feb. 27. It will mark the first time that lawmakers have compelled a former president to testify.

The arrangement comes after months of negotiating between the two sides as Republicans sought to make the Clintons a focal point in a House committee's investigation into Epstein, a convicted sex offender who killed himself in a New York jail cell in 2019, and Ghislaine Maxwell, his former girlfriend.

"We look forward to now

questioning the Clintons as part of our investigation into the horrific crimes of Epstein and Maxwell, to deliver transparency and accountability for the American people and for survivors," Rep. James Comer, the chair of the House Oversight Committee, said in a statement.

The Clintons have remained highly critical of Comer's decision, saying he was bringing politics into the investigation while failing to hold the Trump administration accountable for delays in producing the Department of Justice's case files on Epstein.

Still, the prospect of a vote raised the potential for Congress to use one of its most severe punishments against a former president for the first time.

For months, the Clintons resisted subpoenas from the committee, but House Republicans had advanced criminal contempt of Congress charges to a potential vote this week.

## Intelligence director: President requested she attend Ga. search

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard told lawmakers in a letter Monday that she attended an FBI search of the elections hub in Fulton County, Ga., last week because President Donald Trump asked for her to be there.

She also acknowledged that she "facilitated" what she described as a brief phone call between Trump and FBI agents who carried out the search but insisted that neither she nor the president issued any directives.

The letter to top Democrats on the House and Senate intelligence committees marked Gabbard's first detailed explanation for her presence at an FBI search during which agents with a warrant seized hundreds of boxes containing ballots and other documents related to the 2020 election in Georgia's most populous county.

Fulton County, which votes overwhelmingly Democratic, has been a frequent target of the president's ire. He has long insisted without evidence that widespread voter fraud in the county cost him victory in Georgia in his 2020 loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

Gabbard's arrival in Georgia raised immediate questions among Democratic officials because the FBI search of the election center was a law enforcement, not intelligence, activity and because the position of national intelligence director is typically focused on foreign threats.

In her letter, Gabbard said her presence was specifically requested by Trump and she accompanied senior FBI officials "under my broad statutory authority to coordinate, integrate and analyze intelligence related to election security."

# Russia fires drones, missiles at Ukraine

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia fired around 450 long-range drones and 70 missiles of various types at Ukraine in a major attack overnight, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Tuesday.

The barrage came as NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte visited Kyiv in a show of support and a day before Russia and Ukraine were due to attend U.S.-brokered talks in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on ending the all-out war, which Russia launched nearly four years ago.

The bombardment of at least five regions of Ukraine included a record number of 32 ballistic missiles and specifically took aim at the power grid, Zelenskyy said, as part of Moscow's ongoing campaign to deny civil-

ians light, heating and running water during the coldest winter in years.

Private power company DTEK said it was the heaviest barrage of the electricity network this year. At least 10 people were wounded, officials said.

"Taking advantage of the coldest days of winter to terrorize people is more important to Russia than diplomacy," Zelenskyy said. Temperatures in Kyiv fell to minus 4 Fahrenheit during the night and stood at minus 3 on Tuesday.

He urged allies to send more air defense supplies and bring "maximum pressure" to bear on Russia to end its full-scale invasion, which began on Feb. 24, 2022.

Officials have described recent talks between Moscow and Kyiv delegations as construc-

tive. But after a year of efforts, the Trump administration is still searching for a breakthrough on key issues such as who keeps the Ukrainian land that Russia's army has occupied, and a comprehensive settlement appears distant. The Abu Dhabi talks were scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday.

Rutte addressed the Ukrainian parliament during his visit and said that countries in the military alliance "are ready to provide support quickly and consistently" as peace efforts drag on.

Since last summer, NATO members have provided 75% of all missiles supplied to the front, and 90% of those used for Ukraine's air defense, he said.

European countries, fearing Moscow's ambitions, see their

own future security as being on the line in Ukraine.

"Be assured that NATO stands with Ukraine and is ready to do so for years to come," Rutte said. "Your security is our security. Your peace is our peace. And it must be lasting."

In Kyiv, officials said that five people were wounded in the strikes that damaged and set fire to residential buildings, a kindergarten and a gas station in various parts of the capital, according to the State Emergency Service.

By early morning, 1,170 apartment buildings in the capital were without heat, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said. That set back desperate repair operations that had restored power to all but 80 apartment buildings, he said.

## NASA targets March launch of moon rocket after fuel leaks

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — NASA said Tuesday it will now target a March launch of its new moon rocket after running into exasperating fuel leaks during a make-or-break test a day earlier.

The space agency said in a statement that the launch delay will "allow teams to review data and conduct a second wet dress rehearsal" before the flight test.

The leaks — reminiscent of the rocket's delayed debut three years ago — sprang just a couple hours into the daylong fueling operation Monday at Kennedy Space Center and called into question how soon astronauts could take off.

NASA said the four astronauts tasked for the flight will be moved out of their nearly two-week quarantine. NASA added they will enter quarantine again "about two weeks" before the next launch window for the trip around the moon.

The agency gave no indication

of an official launch target in March, saying teams need to first "fully review data from the test, mitigate each issue, and return to testing." Before Tuesday's postponement, the earliest NASA could have launched commander Reid Wiseman and his crew to the moon was no sooner than Sunday.

Launch controllers Monday began loading the 322-foot rocket with super-cold hydrogen and oxygen at midday. More than 700,000 gallons had to flow into the tanks and remain on board for several hours, mimicking the final stages of an actual countdown. But excessive hydrogen quickly built up near the bottom of the rocket. Hydrogen loading was halted at least twice as the launch team scrambled to work around the problem using techniques developed during the previous Space Launch System countdown in 2022. That first test flight was plagued by hydrogen leaks before finally soaring without a crew.

## Paris prosecutors raid X offices in deepfake probe

Associated Press

PARIS — French prosecutors searched the offices of Elon Musk's social media platform X on Tuesday as part of a preliminary investigation into a range of alleged offenses, including spreading child sexual abuse images and deepfakes.

The investigation was opened in January last year by the prosecutors' cybercrime unit, the Paris prosecutors' office said in a statement.

It's looking into alleged "complicity" in possessing and spreading pornographic images of minors, sexually explicit deepfakes, denial of crimes against humanity and manipulation of an automated data processing system as part of an organized group, among other charges.

Prosecutors also asked Musk and former CEO Linda Yaccarino to attend "voluntary interviews" on April 20.

Employees of X have also been

summoned that same week to be heard as witnesses, the statement said. Yaccarino was CEO from May 2023 until July 2025.

A spokesperson for X did not respond to a request for comment.

In a message posted on X, the Paris prosecutors' office announced the ongoing searches and said it was leaving the platform while calling on followers to join on other social media.

"At this stage, the conduct of the investigation is based on a constructive approach, with the aim of ultimately ensuring that the X platform complies with French law, as it operates on the national territory," the prosecutors' statement said.

The investigation was first opened following reports by a French lawmaker alleging that biased algorithms on X were likely to have distorted the functioning of an automated data processing system.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Trappers scoop up iguanas amid cold snap

**FL** MIAMI — South Florida iguana removal companies were scooping up hundreds of cold-stunned and dead lizards Sunday in a seemingly record-breaking roundup due to the cold snap, according to local business owners.

"We are scooping them up by the dozens," said Blake Wilkins, owner of Redline Iguana Removal in Hollywood.

It was 35.1 degrees Fahrenheit with a wind chill of 27 around 7 a.m. Sunday at Miami International Airport, beating the previous Feb. 1 record low of 36, set in 1909. With those cold temps, the iguana removal business was booming.

Iguanas and other reptiles can lose muscle control and go into a state of shock, appearing "frozen," when temperatures dip near freezing.

The cold temperatures, combined with the wind knocking the iguanas out of trees, created a "kind of double factor," Wilkins said, adding that he had dodged a falling iguana earlier.

On Friday, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission said that on Sunday and Monday, people could trap the iguanas, a non-native invasive species, and bring them to five FWC offices so they could be humanely killed or transferred to permitted pet operators.

### Actor rejects plea deal after alleged shooting

**NY** NEW YORK — A New Jersey actor whose credits include HBO's "The Sopranos," as well as films like "J. Edgar" and "The Prestige," rejected a plea deal fol-

lowing a road rage incident last year, during which he allegedly shot a woman in the face.

Ernest Heinz, 47, on Friday entered a not guilty plea during a brief appearance in Atlantic County Superior Court, NJ Advance reported. The actor is facing 31 counts for allegedly shooting Maritza Arias-Galva near a traffic light in Galloway Township, N.J., including first-degree attempted murder, aggravated assault and weapons offenses.

Arias-Galva told authorities she was trying to merge into a single lane on South Pomona Road, outside Stockton University, when Heinz sped past her and cut her off on the afternoon of Sept. 11, according to court documents. As they neared the light, Heinz "yelled at her, reached his hand out the window and fired a single shot," Galloway Police Capt. Mark D'Esposito said.

### John Adams papers effort awarded \$3 million grant

**MA** BOSTON — The life of America's second president, John Adams, will be further illuminated thanks to a new \$3 million grant.

The Massachusetts Historical Society announced it has been awarded a five-year, \$3 million grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities that will allow it "to accelerate the editing, annotating and publishing of John Adams's public writings."

The MHS says that the grant money will go toward increasing access to the papers of Adams and his family, Adams programming for the celebration of the 250th birthday of the U.S.A., as well as building dig-

ital infrastructure for the MHS' Adams Papers and Primary Source Cooperative projects.

### Driver's license exams to be offered in English only

**FL** FORT LAUDERDALE — Adios, multilingual driver's license tests in Florida.

The state Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles will no longer offer exams in any language other than English starting Friday, officials announced last week.

The state will no longer provide translation services or printed exams in any language other than English, according to the state's announcement. The new policy applies to all driver's license classifications, including oral exams.

Juan Pagan, president of the Florida Hispanic American Chamber of Commerce, recognized the need for drivers to know the language in the country where they've been entrusted with the operation of vehicles, while he also thought the rule reflects an "adversarial approach to assimilation" for foreigners in general and immigrants in particular.

### Democrat wins reliably GOP state Senate seat

**TX** AUSTIN — Democrat Taylor Rehmet won a special election for the Texas state Senate on Saturday, flipping a reliably Republican district that President Donald Trump won by 17 points in 2024.

Rehmet, a labor union leader and veteran, easily defeated Republican Leigh Wambsganss, a conservative activist, in the Fort Worth-area district.

With almost all votes counted,

Rehmet held a comfortable lead of more than 14 percentage points over his opponent. His victory added to Democrats' record of overperforming in special elections so far this cycle. Democrats said it was further evidence that voters under the second Trump administration are motivated to reject GOP candidates and their policies.

The seat was open because the four-term GOP incumbent, Kelly Hancock, resigned to take a statewide office. Hancock easily won election each time he ran, and Republicans have held the seat for decades.

The district is redder than its home, Tarrant County.

Trump won the county by 5 points in 2024, but Democratic President Joe Biden carried it in 2020 by about 1,800 votes out of more than 834,000 cast.

### Court clarifies cannabis 'open container' rules

**CA** SAN FRANCISCO — California cops can't stop or cite drivers under the state's "open container" rules for cannabis unless the product is rolled or otherwise ready to consume, the California Supreme Court ruled Friday.

The case arose after Sacramento police spotted a dusting of loose "crumbs" in the back of a car they had pulled over for a rolling stop.

The debris weighed about a third of a gram and was not "accessible for consumption," according to the decision.

Nevertheless, police cited the "open container" law as probable cause to search the car and turned up an unregistered handgun, for which the passenger was charged.

— From wire reports

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## Reporting World, National and Military News

# Jackson, Del Duca picked as US flag bearers

Associated Press

Speedskater Erin Jackson has already made history as the first Black woman to win an individual gold medal at a Winter Olympics. Bobsledder Frank Del Duca is a sergeant in the Army, hailing from a family with deep Italian roots.

They might be the perfect pair to lead the United States into the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics.

Jackson, 33, and Del Duca, 34, were selected by a group of their fellow Olympians as the U.S. flagbearers for Friday night's opening ceremony of the Milan Cortina Games. Jackson will become the eighth U.S. speedskater to carry the flag into an Olympics, the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee said, while Del Duca will be the first bobsledder to carry the flag into an opening in 70 years.

These Games are Del Duca's second after competing in

Beijing four years ago in both the two- and four-man competitions.

USA Bobsled's No. 1 pilot joined the Army and its World Class Athlete Program in August 2019.

In an interview with Stars and Stripes, Del Duca mentioned that the Milan Cortina Olympics are particularly special to him because of his family background. Three of Del Duca's grandparents were Italian, and he grew up with a lot of Italian-American influence.

"To compete in Italy and then also this time around, having friends and family in the stands, it's going to be a dream come true, and certainly means a lot," Del Duca said.

"Being chosen to represent the United States on the world stage is a tremendous honor," Jackson said in a statement Tuesday from the USOPC. "It's a moment that reflects far more than one individual — it

represents my family, my teammates, my hometown, and everyone across the country who believes in the power of sport. The Olympics remind us of the power of sport to connect and inspire, and I'm proud to carry that forward on the Olympic stage."

It will be an unusual opening ceremony, given that these are the most spread-out Olympics ever. The main ceremony is in Milan, with other ceremonies and athlete parades in the Italian cities of Predazzo, Livigno and Cortina d'Ampezzo.

Bobsledder Elana Meyers Taylor was picked to carry the American flag at the 2022 Beijing Olympics but tested positive for COVID-19, pushing her flag-carrying chance until the closing ceremony of those games. She was replaced at the Beijing opening by speedskater Brittany Bowe, and this time, it's Jackson's turn to have that moment.

Del Duca was fourth in both two- and four-man at last season's world championships on his home track in Lake Placid, N.Y. He made his Olympic debut at Beijing four years ago, finishing 13th in both races.

Now he wears his country's colors in the Olympics again. That means the world to any athlete. It's especially significant to Del Duca as a member of the Army — and even more so, he insists, with these games in his family's homeland.

"It would be cool anywhere, but the fact that it's in Italy, I think our family is just that much more excited," Del Duca told the Associated Press. "My grandparents are no longer around, but they always rooted for Italy and the U.S. And they said the perfect day would be the Italians and the Americans tying for gold. So, yes, this is cool. It's a cool opportunity."

## Vonn confident she will race despite ACL rupture

Associated Press

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy — Lindsey Vonn has done this before. And succeeded.

The 41-year-old American skiing standout is "confident" she can compete at the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics despite a torn ACL from a crash four days ago.

Vonn said that the damage to her left knee was a "completely ruptured" ACL, bone bruising "plus meniscal damage."

After three days of physical therapy and doctors' advice, Vonn tried skiing Tuesday. She did not appear to be limping as she entered and exited a news conference.

"My knee is not swollen, and with the help of a knee brace, I am confident that I can compete on Sunday," Vonn said. "And as long as there's a chance, I will try ... I will do everything in my power to be in the starting gate."

Vonn crashed in a World Cup downhill in Crans-Montana, Switzerland on Friday and ended up in the safety nets. After skiing to the bottom of the course, she was taken to hospital.

Vonn is expected to be one of the biggest stars of the Winter Games, which start Friday with the opening ceremony. Her first race comes two days later in the women's downhill. She also plans on competing in super-G and the new team combined event.

The opening women's downhill training session is scheduled for Thursday.

"My intention," Vonn said, "is to race everything."

Vonn has had numerous crashes and injuries in her career. One of her worst was at the 2013 world championships in Schladming, Austria, during a super-G that was also held in difficult conditions.

Vonn tore her right knee. She returned the following season, got hurt again and missed the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

She was also battered up before the 2019 world championships, but took bronze in downhill before going into a nearly six-year retirement.

"I've been in this position before. I know how to handle it," Vonn said. "I feel a lot better now than I did in 2019. ... And I still got a medal there with no LCL and three tibial

plateau fractures. So like I said, this is not an unknown for me. I've done this before."

She persevered through a bruised shin that she treated with topfen cheese before winning gold in downhill at the 2010 Games.

"I don't need topfen now. My knee isn't swollen," Vonn said.

Still, Vonn added, "This would be the best comeback I've done so far. Definitely the most dramatic."

Vonn made a stunning comeback last season after nearly six years away. Skiing with a partial titanium implant in her right knee, she has been the circuit's leading downhillier this season with two victories and three other podium finishes in five races.

Including super-G, Vonn completed eight World Cup races and finished on the podium in seven of them. Her worst finish was fourth.

Women's skiing during the Games will be in Cortina, where Vonn holds the World Cup record with 12 wins.

She has won three Olympic medals: Gold in downhill and bronze in super-G in 2010 and bronze in downhill in 2018.

# Calmer opening greets Pats, Seahawks

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Maybe the game itself will live up to the hype, because Super Bowl Opening Night was calmer than usual.

Drake Maye and the New England Patriots (17-3) take on Sam Darnold and the Seattle Seahawks (16-3) on Sunday at Levi's Stadium, home of the San Francisco 49ers.

The media frenzy that kicks off the week's festivities on Monday night was smaller, quieter and far less outrageous than recent years.

The crowd inside the San Jose Convention Center was a fraction of its usual size — Opening Night has previously been held in larger arenas. More than 2,000 reporters from across the globe were credentialed to cover the typically zany event, and the league expects 6,500 media members to cover the game and various events surrounding it.

There was no sign of the naked man in a barrel. Nobody wore a wedding dress and proposed to Maye. Reporters weren't asking players to dance or perform odd tricks. One guy did dress up as Charizard, a Pokemon character.

Still, it wasn't all football and X's and O's.

Maye was asked about his wife, Ann Michael Maye, and her popular baking videos on social media.

"Keep being you," he said. "You're the better half of me and I love you. It's such a special moment for me to follow your journey. I know you do it for something bigger than yourself and that's what makes it special."

Darnold was asked to name his favorite coffee spot, burger joint, hobby and food.

Patriots coach Mike Vrabel refused to compare Maye to Tom Brady and was asked several questions about playing for Bill Belichick. He had fun with a reporter from Nickelodeon who presented him with a purple-and-green chain that read, "Slime." Vrabel wore it but feared he'd get that green, gooey stuff splashed all over his head.

"Why do you keep looking up? Am I about to get slimed?" he said.

Assured he wasn't, Vrabel was asked if there's one player he would want to slime.

"Stefon Diggs," he said without hesitation.

Diggs, the standout receiver, was full of praise for his coach.

"I've had great coaches but this guy played the game, he knows we're gonna grind and he takes care of us," Diggs said.

The Patriots spent one hour fielding questions before giving way to the Seahawks, who took the stage an hour after New England concluded.

Seahawks coach Mike Macdonald, a finalist along with Vrabel for AP NFL Coach of the Year, was asked if he considered signing Marshawn Lynch to a one-day contract to give him an opportunity to score a 1-yard touchdown.

This is a Super Bowl matchup that produced one of the most memorable endings among the first 59. The Patriots beat the Seahawks 28-24 when Malcolm Butler picked off Russell Wilson's pass from the 1 in the final minute on Feb. 1, 2015. Seahawks fans still lament the fact Lynch didn't get the ball in that spot.

"I love Beast Mode," Macdonald said. "Just the fact that he knows me and he texts me. ... That's how you want Seahawk football to look like Marhsawn."

An event that began as a day-

time introduction of the teams has evolved into a live, ticketed, prime-time showcase on national television.

The Patriots are aiming for an NFL-record seventh Lombardi trophy and first without Brady and Belichick.

Vrabel, who won three Super Bowls as a linebacker with New England, inherited a 4-13 team and has the Patriots on the verge of their first championship parade in seven years.

Maye had a sensational sophomore season, becoming a finalist for the AP NFL MVP and Offensive Player of the Year awards while leading the Patriots to their 12th Super Bowl.

A stifling defense has led the way for the Patriots in the playoffs, holding three opponents to just 8.7 points per game.

The Seahawks had the NFL's stingiest defense, led by tackle Leonard Williams, linebacker Ernest Jones IV and cornerback Devon Witherspoon. Seattle allowed just 17.1 points per game.

But Darnold's resurgence will be the top storyline of the week. A No. 3 overall pick by the New York Jets in 2018, Darnold is thriving on his fifth team.

## Hornets rally past Pelicans for 7th straight victory

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — LaMelo Ball overcame an early head-to-head collision with coach Charles Lee to score 24 points, and the surging Charlotte Hornets fought back from a 22-point deficit to beat the New Orleans Pelicans 102-95 on Monday for their seventh straight win.

Kon Knueppel added 17 points, hitting four 3s, and Brandon Miller and Grant Williams each scored 16 as Charlotte pulled within a half-game of the Atlanta Hawks for the 10th spot in the Eastern Conference.

The Hornets overcame 17

turnovers while matching their longest winning streak since March 2016.

Ball left the game briefly in the first quarter with an eye laceration after banging heads with Lee as Ball was trying to save an errant pass from going out of bounds.

Trey Murphy III scored 27 points to lead New Orleans, which has lost six of its last nine.

**Rockets 118, Pacers 114:** Alperen Sengun matched his season high with 39 points, and Jabari Smith Jr. added 19 to help short-handed Houston overcome the absence of All-

Star forward Kevin Durant to beat host Indiana.

Durant sat out, coach Ime Udoka said, after spraining his left ankle when he stepped on a fan's foot, so Sengun did the heavy lifting.

He made 13 of 25 from the field and 13 of 18 from the free-throw line, including 8 of 12 during the fourth quarter.

**Grizzlies 137, Timberwolves 128:** Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 30 points, Ty Jerome added 19 and host Memphis built a 20-point lead in the second half and held on for a victory over Minnesota.

The Grizzlies maintained a double-digit advantage through much of the fourth quarter.

Anthony Edwards led the Timberwolves with 39 points and seven rebounds. Jaden McDaniels scored 29 points and DiVincenzo finished with 21, including 13 in the fourth. Minnesota had its four-game win streak halted.

**76ers 128, Clippers 113:**

Tyrese Maxey scored 29 points, including seven 3-pointers, Dominick Barlow added 26 points and 16 rebounds, and visiting Philadelphia beat Los Angeles for its fourth consecutive victory.

# Harley's goal in OT lifts Stars over Jets

Associated Press

DALLAS — Thomas Harley scored at 2:05 of overtime, and the Dallas Stars matched their longest winning streak of the season at five games with a 4-3 victory over the Winnipeg Jets on Monday night.

The goal came moments after Jake Oettinger made a pad save on Mark Scheifele's breakaway in a matchup of the top two goalies for Team USA in the second-to-last game before the break for the Milan Cortina Olympics. Oettinger and expected U.S. starter Connor Hellebuyck each stopped 24 shots.

Mikko Rantanen put Dallas ahead 3-2 with 7:43 left in regulation on a weaving play through two defenders, but Logan Stanley got Winnipeg even on a 6-on-5 goal with 1:43 to go.

Jason Robertson had his 199th career goal and team-leading 31st this season and Nils Lundkvist scored as the Stars won their 18th one-goal game, tying the New York Islanders for the NHL lead.

Matt Duchene's four-game goal streak ended, but he had two assists along with Miro Heiskanen. His pass put Harley one-on-one with Hellebuyck, who was beaten by a backhand over his left pad.

The Jets went ahead 2-1 just

over three minutes after Robertson scored the game's first goal early in the second period. Gabriel Villardi's 21st of the season came on a rebound, and Perfetti ended Winnipeg's five-game streak without a power-play goal by scoring at 3:58 of the second.

**Sabres 5, Panthers 3:** Jason Zucker broke a tie on a power play at 5:31 of the third period and visiting Buffalo beat two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Florida.

The Sabres have won six of seven and took over the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference standings. They hold a 10-point lead over the Panthers.

Florida, which has lost four straight, trails Boston by nine for the final playoff position with 27 games remaining.

**Senators 3, Penguins 2:** Claude Giroux scored with just over five minutes remaining in the third period and visiting Ottawa beat Pittsburgh.

Linus Ullmark made 14 saves for the Senators, who won their fourth straight game. Ottawa has points in nine of its last 11 games overall. Ullmark joined Tony Esposito and Bob Froese as the only goalies in NHL history to win each of their first eight games against the Penguins.

**Capitals 4, Islanders 1:** Mar-

tin Fehervary and Anthony Beauvillier scored 31 seconds apart in the second period, and host Washington beat New York.

Nic Dowd also scored for the Capitals in his 500th game with the franchise. John Carlson scored into an empty net with 2:25 to play on a shot that traveled almost the entire length of the ice.

**Wild 4, Canadiens 3 (OT):** Kirill Kaprizov scored his second goal of the game on a power play at 3:38 of overtime to give host Minnesota a victory over Montreal.

Quinn Hughes assisted on Kaprizov's first goal to tie the Russian's team-record assists streak at nine and push his franchise-record points streak for defenseman to nine.

**Predators 6, Blues 5:** Steven Stamkos scored twice in the third period to help host Nashville rally over St. Louis.

Ryan O'Reilly also scored twice and Michael McCarron and Filip Forsberg added goals for the Predators. They scored five straight goals to erase a four-goal deficit and win their second straight.

**Blackhawks 6, Sharks 3:** Ryan Donato had two goals and two assists, and host Chicago beat San Jose.

The Blackhawks had lost five

in a row. They improved to 3-6-2 in their last 11 games.

**Red Wings 2, Avalanche 0:** John Gibson stopped 21 shots for his fourth shutout of the season and Lucas Raymond scored and had his team-leading 41st assist as visiting Detroit beat Colorado.

The Red Wings were 0-14-1 in their previous 15 games against the Avalanche entering Monday, including a 5-0 home loss two days earlier in which Gibson allowed four goals on 17 shots.

**Mammoth 6, Canucks 2:** Nick Schmaltz had his second hat trick of the season and added two assists for a five-point game in host Utah's victory over Vancouver.

Schmaltz had his third career NHL hat trick to push his season goals total to 22, one shy of his career high set with Arizona in 2021-22.

**Maple Leafs 4, Flames 2:** William Nylander scored on a breakaway 35 seconds into the game and added two assists that helped visiting Toronto beat Calgary.

Matias MacCelli and defenseman Troy Stecher also scored as the Maple Leafs won their second straight following a six-game losing streak. Toronto has won eight in a row versus the Flames, its longest active streak against any team.

## Peterson hits late 3s, No. 11 Kansas tops No. 13 Texas Tech

Associated Press

LUBBOCK, Texas — Kansas freshman Darryn Peterson scored 19 points, including two 3-pointers in the final 1:20 for his only field goals of the second half, and the 11th-ranked Jayhawks overcame a late nine-point deficit to beat No. 13 Texas Tech 64-61 on Monday night.

Peterson, who played a season-high 35 minutes, hit a 3 from the right corner with 1:20 left to tie the game at 61. His next one, with 44 seconds remaining, put Kansas (17-5, 7-2 Big 12) ahead to stay in its sixth consecutive win.

"This is the first game I got through to the end," Peterson said. "I've been trying to all year, so to finally be able to do it, it's a blessing."

Before hitting the late 3s, Peterson was only 3-for-12 shooting against the Red Raiders.

"He's got something that I guess you're born with and can't teach. He's got just an unbelievable ability to raise his level when it counts the most," Jayhawks coach Bill Self said. "That's what he did tonight. I mean, those two plays he made were obviously the two biggest

plays of the game for us."

Melvin Council Jr. had 16 points, Flory Bidunga scored 14 and Bryson Tiller grabbed 10 rebounds for Kansas.

Texas Tech (16-6, 6-3), playing without starting point guard Christian Anderson, had a 59-50 lead with 6:05 to go after a jumper by LeJuan Watts. But they made only one of their last 12 shots while the Jayhawks closed on a 14-2 run.

**No. 14 North Carolina 87, Syracuse 77:** Caleb Wilson had 22 points and nine rebounds as the host Tar Heels held off the Or-

ange after building a 32-point lead midway through the second half.

Syracuse shaved the deficit to six with 42 seconds remaining before North Carolina finally closed it out from the free-throw line.

Henri Veesaar added 17 points and 11 boards for his Atlantic Coast Conference-leading 12th double-double. Jonathan Powell scored 12 points and Luka Bogavac had 10 for the Tar Heels (18-4, 6-3), who will carry a four-game winning streak into Saturday's showdown with No. 4 Duke in Chapel Hill.