

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2026

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

High North is high priority for NATO

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Anti-submarine warfare drills are underway in the High North as allies step up their presence in the Arctic with maneuvers aimed at securing a strategic gap near Greenland.

Arctic Dolphin, involving allied naval forces at various locations in Norway, marks the latest push by NATO allies to showcase how operating in the Arctic's harsh terrain is a top priority.

The exercise "reinforces NATO's focus on the strategically important Greenland-United Kingdom gap, a vital gateway to the Atlantic Ocean," NATO's Allied Mari-

time Command said in a Wednesday statement.

Arctic Dolphin, which began Monday and runs until Feb. 13, involves submarines, warships and submarine-hunting aircraft.

The High North has emerged as a major NATO military focal point, on par with the alliance's eastern flank in the Baltics.

As northern sea ice melts, new shipping lanes are opening in a region rich with valuable natural resources. In addition, the prospect of increased competition there with Russia and China has risen.

President Donald Trump also has turned his attention to

Greenland, a semiautonomous territory of NATO ally Denmark.

Trump recently pushed for an American takeover of the island, although he ruled out using American military force as an option for doing so. Nevertheless, his comments left many European members of the bloc rattled.

Discussions are now taking place on a potential deal that could see a larger American presence in Greenland, where the U.S. currently has around 200 troops based.

The exercise comes as NATO prepares to further expand its presence in the High North with a new operation called

Arctic Sentry, which is in the planning phase.

Meanwhile, thousands of U.S. and allied service members will deploy to Norway in the coming weeks for large-scale combat drills centered on the country's defense.

Nearly 3,000 Marines and roughly 25,000 personnel from a dozen countries plan to participate in Cold Response, an exercise slated to kick off in March.

"Training in this region enhances Allied readiness to protect sea lines of communication and maintain maritime security in the North Atlantic and Norwegian Sea," the NATO statement said.

Navy pilot in secret dogfight in Korean War honored

BY MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Korean War veteran Royce Williams, who was involved in a secretive dogfight with seven Soviet fighter planes more than 70 years ago, will receive the Medal of Honor, the White House confirmed Thursday.

Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., announced the news Wednesday that President Donald Trump let Williams know he would receive the nation's highest award for courage under fire.

"My friend, constituent and hero Royce Williams is 100 years young, a Top Gun pilot like no other, and an American hero for all time," Issa said. "The heroism and valor he demonstrated for more than 35 harrowing minutes almost 70 years ago in the skies over the

North Pacific and the coast of North Korea unquestionably saved the lives of his fellow pilots, shipmates and crew. His story is one for the ages and it now has its rightful chapter as Royce receives the Medal of Honor."

On Nov. 18, 1952, Williams was piloting an F9F-5 Panther when he encountered seven Soviet MiG-15s. Williams, a lieutenant at the time, shot down four of the fighters and survived a 37-millimeter round to his fuselage. Though his plane was badly damaged, he managed to make a safe landing on the deck of the USS Oriskany aircraft carrier off the North Korean coast.

After the mission, he was directed to keep silent about the high-stakes dogfight that pitted him against Soviet aviators at the peak of the Cold War.

"In the moment I was a fighter pilot doing my job ... I was only shooting what I had," Williams said in an earlier Navy account of the dogfight. "They had me cold on maneuverability and acceleration — the MiG was vastly superior on those counts to the F9F. The only thing I could do was out-turn them."

Williams battled the Soviet pilots for 35 minutes, making it the longest dogfight in U.S. military history, according to the Navy.

For more than 50 years, Williams kept quiet about the mission, which was detailed in Soviet records in 1992.

Williams was initially awarded the Silver Star, and that was elevated to the Navy Cross in 2023. His supporters have continued to press for higher recognition.

Issa was among the people spearheading the effort to award Williams the Medal of Honor.

The National Defense Authorization Act for 2026, finalized in December, included legislation that removes a five-year statute of limitations rule so that Williams, whose exploits as a Navy pilot are now part of military lore, can be considered for the honor.

"What Royce did is — still to this day — the most unique U.S.-Soviet aerial combat dogfight in the history of the Cold War, and one in which Royce Williams demonstrated indomitable courage of the highest skill under incalculable duress," Issa said. "It is my honor to have fought all these years for Royce to gain a recognition that he has not sought, but so richly deserves."

US accuses China of 2020 nuclear test

The Washington Post

The United States' top nuclear arms official on Friday accused China of carrying out an undisclosed nuclear detonation in 2020, arguing that recent secretive underground tests by China and Russia have given Washington reason to conduct "parallel steps" as a decades-long moratorium on nuclear testing among major powers is unraveling.

Thomas DiNanno, the under-secretary of state for arms control, told the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on Friday that Beijing is preparing tests "with designated yields in the hundreds of tons" and has interfered with international seismic

monitoring systems to mask prior or detonations.

"Today, I can reveal that the U.S. government is aware that China has conducted nuclear explosive tests.... China carried out one such yield-producing test on June 22, 2020," DiNanno said, adding that Russia is assisting Beijing in developing the weapons-grade fissile material needed to fuel its nuclear arsenal.

DiNanno's remarks offered fresh context to President Donald Trump's announcement a day earlier that he would not seek to renew the New START accord, the last major nuclear arms control agreement between Washington and Moscow.

In a Truth Social post, Trump said the U.S. would instead pursue a "new, improved, and modernized" pact. In December, Trump said he had ordered the U.S. to resume nuclear weapons testing "immediately" — something it has not done since 1992 — citing the need to match what he said are secretive tests by Russia and China.

"Serial Russian violations, growth of worldwide stockpiles and flaws in New START's design and implementation gives the United States a clear imperative to call for a new architecture that addresses the threats of today, not those of a bygone era," said DiNanno, who argued that "constraints" placed on the

U.S. under the unilateral moratorium with Russia had fueled the rapid growth of China's arsenal.

Russia, he noted, had successfully tested its 9M730 Burevestnik "Skyfall" cruise missile and Status-6 Poseidon "Doomsday" nuclear-armed unmanned underwater vehicle in "the last few months." DiNanno did not elaborate on the evidence underpinning U.S. assessments of the alleged Chinese and Russian tests.

The Chinese Embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment on the alleged 2020 test but said it adheres to a nuclear testing moratorium and a "no first use" policy on nuclear weapons.

Sailors, civilians mark 80th anniversary of Sasebo base

BY JANIQUA ROBINSON
Stars and Stripes

U.S. sailors recently joined American and Japanese civilian employees to mark Sasebo Naval Base's 80th anniversary, gathering to form the number 80 for a commemorative photo at the installation in southern Japan.

The image, taken Wednesday, was shared on the base's official Facebook page along with a brief account of its history.

"Today we celebrate our 80-year history as we look forward to our future and our continuing mission to support security, stability, and freedom in the Indo-Asia-Pacific Region in partnership with the Japan Self-Defense Forces and our regional allies," the post said.

Base spokesman Aki Nichols organized the photo and social media post, he told Stars and Stripes on Thursday.

Originally planned for summer 2025, the group photo was

rescheduled to coincide with the anniversary of Sasebo's establishment as a U.S. naval base on Feb. 4, 1946.

"Setting up the '80' and taking the photo took approximately two hours, thanks to the cooperation of the volunteer participants and the fire department who provided their ladder truck to use as the platform for the photographer," Nichols wrote.

Before the arrival of U.S. forces in September 1946, Sasebo had already played a significant military role for decades. Established in 1889, it served as headquarters for the Imperial Japanese Navy's Third Naval District, according to the base's website. Today, the facility is jointly used by the U.S. Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.

Sasebo serves as the homeport for the U.S. 7th Fleet's amphibious and mine warfare forces, including eight warships, along with their crews and families.

Navy enters Sapporo contest with 'Beatles' snow sculpture

BY RYAN M. BREEDEN
Stars and Stripes

isons to the Beatles' "Yellow Submarine."

SAPPORO, Japan — Short on experience but not creativity, a U.S. Navy snow-sculpting team leaned into a playful design that's got some people humming a popular Beatles tune at this city's annual Snow Festival.

One of Japan's largest winter events, the festival draws millions of visitors to Odori Park on the northern island of Hokkaido.

The four-member Navy team arrived planning to sculpt a submarine above a crest reading "250" to mark the semiquincentennial of U.S. independence. But a last-minute change left the sailors without their veteran sculptor, said team leader Chief Petty Officer Robert Guerra.

"The team understood that, given our inexperience, we would not be able to sculpt the more hyper realistic version of the Submarine," he told Stars and Stripes in a text message Thursday.

The sailors opted for a simpler design that quickly drew compar-

"So far, the response has been positive, as many visitors have let us know they really enjoyed our yellow submarine, a reference to the Beatles song," Guerra wrote.

The team included Petty Officers 2nd Class Scott Flagg, Matthew Fischer, Wyatt Rivet and Mya Howard, along with Seaman Jalil Moorer, according to a Jan. 28 news release from Misawa Naval Air Facility, the team's home station. They carved the sculpture over three days beginning Jan. 30, working up to 11 hours daily, Guerra said.

This marks the Navy's 41st year participating in the festival. Previous snow sculptures have included an F-35C Lightning II stealth fighter and the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford.

Founded in 1950, the Sapporo Snow Festival draws more than 2 million visitors annually, according to city tourism officials. Sculptures remain on display through Wednesday.

Racist post brings rare GOP rebuke of Trump

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump received rare blowback from Republican lawmakers over a video posted to social media that included a racist image of former President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle Obama, depicted as primates.

Since Trump's return to the White House, Republican lawmakers have treaded carefully when disagreeing with the president, often communicating their concerns in private for fear of suffering his wrath.

But the swift calls to remove the post, which also echoed false conspiracy theories about the 2020 election, represented a rare moment of bipartisan backlash to Trump's actions

from members of Congress.

Multiple GOP members of the Senate and House joined their Democratic colleagues in voicing disgust and criticism at the post and urged the president to remove it.

Trump declined to apologize, saying he did not see the racist portion of the video when he passed it on to staff.

South Carolina's Tim Scott, the only Black Republican senator and chair of the Senate GOP's campaign arm, criticized the image and urged the president to remove it.

"Praying it was fake because it's the most racist thing I've seen out of this White House. The President should remove it," Scott wrote on social media.

Other Republican senators

echoed the sentiment.

"Even if this was a Lion King meme, a reasonable person sees the racist context to this," Sen. Pete Ricketts of Nebraska, wrote on social media. "The White House should do what anyone does when they make a mistake: remove this and apologize."

Roger Wicker, the senior senator from Mississippi, denounced it as "totally unacceptable."

"The president should take it down and apologize," Wicker wrote.

In the House, Rep. Mike Lawler of New York called Trump's post "wrong and incredibly offensive—whether intentional or a mistake—and should be deleted immediately with an apology

offered." Rep. Don Bacon of Nebraska, a frequent Trump critic, quipped on social media about the White House's shifting explanations for the video's origin and deletion.

More Republicans lodged their objections to the post after the video was taken down.

"This content was rightfully removed, should have never been posted to begin with, and is not who we are as a nation," wrote Sen. Katie Britt, an Alabama Republican.

Rep. John James, a Michigan Republican running for governor, said he was "glad to see that trash has been taken down." James, one of four Black Republicans in the House, said he was "shocked and appalled by that post."

Files show FBI found Epstein wasn't running a sex trafficking ring

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The FBI pored over Jeffrey Epstein's bank records and emails. It searched his homes. It spent years interviewing his victims and examining his connections to some of the world's most influential people.

But while investigators collected ample proof that Epstein sexually abused underage girls, they found scant evidence the well-connected financier led a sex trafficking ring serving powerful men, an Associated Press review of internal Justice Department records shows.

Videos and photos seized from Epstein's homes in New York, Florida and the Virgin Islands didn't depict victims being abused or implicate anyone else in his crimes, a prosecutor wrote in one 2025 memo.

An examination of Epstein's financial records, including

payments he made to entities linked to influential figures in academia, finance and global diplomacy, found no connection to criminal activity, said another internal memo in 2019.

While one Epstein victim made highly public claims that he "lent her" to his rich friends, agents couldn't confirm that and found no other victims telling a similar story, the records said.

Summarizing the investigation in an email last July, agents said "four or five" Epstein accusers claimed other men or women had sexually abused them. But, the agents said, there "was not enough evidence to federally charge these individuals."

But the documents, which include police reports, FBI interview notes and prosecutor emails, provide the clearest picture to date of the investigation.

Guthrie pleads with mother's kidnappers

Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. — Savannah Guthrie told the potential kidnappers of her mother Nancy Guthrie on Saturday that the family is prepared to pay for her safe return, as the frantic search for the 84-year-old Arizona resident has entered a seventh day.

"We received your message, and we understand. We beg you now to return our mother to us so that we can celebrate with her," she said in a video posted on social media, flanked by her siblings. "This is the only way we will have peace. This is very valuable to us, and we will pay."

The "Today" show host was referencing a message that was sent to the Tucson-based television station KOLD on Friday afternoon.

KOLD said it received an email related to the Guthrie case on social media that day but declined to share specific details about its contents as the FBI conducted its review.

The station was one of multiple press outlets that received alleged ransom letters during the week. At least one letter made monetary demands and established Thursday evening and the following Monday evening as deadlines.

In a news conference Thursday, law enforcement officials declined to affirm that the letters were credible but said all tips were being investigated seriously. They also said one letter referenced Nancy Guthrie's Apple watch and a specific feature of her property.

The video released Saturday was the third of the week that pleaded with potential kidnappers.

Investigators think Nancy Guthrie was taken against her will from her home just outside Tucson last weekend. DNA tests showed blood on Guthrie's front porch was a match to her, Pima County Sheriff Chris Nanos has said.

Zelenskyy: Russia, US eye economic deal

The Washington Post

KYIV, Ukraine — Days after negotiations to halt Russia's war in Ukraine ended inconclusively in Abu Dhabi, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Russia and the United States were discussing bilateral economic agreements worth some \$12 trillion, including deals that would affect Ukraine.

Zelenskyy said intelligence sources showed him documents that laid out a framework for U.S.-Russian economic cooperation that he called the "Dmitriev package" — named for Kirill Dmitriev, the head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund and a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin who has been a central fig-

ure in negotiations over a ceasefire.

President Donald Trump previously has dangled the possibility of sanctions relief and renewed economic cooperation with Russia as inducements for Moscow to agree to halt the war. Putin, however, has insisted that Russia would achieve its objectives in Ukraine one way or another.

Dmitriev drafted a 28-point peace plan with Trump's envoy to the talks, Steve Witkoff, and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, which included sections for gradually lifting sanctions and creating long-term economic development projects between Russia and Ukraine.

However, Zelenskyy, backed

by European leaders and some members of Congress, has insisted that the sanctions regime against Russia must instead be tightened.

"We are not aware of all their bilateral economic or business agreements, but we are receiving some information on the matter," Zelenskyy said during a briefing with journalists Friday, according to a transcript released Saturday.

"There are also various signals, both in the media and elsewhere, that some of these agreements could also involve issues related to Ukraine — for example, our sovereignty or Ukraine's security," Zelenskyy said. "We are making it clear that Ukraine will not

support any such even potential agreements about us that are made without us."

Zelenskyy's concerns were made public as Moscow launched another major airstrike on Ukraine's energy sector, plunging large portions of the country into darkness Saturday. The attack also caused Ukraine's nuclear power plants to reduce output as the "military activity affected electrical substations and disconnected some power lines," the International Atomic Energy Agency wrote on X.

Dmitriev apparently presented the package while meeting with American officials in the U.S., but Zelenskyy did not say when.

Iran's top diplomat strikes hard line on talks with US

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iran's top diplomat insisted Sunday that Tehran's strength came from its ability to "say no to the great powers," striking a maximalist position just after negotiations with the United States over its nuclear program and in the wake of nationwide protests.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, speaking to diplomats at a summit in Tehran, signaled that Iran would stick to its position that it must be able to enrich uranium — a major point of contention with President Donald

Trump, who bombed Iranian atomic sites in June during the 12-day Iran-Israel war.

While Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian praised the talks Friday in Oman with the Americans as "a step forward," Araghchi's remarks show the challenge ahead. Already, the U.S. moved the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, ships and warplanes to the Middle East to pressure Iran into an agreement and have the firepower necessary to strike the Islamic Republic should Trump choose to do so.

"I believe the secret of the Is-

lamic Republic of Iran's power lies in its ability to stand against bullying, domination and pressures from others," Araghchi said. "They fear our atomic bomb, while we are not pursuing an atomic bomb. Our atomic bomb is the power to say no to the great powers. The secret of the Islamic Republic's power is in the power to say no to the powers."

Araghchi's choice to explicitly use an "atomic bomb" as a rhetorical device likely wasn't accidental. While Iran has long maintained its nuclear program is peaceful, the West and the In-

ternational Atomic Energy Agency say Tehran had an organized military program to seek the bomb up until 2003.

Iran had been enriching uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step to weapons-grade levels of 90%, the only non-weapons state to do so. Iranian officials in recent years had also been increasingly threatening that the Islamic Republic could seek the bomb, even while its diplomats have pointed to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's preachings as a binding fatwa, or religious edict, that Iran wouldn't build one.

Supertankers speeding through Hormuz chokepoint

Bloomberg News

Some supertanker operators, nervous about rising U.S.-Iran tensions and potential risks to shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, are speeding their vessels through the chokepoint.

Very Large Crude Carriers are traveling around the narrow, congested waterway — through which about a quarter of the

world's seaborne oil trade travels — at as much as 17 knots, ship-tracking data show. About 13 knots is the usual top speed for a fully laden VLCC, which is typically about 1,080 feet long and cumbersome to maneuver.

Some operators began the measures after Iran said it would conduct live-firing drills last week, according to shipown-

ers and brokers that dispatch vessels through the waterway. The OPEC producer last week issued at least two warnings that they would commence live-firing exercises around the region, although none were observed, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

The development adds more uncertainty to volatile freight

markets, which have spiked after tensions over Iran combined with tight vessel supply. The U.S. continues to build up its military presence in the region as talks between Washington and Tehran kicked off in Oman on Friday. However, Iran has suggested the discussions won't yield a quick resolution to tensions.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

92-year-old crashes into store, killing 3, hurting 6

CA LOS ANGELES — Three people were killed and six others were hurt after a 92-year-old driver collided with a bicyclist and then lost control and slammed into a grocery store Thursday in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Westwood, authorities said.

The woman driving a Toyota Prius hit the bicyclist shortly after noon and then continued for another block before swerving into the bakery section of a 99 Ranch Market and then coming to a stop, trapping several people underneath the vehicle, police and fire officials said.

Capt. Anthony Espinoza of the Los Angeles Police Department called the crash "an unfortunate accident," and said it is not believed to have been intentional.

Two men, ages 30 and 55, and a 42-year-old woman, who were all inside the bakery at the time, died at the scene, the Los Angeles Fire Department said in its report. Two men, both 35, were taken to the hospital in critical condition, and two other men, ages 38 and 37, were in fair condition, according to the department.

The bicyclist and the driver declined offers to be taken to the hospital, the fire department said.

Transplant doc indicted in falsification of records

TX HOUSTON — A Houston doctor has been indicted on charges of falsifying medical records for five patients, making them ineligible to receive a liver transplant, federal prosecutors announced

on Thursday.

Dr. John Stevenson Bynon Jr. was indicted by a grand jury in Houston last month on five counts of false statements relating to health care matters. Bynon is accused of making false statements in his role as director of abdominal organ transplantation and surgical director for liver transplantation at Memorial Hermann Health System in Houston.

Of the five patients detailed in an indictment made public on Thursday, three died and two others were able to get liver transplants at different hospitals. Patients, their families, and other members of their medical care team were unaware Bynon allegedly made false statements in their medical records, according to court records.

"Dr. Bynon is alleged to have betrayed the most sacred duty of a medical professional — to heal," U.S. Attorney Nicholas J. Ganjei said in a statement. "He stole years and hope from those who trusted him most by falsifying records and preventing patients from receiving organ transplants."

Big 12 to look into anti-Mormon fan chants

UT SALT LAKE CITY — A BYU team was the target of a derogatory chant in an opponent's venue for at least the fourth time in a year, and the Big 12 again announced the conference would look into the matter and the home team offered an apology.

BYU athletic director Brian Santiago wants to break the cycle.

"What we're trying to do is eliminate the behavior from happening and the apologies

that come afterward," he said Thursday.

Kevin Young, coach of the 16th-ranked Cougars men's basketball team, said after a 99-92 loss at Oklahoma State on Wednesday night that he heard "F— The Mormons" chants coming out of the student section.

"It's a great win for Oklahoma State University. Their fans should be proud," he said. "It would be great if some class was warranted in there as well. I've got four small kids at home. I'm a Mormon. When I go home, they're going to ask me about it, same way as they asked me about it last year at Arizona. There's just too much hate in the world to be saying stuff like that. We've got enough problems in our world without going at people's religion and beliefs and whether it's in vogue or not."

BYU is the flagship school for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, widely known as the Mormon church.

Hospital blaze forces evacuation of patients

PA DICKSON CITY — A fire tore through a northeastern Pennsylvania hospital, sending smoke billowing into the air as dozens of patients were evacuated and emergency medical crews were rushed in from across the region, authorities said.

No one was reported injured by the Wednesday night blaze at the Lehigh Valley Hospital campus in Dickson City, which drew all available emergency medical services within a 50-mile radius, fire officials said.

The facility remained closed Thursday while the damage was assessed, hospital spokes-

person Shellie Wass said.

Bystander video showed smoke rising over the hospital's entrance as firefighters on ladders worked to contain the blaze. One video appeared to show patients, some on gurneys, being loaded into a line of ambulances for transport to other hospitals.

The fire started on the roof of an older medical office building formerly known as Scranton Orthopedics and did not begin inside the attached main hospital building, officials said.

More than 70 hospital patients were evacuated, most to other area hospitals.

Dozens rescued after gondolas malfunction

NY NORTH CREEK — Nearly 70 people were rescued from gondola cabins at an upstate New York ski area after a mechanical problem forced a shutdown of the lift system, leaving skiers stranded for hours up to 70 feet in the air, authorities said.

Staff at Gore Mountain in North Creek, nearly 90 miles north of Albany, and state park rangers climbed lift poles and used rope and body harnesses to lower people to the ground on Wednesday. The operation took nearly five hours. No one was injured.

About 67 skiers in 20 gondola cabins were helped back down to the ground. There was some anxiety among those trapped, and worries about having to use the restroom, people on the mountain said. Although the temperatures were below freezing, the cabins remained warm as the doors were closed and the sun was shining, they said.

—From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting World, National and Military News

Johnson 2nd US woman to win Olympic downhill

Associated Press

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy — American ski racer Breezy Johnson won the Olympic downhill Sunday with a hard-charging run on a day marred by teammate Lindsey Vonn's crash that saw her being taken off the mountain in a helicopter.

Johnson was the sixth racer and found speed with a risk-taking trip along the iconic Olympia delle Tofana course on a sunny day in Cortina. She was in the leader's box when Vonn, the No. 13 racer, cut a corner too close and was spun around before crashing. The race was put on hold for more than 20 minutes.

The 30-year-old Johnson joins Vonn, 41, as the only American women to win the Olympic downhill. Johnson finished in 1 minute, 36.10 seconds to hold off Emma Aicher of Germany by just 0.04 seconds,

securing the first medal for the United States of these Winter Games in the process. Italy's Sofia Goggia, the 2018 Olympic downhill winner and 2022 silver medalist, finished with the bronze.

The tears began welling in the eyes of Johnson as racer after racer couldn't top her time. Johnson wiped them away with her mitten.

"I had a good feeling about today. I sort of still can't believe it yet," Johnson said. "I don't know when it will sink in."

It's been a tumultuous road to the top for Johnson, who sat out the 2022 Beijing Olympics with a knee injury. She was given a 14-month ban that expired in December 2024 for missing three anti-doping exams and violating "whereabouts" rules. She returned to win the world championship last February.

Now she's an Olympic down-

hill gold medalist. Teammate Jacqueline Wiles finished just 0.27 seconds away from a medal in a tie for fourth place.

"I think that this was the best run Breezy's ever skied," teammate Bella Wright said. "I've seen her ski ever since I was 8 years old."

Vonn's crash put a somber mood over the event. The downhill winner at the 2010 Vancouver Games, she was a gold-medal favorite before her crash in Switzerland last week when she suffered a ruptured ACL for her latest major knee injury.

She returned to elite ski racing last season after nearly six years and after receiving a partial titanium knee replacement in her right knee.

"I hope it's not as bad as it looked," Johnson said. "Sometimes, because you love this course so much, when you

crash on it and hurts you like that, it hurts that much worse. My heart just goes out to her."

Cande Moreno of Andorra had her left knee buckle while landing on a jump. Like Vonn, she was taken off the course by helicopter and the race was again put on hold.

Both downhill golds this weekend were won by the reigning world champions after Franjo von Allmen of Switzerland won the men's race Saturday. Both races also featured up-and-coming silver medalists (Aicher, Giovanni Franzoni of Italy) and Italian veterans in bronze position (Goggia, Dominik Paris).

With her bronze medal, Goggia now has an Olympic downhill medal of every color.

"So-so with my performance, but in the overall I got a medal again," Goggia said. "It's a privilege."

Vonn airlifted off course after clipping gate, crashing

Associated Press

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy — Lindsey Vonn's defiant bid to win the Winter Olympic downhill at the age of 41, on a rebuilt right knee and a badly injured left knee, ended Sunday in a frightening crash that left her with a broken leg and saw her taken to safety by a rescue helicopter for the second time in nine days.

Vonn lost control within moments of leaving the starting gate, clipping a gate with her right shoulder and pinwheeling down the slope before ending up awkwardly on her back, her skis crisscrossed below her and her screams ringing out soon after medical personnel arrived. She was treated for long, anguished minutes as a hush fell over the crowd waiting far below at the finish line.

She was strapped to a gurney and flown away, possibly ending the skier's storied career. She was taken to a clinic in Cortina, then transferred to a larger hospital in Treviso, a two-hour drive to the south.

She was being "treated by a multidisciplinary team" and "underwent an orthopedic operation to stabilize a fracture reported in her left leg," the Ca' Foncello hospital said in a statement. The U.S. Ski Team said

Vonn was "in stable condition and in good hands with a team of American and Italian physicians."

"She'll be OK, but it's going to be a bit of a process," said Anouk Patty, chief of sport for U.S. Ski and Snowboard. "This sport's brutal and people need to remember when they're watching (that) these athletes are throwing themselves down a mountain and going really, really fast."

Breezy Johnson, Vonn's teammate, became only the second American woman to win the Olympic downhill after Vonn did it 16 years ago. The 30-year-old Johnson held off Emma Aicher of Germany and Italy's Sofia Goggia on a bittersweet day for the team.

Vonn had family in the stands, including her father, Alan Kildow, who stared down at the ground while his daughter was being treated after just 13 seconds on the course where she holds a record 12 World Cup titles. Others in the crowd, including rapper Snoop Dogg, watched quietly as the star skier was finally taken off the course. Fellow American star Mikaela Shiffrin posted a broken heart emoji on social media.

Vonn's crash was "tragic, but it's ski rac-

ing," said Johan Eliasch, president of the International Ski and Snowboard Federation.

"I can only say thank you for what she has done for our sport," he said, "because this race has been the talk of the games and it's put our sport in the best possible light."

All eyes had been on Vonn, the feel-good story heading into the Olympics. She had returned to elite ski racing last season after nearly six years, a remarkable decision given her age but has also been dealing with a partial titanium knee replacement in her right knee. Many wondered how she would fare as she sought a gold medal to join the one she won in the downhill at the 2010 Vancouver Games.

The four-time overall World Cup champion stunned everyone by being a contender almost immediately. She came to the Olympics as the leader in the World Cup downhill standings and was a gold-medal favorite before her crash in Switzerland nine days ago, when she suffered her latest knee injury. In addition to a ruptured ACL, she also had a bone bruise and meniscus damage.

"This would be the best comeback I've done so far," Vonn said before the race. "Definitely the most dramatic."

Trimble's last-second 3 lifts UNC over Duke

Associated Press

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — Seth Trimble made a corner 3-pointer with 0.4 seconds left to lift No. 14 North Carolina past No. 4 Duke 71-68 in a stunning finish Saturday night, which included fans storming the court prematurely before having to clear out for the Blue Devils to get one desperate final play.

Trimble's shot on the catch off a feed from Derek Dixon swished cleanly through the net with apparently no time left, sending the Tar Heels rushing onto the court to celebrate followed closely by the fans at a frantic, ear-ringing roar. But a review determined there was still 0.4 seconds left, prompting the Smith Center's public-address announcer to repeatedly tell fans to clear the court.

Once they did, Duke had a final chance, but Isaiah Evans couldn't get a clean handle on the long inbound pass to near half-court to get off a tying shot to end it — prompting another court-storming that stuck this time.

It capped a night in which UNC trailed by 13 in the second half and never led until Trimble's final shot.

Caleb Wilson scored 23 points to lead the Tar Heels (19-4, 7-3 Atlantic Coast Conference), while big man Henri Veesaar had all 13 of his points after halftime—including a tying 3-pointer with 1:40 left. Trimble had 16 points.

Cameron Boozer had 24 points and 11 rebounds to lead the Blue Devils (21-2, 10-1), but missed a drive against Veesaar in the final 20 seconds of a tie game to set up Trimble's winner.

No. 1 Arizona 84, Oklahoma State 47: Brayden Burries scored 15 points and the host Wildcats stifled the Cowboys' high-scoring offense to remain unbeaten.

Arizona (23-0, 10-0) extended the best start in school history by holding Oklahoma State to 24.6% shooting. The Wildcats' start also is the best in Big 12 history,

passing Kansas' 22-0 opening run in 1996-97.

No. 10 Michigan State 85,

No. 5 Illinois 82 (OT): Jeremy Fears scored 26 points, including a tiebreaking three-point play with 1:47 left in overtime, and had 15 assists to help the host Spartans hold on over the Fighting Illini.

Michigan State (20-4, 10-3 Big Ten) knocked the Illini (20-4, 11-2) out of first place in the Big Ten and ended their 12-game winning streak.

No. 6 Gonzaga 81, Oregon

State 61: Graham Ike matched his career high with 35 points and the visiting Bulldogs rebounded from a midweek loss with a victory over the Beavers.

Tyon Grant-Foster added 15 points for Gonzaga (23-2, 11-1 WCC), which was coming off an 87-80 loss to unranked Portland on Wednesday night that snapped a 15-game winning streak for the Zags.

No. 7 Iowa St. 72, Baylor 69:

Milan Momcilovic scored 21 points, Joshua Jefferson added 15 and the host Cyclones held off a late rally by the Bears for a victory.

It was the fifth consecutive win for Iowa State (21-2, 8-2 Big 12).

No. 8 Houston 77, No. 16

BYU 66: Kingston Flemings scored 11 of his 19 points in the second half to help visiting Houston beat BYU.

Chris Cenac, Jr. added 16 points and Emanuel Sharp had 14 for Houston (21-2, 9-1 Big 12), which has won four in a row to stay within a game of No. 1 Arizona in the Big 12 standings. Houston shot 50% from the field after halftime.

No. 9 Nebraska 80, Rutgers

68: Rienk Mast scored 26 points to lead four players in double figures as the visiting Cornhuskers rolled to a win over the Scarlet Knights.

Nebraska (21-2, 10-2 Big Ten) was coming off its first losses of the season, falling to No. 2 Michigan 75-72 and No. 5 Illinois 78-69.

No. 11 Kansas 71, Utah 59:

Flory Bidunga had 17 points, 10 rebounds and seven blocks and the host Jayhawks beat the Utes to take a seven-game winning streak into their Monday night home showdown with top-ranked Arizona.

Trey White added 16 points for Kansas (18-5, 8-2 Big 12). Darryn Peterson had 14 and Melvin Council added 11.

No. 12 Purdue 68, Oregon

64: Fletcher Loyer scored 18 points and made a go-ahead 3-pointer with 51 seconds left Saturday to lead the host Boilermakers past the pesky Ducks. He closed it out by making three of four free throws in the waning seconds.

Smith reached yet another milestone by becoming the first Big Ten player with 1,000 points and 500 assists in conference games only.

Oklahoma 92, No. 15 Vanderbilt 91:

Xzavier Brown scored 14 of his 20 points in the second half and the visiting Sooners held off the Commodores to end a nine-game losing streak.

Nigel Pack added 17 points for Oklahoma (12-12, 2-9 Southeastern Conference), which had a 21-point lead with 12:03 left. The Sooners shot 53.4% from the field.

No. 17 Florida 86, Texas

A&M 67: Thomas Haugh scored 22 points and the visiting Gators beat the Aggies in a showdown for the Southeastern Conference lead.

Florida (17-6, 8-2) outscored Texas A&M 48-24 in the paint, blocked seven shots and limited the Aggies to making just nine makes on 25 layups.

No. 18 Virginia 72, Syracuse

59: Sam Lewis had 16 points as the host Cavaliers held the Orange to their lowest point total of the season.

Lewis started the game hot, making his first four 3-point attempts. He finished 4 of 8 beyond the arc and 5 of 10 overall. Ugonna Onyenso had 10 points

and eight rebounds off the bench for Virginia (20-3, 9-2 Atlantic Coast).

No. 19 Saint Louis 82, La

Salle 58: Ishan Sharma came off the bench to score 15 points on five 3-pointers and the host Billikens beat the Explorers for a 17th straight win.

Quentin Jones had 13 points and six rebounds, Amari McCottry also scored 13 and Robbie Avila had nine points and eight assists for Saint Louis (23-1, 11-0 Atlantic 10).

No. 20 Clemson 77, Califor-

nia 55: Ace Buckner and RJ Godfrey each scored 13 points as the visiting Tigers overwhelmed the Golden Bears and moved into a first-place tie with No. 4 Duke in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Jake Wahlin and Carter Wellings each had 11 points for Clemson (20-4, 10-1), which went 27 for 59 (55.1%) from the floor, including 12 for 26 (46.2%) from beyond the arc.

No. 21 Arkansas 88, Missis-

sippi St. 68: Darius Acuff scored 24 points and Trevon Brazile added 19 to lead the visiting Razorbacks over the Bulldogs.

Arkansas (17-6, 7-3 Southeastern Conference) shot 52% from the field and made eight 3-pointers while securing its largest margin of victory in an SEC road game this year.

No. 23 Miami (Ohio) 90, Mar-

shall 74: Eian Elmer scored 18 points, Peter Suder had 17 and the visiting RedHawks kept their perfect season going with a victory over the Thundering Herd in the MAC-Sun Belt Challenge.

No. 24 Louisville 88, Wake

Forest 80: Sananda Fru had 17 points while the visiting Cardinals survived at the foul line late after blowing a 15-point second-half lead to beat the Demon Deacons.

Kentucky 74, No. 25 Tennes-

see 71: Otega Oweli scored 21 points to lead the host Wildcats over the Volunteers.

Rockets defeat short-handed Thunder

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Tari Eason scored a season-high 26 points, and the Houston Rockets beat the short-handed Oklahoma City Thunder 112-106 on Saturday.

Alperen Sengun had 17 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists for his second triple-double of the season and No. 10 for his career. Jabari Smith Jr. had 22 points and 10 rebounds for Houston, and Kevin Durant added 20 points.

Cason Wallace scored 23 points for Oklahoma City and Isaiah Joe added 21.

It was the Thunder's second game without reigning MVP Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, who is recovering from an abdominal strain. He will be out until after the All-Star break. OKC was already missing 2025 All-Star Jalen Williams and second-year guard Ajay Mitchell, one of the Rising Stars for All-Star Weekend.

Second-year guard Jared McCain played his first game with the Thunder since coming over in a trade with Philadelphia. He entered late in the first quarter to loud cheers. He finished with five points in 14 minutes.

Oklahoma City fans, still angry with Durant 9½ years after he left the Thunder to head to Golden State in free agency, booed him during pregame starter introductions. They cheered when the normally outstanding free-throw shooter missed two in the second quarter after being fouled on a shot.

McCain scored his first basket for OKC with about nine minutes left in the second quarter. An alley-oop lob from Joe to Wallace gave the Thunder a 46-32 lead. Oklahoma City led 52-46 at the break, with Chet Holmgren posting 10 points and 10 rebounds.

Cavaliers 132, Kings 126: James Harden scored 23 points in his Cleveland debut and Do-

novan Mitchell had 35 to lead the host Cavaliers to a victory over Sacramento, sending the Kings to their 12th straight loss.

Harden was acquired by Cleveland from the Los Angeles Clippers on Wednesday for Darius Garland and a second-round draft pick.

Jarrett Allen had 29 points and 10 rebounds for the Cavs, who won for the eighth time in nine games.

Nique Clifford scored 30 points to lead Sacramento, which hasn't won since beating Washington at home on Jan. 16. The Kings have lost six straight at home.

Trail Blazers 122, Grizzlies 115:

Donovan Clingan had 20 points and 19 rebounds, Jerami Grant had 29 points, and host Portland erased an 11-point second-half deficit to beat Memphis and split a two-game series.

Jahmai Mayshack's 3-pointer pushed the Grizzlies' advantage to 104-97 before the Trail Blazers made their final push.

Vit Krejci, Toumani Camara and Love each hit a 3-pointer before Love stole the ball and made a layup to give Portland a 108-107 lead with 5:59 left in the game.

Javon Small's 3-pointer cut the Blazers' lead to a point about three minutes later, but Holiday answered with a layup before Grant made back-to-back 3s to give them a 120-113 lead with 1:51 left.

Nets 127, Wizards 113: Michael Porter Jr. scored 23 points and host Brooklyn used an 80-point first half to beat short-handed Washington.

With the Wizards having only eight players available, the Nets led by 34 points in the second quarter and went on to snap a three-game losing streak.

Will Riley scored a career-high 27 points for the Wizards. Justin Champagnie added 21 points and nine rebounds.

The teams are tied for 13th in the Eastern Conference at 14-

37, playing plenty of young players as they angle for better lottery positions. But Brooklyn had its full roster on the court Saturday while Washington sat a few players on the first back-to-back games.

Spurs 138, Mavericks 125:

Guard Stephon Castle had a career-high 40 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists for his second career triple-double, leading host San Antonio past Dallas.

The Spurs (36-16) won their fourth straight and ninth in 12 games to remain second in the Western Conference.

Dallas, which lost 135-123 at San Antonio on Thursday night, got 19 points from Klay Thompson, 18 from Brandon Williams and 17 from Max Christie. Cooper Flagg finished with 14 points.

Castle joins Hall of Famer David Robinson as the only players in San Antonio franchise history with a 40-point triple-double.

Magic 120, Jazz 117: Paolo Banchero had 23 points and host Orlando overcame a 17-point deficit to beat Utah.

Desmond Bane added 22 points, making two free throws with 28.3 seconds to go to give the Magic a 118-117 lead. Anthony Black scored 21 points, and Banchero also had eight assists and seven rebounds.

Lauri Markkanen led the Jazz with 27 points. Jaren Jackson Jr. had 17 of his 22 points in the first half in his Utah debut, and Isaiah Collier scored 20 points. The Jazz have lost two straight and 18 of 22.

Hornets 126, Hawks 119: Miles Bridges scored 26 points, Kon Kneoppel had 23 and visiting Charlotte beat Atlanta for its ninth straight win.

LaMelo Ball added 19 points and nine assists as the Hornets improved to 12-3 in their last 15 games. Brandon Miller scored 16 points, and Moussa Diabate finished with 11 points and 15 rebounds.

Charlotte's win streak is the longest active streak in the NBA

and the best run for the franchise since it also won nine in a row during the 1998-99 season.

Nuggets 136, Bulls 120: Nikola Jokic had 22 points, 17 assists and 14 rebounds for his second triple-double in as many games, Jamal Murray had 28 points and 11 assists and visiting Denver ended a three-game skid with a victory over Chicago.

It was Jokic's 19th triple-double of the season. Tim Hardaway Jr. added 23 points for the Nuggets, who capped a three-game road trip with a win after losing at Detroit and New York.

Matas Buzelis scored 21 points and Collin Sexton added 17 for the Bulls, who have lost four straight.

Lakers 105, Warriors 99: LeBron James had 20 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds to help host Los Angeles beat Golden State.

The Lakers won their third straight game despite not having superstar guard Luka Doncic after he sustained a mild hamstring strain Thursday night, and center DeAndre Ayton was a late scratch because of a knee injury.

Moses Moody had 25 points to lead the Warriors, who have lost four of their past six games. Stephen Curry missed his third straight game because of a knee injury.

76ers 109, Suns 103: Joel Embiid scored 33 points, Tyrese Maxey added 29 and visiting Philadelphia beat cold-shooting Phoenix.

The 76ers have won six of their last seven games, bouncing back from a 119-115 loss to the Los Angeles Lakers on Thursday night. The Suns lost for the third time in four games, shooting just 11 of 46 (23.9%) from 3-point range.

Philadelphia led 81-71 going into the fourth quarter and pushed its advantage to 16 after holding Phoenix scoreless for the first three minutes of the fourth.