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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## US military boards sanctioned oil tanker

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. military forces boarded a sanctioned oil tanker in the Indian Ocean after tracking the ship from the Caribbean Sea, the Pentagon said Monday.

The Pentagon's statement on social media did not say whether the ship was connected to Venezuela, which faces U.S. sanctions on its oil and relies on a shadow fleet of falsely flagged tankers to smuggle crude into global supply chains.

However, the Aquila II was one of at least 16 tankers that de-

parted the Venezuelan coast last month after U.S. forces captured then-President Nicolás Maduro, said Samir Madani, co-founder of TankerTrackers.com. He said his organization used satellite imagery and surface-level photos to document the ship's movements.

According to data transmitted from the ship on Monday, it is not currently laden with a cargo of crude oil.

The Aquila II is a Panamanian-flagged tanker under U.S. sanctions related to the shipment of illicit Russian oil.

Owned by a company with a listed address in Hong Kong, ship tracking data shows it has spent much of the last year with its radio transponder turned off, a practice known as "running dark" commonly employed by smugglers to hide their location.

U.S. Southern Command, which oversees Latin America, said in an email that it had nothing to add to the Pentagon's post on X. The post said the military "conducted a right-of-visit, maritime interdiction" on the ship.

"The Aquila II was operating

in defiance of President [Donald] Trump's established quarantine of sanctioned vessels in the Caribbean," the Pentagon said. "It ran, and we followed."

The U.S. did not say it had seized the ship, which the U.S. has done previously with at least seven other sanctioned oil tankers linked to Venezuela.

Since the U.S. ouster of Maduro in a surprise nighttime raid on Jan. 3, the Trump administration has set out to control the production, refining and global distribution of Venezuela's oil products.

## Food insecurity up significantly in military family survey

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN

*Stars and Stripes*

More than a quarter of military families polled in the most recent annual survey by a leading aid organization for service members and veterans said they consistently struggle to put food on the table.

That is among the financial strains of military life that make it a challenge to meet basic needs, Blue Star Families found as part of the nonprofit's Military Family Lifestyle Survey for 2025.

Frequent relocations, out-of-pocket expenses for military moves, child care shortages and interruptions of a spouse's education and career are contributing factors to the financial hardships of U.S. personnel, according to the survey.

The data highlight "how persistent, service-connected financial pressures continue to shape military family life," the organization said last week in a statement releasing the survey's findings.

About 28% of survey respondents were categorized as having "low or very low" food security,

an increase from 16% in 2023, when that category was last reported, according to the survey.

In addition, 22% of participants said they used a food pantry or received food from a military food distribution center in the 12 months preceding the survey, while 30% of active-duty respondents said they "often or sometimes" could not afford to eat balanced meals.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life, according to Blue Star Families.

"That should be a call to action for the government, for the services and, frankly, for the private- and public-sector support to get after this challenge," said Lindsay Knight, Blue Star Families' chief impact officer, according to the Deseret News.

"If our military families aren't getting quality, healthy meals, that endangers the viability or the sustainability of the all-volunteer force in the future," she said.

The 2025 survey drew re-

sponses from more than 6,000 military-connected respondents, including a cross-section of active-duty service members and their spouses or domestic partners.

The top issue, identified by 50% of survey participants, was military spouse employment, followed by military pay (48%) and time away from family (39%). Child care, housing and child education concerns all registered at 33%.

Military spouses in the survey reported an unemployment rate of 23% in 2025. That compares with an average nationwide figure of 4.4% last year. Although 67% said they were in the labor force, 70% identified as being underemployed.

Those rates remained stagnant compared with the 2024 survey, in which a majority (66%) also reported experiencing some level of underemployment, such as pay not matching work experience or education or being overqualified for one's position, according to the 2024 survey findings.

Child care shortages contrib-

ute to difficulties maintaining and seeking employment, the survey found, and respondents also expressed concerns with the high cost of child care and the quality of care.

"There are bright spots," Blue Star Families CEO Kathy Roth-Douquet said. "Congressional efforts to improve quality of life have impact. Community programs to welcome and integrate military families lessen the otherwise growing food insecurity, spouse unemployment and related strains caused by frequent moves, family separations and uncertainty of military life."

The proportion of active-duty family respondents who reported their family financial situation as "living comfortably" or "doing OK" was 62%, the same as 2024 survey findings, but it continues to be lower than the 72% overall for U.S. adults, according to the data.

Also, 37% of respondents said they would recommend joining the military to a family member, up from 32% in 2024. In 2016, the number was 55%.

# Report says keep Marines on Okinawa

BY BRIAN McELHINEY

*Stars and Stripes*

A new report from a U.S. foreign policy think tank is urging Washington to renegotiate a decades-old agreement with Japan to reduce the Marine Corps presence on Okinawa, arguing that the deal should instead be reversed to strengthen deterrence against China.

The report, released Feb. 3 by the Atlantic Council, recommends keeping about 5,000 Marines on Okinawa rather than relocating them to Guam and retaining the Corps' airfield in densely populated central Okinawa along with a replacement runway under construction farther north.

The authors call for reversing the Defense Policy Review Initiative, or DPRI, a 20-year-old

U.S.-Japan agreement aimed at reducing the U.S. military footprint on Okinawa by moving thousands of Marines to Guam.

The report was written by Lt. Col. Caleb Eames, a senior Marine Corps fellow at the council, and Amy Cowley, assistant director for the Forward Defense program at the council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security. They argue the initiative weakens U.S. deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

The plan "would give Chinese military planners exactly what they want — a removal of U.S. forces from the locations where they would be most essential in a First Island Chain conflict," the authors write.

Eames and Cowley recommend retaining Marine Corps Air Station Futenma while com-

pleting the replacement facility under construction at Camp Schwab. They also propose temporary Marine deployments to Yonaguni, Japan's westernmost inhabited island, about 70 miles from Taiwan.

The recommendations are "sound and necessary," said retired Marine Col. Grant Newsham, a senior researcher with the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies in Tokyo.

"China (and North Korea and Russia) are far more of a threat than they were 20 years ago when the deal was negotiated," he said.

As part of the initiative, about 100 logistics support troops from III Marine Expeditionary Force moved from Okinawa to Guam last year. The 210-square-mile U.S. territory is projected to grow from about 17,000 service mem-

bers to roughly 24,000 by fiscal year 2033.

The authors also argue that crime concerns often cited to justify reducing the Marine presence have diminished, noting that "U.S. military crime rates on Okinawa are now far lower than in decades past."

They cite an October 2024 Stars and Stripes report that found six felony cases linked to the U.S. military community on Okinawa that year — the highest tally in 16 years — but noted the figure ran counter to a broader, decadeslong decline in crime on the island.

As incentives for renegotiation, Eames and Cowley suggest exempting Okinawa from U.S. tariffs and repurposing Marine facilities built on Guam for Army use.

## US asks court to dismiss suit against Army over Maine mass shooting

*Associated Press*

PORTLAND, Maine — The U.S. government wants a judge to dismiss a lawsuit from survivors and relatives of the victims of Maine's deadliest mass shooting, who say the Army failed them by not intervening before the killings.

The families allege the government was negligent in failing to act on warning signs displayed by the shooter, an Army reservist.

Eighteen people were killed when the 40-year-old reservist opened fire at a bowling alley and a bar and grill in Lewiston in October 2023. An independent commission appointed by Maine's governor later concluded that there were numerous op-

portunities for intervention by both Army officials and law enforcement.

In a filing Thursday in Maine federal court, the government urged a judge to toss the lawsuit, saying the court lacks the authority to hear the case and that the families' claims don't meet the legal standard to move forward.

The lawsuit alleges that the Army was negligent when it failed to investigate the shooter's condition. But the government says the shooter was "solely responsible" for the attack and the government should not be held liable.

Attorneys for 100 survivors and victims' family members announced the filing of the lawsuit last year.

## Navy expands mental health program access

BY JONATHAN BAEZ

*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. Navy has expanded its partnership with the mental health app Headspace to a handful of overseas installations, extending free access to coaching and mindfulness tools for sailors and their families.

"The program is available to eligible sailors and their invited family/loved ones at select pilot sites," Headspace spokeswoman Lexi Herosian told Stars and Stripes by email Wednesday. "This can be anyone in the sailor's support network; it does not need to follow the sailor's Page 2."

Headspace offers video- and text-based coaching sessions with mental health care professionals who are nationally

board certified, as well as artificial intelligence-powered tools focused on meditation and mindfulness, according to a mission statement on the company's website.

The Navy's partnership with Headspace began in February 2025 as a pilot program at three stateside installations.

The pilot's second phase expands access to Naval Station Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; Naval Support Activity Naples, Italy; and Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan.

To enroll, eligible participants must register through a Navy-specific Headspace portal. A Department of Defense ID number and the name of the participant's home installation are required.

# Lawmakers target masked ICE operations

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Beyond the car windows being smashed, people tackled on city streets — or even a little child with a floppy bunny ears snowcap detained — the images of masked federal officers have become a flashpoint in the Trump administration's immigration enforcement operations.

Not in recent U.S. memory has an American policing operation so consistently masked its thousands of officers from the public, a development that the Department of Homeland Security believes is important to safeguard employees from online harassment. But experts have warned that masking serves another purpose, inciting fear in communities, and risks shattering norms, accountability and trust between the police and its citizenry.

Whether to ban the masks or allow the masking to continue has emerged as a central question in the debate in Congress over funding Homeland Security ahead of Friday's midnight deadline, when it faces a partial agency shutdown.

"Humans read each others' faces — that's how we communicate," said Justin Smith, a former Colorado sheriff who is executive director and CEO of the National Sheriffs' Association.

"When you have a number of federal agents involved in these operations, and they can't be identified, you can't see their face, it just tends to make people uncomfortable," he said. "That's bringing up some questions."

Masks on federal agents have been one constant throughout the first year of President Donald Trump's mass deportation operation.

What began as a jarring image last spring, when plain-clothed officers drawing up their masks surrounded and detained a Tufts University doctoral student near her Massachusetts home, has morphed into familiar scenes in Los Angeles, Chicago and other cities.

The shooting deaths of two American citizens at the hands of federal immigration officers during demonstrations against ICE raids in Minneapolis sparked widespread public protest and spurred lawmakers to respond.

"Cameras on, masks off" has become a rallying cry among Democrats, who are also insisting the officers wear body cameras as a way to provide greater accountability and oversight of the operations.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries told reporters at the Capitol that unmasking

the federal agents is a "hard red line" in the negotiations ahead.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement says on its website that its officers "wear masks to prevent doxing, which can (and has) placed them and their families at risk. All ICE law enforcement officers carry badges and credentials and will identify themselves when required for public safety or legal necessity."

Fueled with funds from Trump's big tax cuts bill, which poured some \$170 billion into Homeland Security, ICE has grown to become among the largest law enforcement operations in the nation. Last year, it announced it had more than doubled its ranks to 22,000 with rapid hiring and \$50,000 signing bonuses. Homeland Security did not respond to an emailed request for further comment.

## Official makes appeal for vaccine amid measles rise

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A leading U.S. health official on Sunday urged people to get inoculated against the measles at a time of outbreaks across several states and as the United States is at risk of losing its measles elimination status.

"Take the vaccine, please," said Dr. Mehmet Oz, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services administrator whose boss has raised suspicion about the safety and importance of vaccines. "We have a solution for our problem."

Oz, a heart surgeon, defended some recently revised federal vaccine recommendations as well as past comments from President Donald Trump and the nation's health chief, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., about the efficacy of vaccines. From Oz, there was a clear message on the measles.

"Not all illnesses are equally dangerous and not all people are equally susceptible to those illnesses," he told CNN's "State of the Union." "But measles is one you should get your vaccine."

An outbreak in South Carolina in the hundreds has surpassed the recorded case count in Texas' 2025 outbreak, and there is also one on the Utah-Arizona border. Multiple other states have had confirmed cases this year. The outbreaks have mostly impacted children and have come as experts warn that rising public distrust of vaccines generally may be contributing to the spread of a disease once declared eradicated.

Asked whether people should fear the measles, Oz replied, "Oh, for sure." He said Medicare and Medicaid will continue to cover the measles vaccine.

## Maxwell declined to answer House committee questions

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ghislaine Maxwell, the former girlfriend of Jeffrey Epstein, declined to answer questions from House lawmakers in a deposition Monday, but indicated that if President Donald Trump ended her prison sentence, she was willing to testify that neither he nor former President Bill Clinton had done anything wrong in their relationships with Epstein.

The House Oversight Committee had wanted Maxwell to answer questions during a video call to the federal prison camp in Texas where she's serving a 20-year sentence for sex trafficking, but she invoked her Fifth Amendment rights to avoid answering questions that would be self-incriminating.

She's come under new scrutiny as lawmakers try to investi-

gate how Epstein, a well-connected financier, was able to sexually abuse underage girls for years.

Amid a reckoning over Epstein's abuse that has spilled into nations around the globe, lawmakers are searching for anyone who was connected to Epstein and may have potentially facilitated his abuse.

So far, the revelations have shown how both Trump and Clinton spent time with Epstein in the 1990s and early 2000s, but they have not been credibly accused of wrongdoing.

Trump has not ruled out granting Maxwell clemency, but Republican pushback to that notion quickly rose after Maxwell made the appeal.

"NO CLEMENCY. You comply or face punishment," Republican Rep. Anna Paulina Luna wrote on social media.

# UK leader fights for his job amid Epstein crisis

Associated Press

LONDON — British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's position hung by a thread on Monday as he tried to persuade his Labour Party lawmakers not to kick him out of his job after just 19 months in office.

The prime minister lost his chief of staff on Sunday and is rapidly shedding support from Labour legislators after revelations about the relationship between Peter Mandelson, who was appointed by Starmer to be the British Ambassador to Washington, and the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

In a sign of the deepening crisis, Starmer's director of communications, Tim Allan, said he was quitting Monday to allow a

new "team to be built."

Starmer's Downing Street office said the prime minister was not considering resigning and was "concentrating on the job in hand." Starmer was due to address Labour lawmakers behind closed doors in an attempt to rebuild some authority.

He told staff on Monday morning that the Mandelson scandal had hammered the public's respect for politicians, and "we must prove that politics can be a force for good."

The political storm stems from Starmer's decision in 2024 to appoint Mandelson to Britain's most important diplomatic post, despite knowing he had ties to Epstein.

Starmer fired Mandelson last

September after emails were published showing that he maintained a friendship with Epstein after the financier's 2008 conviction for sex offenses involving a minor. Critics say Starmer should have known better than to appoint Mandelson, 72, a contentious figure whose career has been studded with scandals.

A new trove of Epstein files released in the United States has brought more details about the relationship and new pressure on Starmer. He apologized last week for "having believed Mandelson's lies."

He promised to release documentation related to Mandelson's appointment, which the government says will show that

Mandelson misled officials about his ties to Epstein. The documents must be vetted on national security grounds.

Police are investigating Mandelson for potential misconduct in public office over documents suggesting he passed sensitive government information to Epstein a decade and a half ago. The offense carries a maximum sentence of life in prison.

Mandelson has not been arrested and does not face any allegations of sexual misconduct.

Starmer's chief of staff, Morgan McSweeney, took the fall for the decision by quitting on Sunday, saying: "I advised the prime minister to make that appointment and I take full responsibility for that advice."

## Japanese PM looks to usher in conservative shift

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's gamble that her personal popularity would lead to big election gains for her struggling party paid off hugely.

On Monday, she began the process of translating that new power, made manifest in a two-thirds supermajority gained in parliamentary elections the day before, into what she hopes will be sweeping conservative legislation that will shift Japanese security, immigration, economic and social policies.

The first steps include reappointing her Cabinet and pushing forward on a delayed budget and the votes next week that will reelect her as prime minister.

Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party, or LDP, alone secured 316 seats, comfortably surpassing a 261-seat absolute majority in the 465-member lower house, the more powerful of Japan's two-chamber parliament, officials said. That is a record since the party's foundation in 1955.

With the 36 seats won by its new ally, Japan Innovation Party, the ruling coalition won 352 seats.

A smiling Takaichi placed a big red ribbon above each winner's name on a signboard at LDP headquarters as accompanying party executives applauded.

Despite the lack of a majority in the upper house, the huge jump from the preelection share in the more powerful lower house allows Takaichi to make progress on policies seeking to boost Japan's economy and military as tensions grow with China and she tries to nurture ties with the United States.

Takaichi said she would be "humble" and seek support from the opposition while firmly pushing forward with her policy goals.

Japan has recently seen far-right populists gain ground, such as the anti-globalist and surging nationalist party Sanseito. Exit polls projected a big gain for Sanseito.

## Olympians discover medals are breaking

Associated Press

MILAN — Handle with care. That's the message from gold medalist Breezy Johnson at the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics after she and other athletes found their medals broke within hours.

Olympic organizers are investigating with "maximum attention" after a spate of medals have fallen off their ribbons during celebrations on the opening weekend of the Games.

"Don't jump in them. I was jumping in excitement, and it broke," women's downhill ski gold medalist Johnson said after her win Sunday. "I'm sure somebody will fix it. It's not crazy broken, but a little broken."

TV footage broadcast in Germany captured the moment biathlete Justus Strelow realized the mixed relay bronze he'd won Sunday had fallen off his neck and clattered to the floor as he danced with teammates.

His German teammates cheered as Strelow tried with-

out success to reattach the medal before realizing a smaller piece, seemingly the clasp, had broken off and was still on the floor.

U.S. figure skater Alysa Liu posted a clip on social media of her team event gold medal, detached from its official ribbon.

"My medal don't need the ribbon," Liu wrote early Monday.

Andrea Francisi, the chief games operations officer for the Milan Cortina organizing committee, said it was working on a solution.

"We are aware of the situation, we have seen the images. Obviously we are trying to understand in detail if there is a problem," Francisi said.

It isn't the first time the quality of Olympic medals has come under scrutiny.

Following the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, some medals had to be replaced after athletes complained they were starting to tarnish, giving them a mottled look likened to crocodile skin.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Luigi Mangione protests as judge sets trial date

**NY** NEW YORK — Luigi Mangione spoke out in court Friday against the prospect of back-to-back trials over the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, telling a judge: "It's the same trial twice. One plus one is two. Double jeopardy by any commonsense definition."

Mangione, 27, made the remarks as court officers escorted him out of the courtroom after a judge scheduled his state murder trial to begin June 8, three months before jury selection in his federal case.

Judge Gregory Carro said the state trial could be delayed until Sept. 8 if an appeal delays the federal trial. Mangione's lawyers objected to the June trial date, telling Carro that at that time, they'll be consumed with preparing for the federal trial, which involves allegations that Mangione stalked Thompson before killing him.

### 'West Wing' actor indicted on sexual contact counts

**NM** SANTA FE — "West Wing" and "Field of Dreams" actor Timothy Busfield has been indicted by a grand jury on four counts of criminal sexual contact with a child under age 13, a New Mexico prosecutor announced Friday.

The allegations are tied to Busfield's work as a director on the set of the TV series "The Cleaning Lady" from 2022 to 2024. Busfield has denied the allegations, initially filed in court by police.

Bernalillo County District Attorney Sam Bregman an-

nounced the indictment in a social media post.

Busfield had turned himself in to authorities in January on related charges by police and was released from jail by a judge who found no pattern of criminal conduct or similar allegations involving children in Busfield's past. The grand jury indictment allows the case against Busfield to proceed toward possible trial without a preliminary courtroom hearing on evidence.

### Court blocks challenges tied to water prosecutions

**MI** DETROIT — In a case with a potential far-reaching scope, the Michigan Supreme Court has closed the door on a wave of post-conviction challenges tied to the state's use of judges as one-person grand juries.

In the unanimous opinion issued Feb. 4 and written by Justice Elizabeth Welch, the court said that its 2022 decision restricting the use of one-man grand juries, which curtailed prosecutions in the Flint Water Crisis, does not apply retroactively to cases that are already final.

The court held that defendants convicted years ago cannot rely on its earlier ruling in *People v. Peeler* to reopen their cases simply because they were charged through a one-person grand jury rather than given a preliminary examination.

That conclusion carries broad consequences for other defendants who were charged under the same statutory scheme before Peeler was decided. By determining that one-person grand jury charging errors are not cause to undo the fi-

nal disposition of a case, the court effectively foreclosed arguments that such defects automatically invalidate convictions.

### Man acquitted in Bovino plot wrongly detained

**IN** TERRE HAUTE — A federal judge in Indiana has ruled immigration officials are unlawfully detaining a Chicago man acquitted last month of charges he offered money for the killing of Border Patrol Cmdr. Gregory Bovino.

Juan Espinoza Martinez, who has lived in Chicago for decades but is not a U.S. citizen, was taken into the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and transferred to a jail in Clay County, Ind., on Jan. 23, a day after a federal jury found him not guilty of murder-for-hire.

On Friday, U.S. District Judge James Patrick Hanlon in Terre Haute ruled that Espinoza Martinez was unlawfully denied a bond hearing, where a judge would assess factors such as risk of flight and danger to the community in deciding whether he should be released pending his immigration proceedings.

Hanlon ordered that a bond hearing be held for Espinoza Martinez by 5 p.m. Wednesday, court records showed.

### Accused child predator charged for Vance threat

**OH** TOLEDO — An Ohio man has been charged with threatening to kill Vice President JD Vance and possessing child pornography, according to the Department of Justice.

A federal grand jury indicted Toledo resident Shannon Mathre, 33, for allegedly mak-

ing the death threats during the former Ohio senator's visit to the northwest region of the state last month.

The suspect was apprehended on Friday by U.S. Secret Service agents after he allegedly stated, "I am going to find out where he (the vice president) is going to be and use my M14 automatic gun and kill him," the feds said.

During the course of arresting Mathre, agents also discovered multiple digital files of child sexual abuse material in his possession. Further investigation found that between Dec. 31 and Jan. 21, Mathre had been engaged in the receipt and distribution of such images.

### City eyes 'biochar' to help reduce waste in landfills

**FL** MIAMI-DADE — At the top of the South Dade Landfill, a massive oven that turns wood into charcoal is being tested by Miami-Dade County as an environmentally friendly way to cut down on landfill waste.

The material that comes out of the machine, "biochar," has the potential to clean dirty water, nourish soil and even be used in roads. Plus, it has lower emissions than a simple bonfire, leading to cleaner, healthier air.

About 10% of the county's waste is green material, which includes decaying trees and invasive plants.

It is usually broken down into mulch to cover up landfill trash. But organic waste releases methane, a potent greenhouse gas, as it decomposes. Instead, this machine breaks down all of those gases and stores the carbon in the charcoal.

— From wire reports

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## Reporting World, National and Military News

# Seahawks ride defense to Super Bowl win

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — The “Dark Side” defense carried Sam Darnold and the Seattle Seahawks to a Lombardi Trophy.

Devon Witherspoon, Derick Hall, Byron Murphy and the rest of Mike Macdonald’s ferocious unit pummeled Drake Maye, and Seattle beat the New England Patriots 29-13 on Sunday to win the franchise’s second Super Bowl.

“We never waver, man. We believe in each other. We love each other, and now we’re world champions,” Macdonald said.

Darnold threw a touchdown pass to AJ Barner, Kenneth Walker III ran for 135 yards and Jason Myers set a Super Bowl record by making all five of his field-goal tries.

“To do this with this team, I wouldn’t want it any other way,” Darnold said. “So proud of our guys, our defense. I

mean, I can’t say enough great things about our defense, our special teams.”

Walker became the first running back to win the Super Bowl MVP award since Hall of Famer Terrell Davis did it with Denver 28 years ago.

Uchenna Nwosu punctuated a punishing defensive performance by snagging Maye’s pass in the air after Witherspoon hit his arm and running it back 45 yards for a pick-6.

“We went through a lot, but we believed,” Witherspoon said. “All of you all doubters out there who said all that other stuff, you all don’t know what’s going on in this building. We’re one of one over here.”

The Seahawks won their first Super Bowl a dozen years ago behind their “Legion of Boom” defense, then were denied a repeat when New England’s Malcolm Butler intercepted Russell Wilson at the

goal line. Seattle hadn’t been back to the Super Bowl since.

Darnold became the first quarterback in the 2018 NFL draft class to win a Super Bowl, ahead of Josh Allen, Baker Mayfield and Lamar Jackson.

Labeled a bust, dumped by two teams and considered expendable by two others, Darnold proved his doubters wrong while helping the Seahawks go 17-3.

After leading the NFL with 20 turnovers in the regular season, Darnold didn’t have any in three playoff games. He wasn’t particularly sharp against a solid Patriots defense but protected the ball and made enough plays, finishing 19-for-38 for 202 yards.

“I know we won the Super Bowl, but we could have been a little bit better on offense, but I don’t care about that right now,” Darnold said. “It’s an unbelievable feeling, man. I’m just so happy for the guys in the

locker room and the coaches that put in so much effort throughout the whole season.”

Seattle sacked Maye six times, including two apiece by Hall and Murphy. Hall’s strip-sack late in the third quarter set up a short field and Darnold connected with Barner on 16-yard scoring toss to make it 19-0.

Julian Love’s interception set up another field goal that made it 22-7 with 5:35 left.

New England (17-4) punted on the first eight drives, excluding a kneel-down to end the first half.

“Just reminding them that we’re 307 days into what hopefully is a long, successful relationship and program, and it’s OK to be disappointed,” Patriots coach Mike Vrabel said.

New England failed to win the franchise’s seventh Super Bowl, which would have set an NFL record. It’s tied with Pittsburgh at six championships.

## Walker becomes first running back to win MVP in 28 years

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Kenneth Walker III is running into free agency with a Super Bowl MVP.

Walker capped a prolific postseason with another big performance on the ground to help the Seattle Seahawks beat the New England Patriots 29-13 on Sunday night for a championship.

While the defense carried Seattle for much of the postseason, Walker was once again the engine of the offense by rushing for 135 yards and adding 26 receiving for his third straight 100-yard game from scrimmage in the postseason. He became the first running back since Terrell Davis 28 years ago to win Super Bowl MVP.

“If I would tell myself as a kid right now, I wouldn’t have guessed I would have been the one to win MVP,” Walker said. “It’s a surreal moment, and it doesn’t happen without the guys in the locker room.”

Walker stepped up his game after back-field mate Zach Charbonnet went down with a season-ending knee injury.

The 25-year-old running back is in the fi-

nal year of his rookie contract and is slated to become a free agent in 2026. Thanks to his playoff run, Walker figures to be in line for a significant pay bump.

Walker gained 413 yards from scrimmage in the three wins for the Seahawks this postseason. He became the first player to top 100 yards from scrimmage in every playoff game for a Super Bowl champion since Terrell Davis did it in back-to-back seasons in 1997-98 for Denver.

“It means a lot,” Walker said. “It means a lot to me and I know it means a lot to my teammates. We went through a lot of adversity throughout the season. To be able to make it this far is a blessing, with the noise really. As a team we know the only thing that matters is what’s talked about in the organization. So all the outside noise we really ignore. We stuck together throughout the season and we won a Super Bowl for that.”

Making it even sweeter was the fact that his father was in attendance to watch him for the first time in the NFL. Walker said his dad comes to Seattle a lot, but doesn’t go to games because of the crowds.

But Walker said his agent convinced his father to come Sunday, and he got to see his son shine.

“I didn’t think he would come,” Walker said. “They ended up making him up and everything. He got out of his comfort zone.”

While fantasy football owners and Walker were sometimes frustrated that he didn’t carry a bigger load of the offense, especially in the red zone, in the regular season, the job share with Charbonnet did mean Walker was fresh for the playoffs when he was at his best.

Walker averaged less than 15 touches from scrimmage per game in the regular season when he delivered his first 1,000-yard rushing season since his rookie year.

But he averaged nearly 25 touches per game in the playoffs when he showed he’s capable of being a bell-cow back.

“When Charbs goes down everyone was hurting for him because he’s an instrumental part of this team,” receiver Cooper Kupp said. “For (Walker) to be able to shoulder the load and step up his game to another level, I’m so proud of him.”

# Malinin delivers US gold in team event

Associated Press

MILAN — It seemed only fitting that Ilia Malinin was the first one to get his Olympic gold medal after the U.S. successfully defended its team title by holding off the Japanese on Sunday night in the three-day competition at the Milan Cortina Games.

After all, everything came down to him in the end.

With the teams tied after seven of eight performances, Malinin calmly delivered for the Americans. The 21-year-old nicknamed the “Quad God” landed five quadruple jumps and scored 200.03 points for his free skate, atoning for a mediocre short program — at least by his lofty standards — one night earlier. That was enough to beat Japanese sensation Shun Sato, who followed him to the ice, hit a trio of quads of his own but could only manage 194.86 points in finishing second.

The U.S. finished with 69 points while Japan had 68, earning the silver medal for the second consecutive Olympics.

“I was like, ‘OK, I’m the deciding factor,’” Malinin said later, after the U.S. got the medal ceremony it was denied at the Beijing Games, when Russian doping held up their awards for

more than two years.

Malinin does it better than anyone in the world.

Matteo Rizzo delivered one of the best free skates of his career as Italy was trying to hold onto the bronze medal, allowing the host nation to finish third with 60 points. Georgia was fourth with 56 and still has never won a Winter Olympics medal.

The U.S. had a five-point lead over Japan after two days of competition. But the advantage dwindled to nothing when world champions Riku Miura and Ryuichi Kihara won the pairs free skate and Kaori Sakamoto won the women’s free skate earlier Sunday night.

Leave it to the best closer in the business to come through for the Americans.

Malinin opened with a big quad flip, opted for a safer triple Axel over his quad and overcame a couple of mistakes along the way to finish with aplomb. The son of Olympic skaters Tatiana Malinina and Roman Skorniakov ended with back-to-back combos, a quad toe-triple flip and a quad salchow-triple Axel, leaving a crowd full of American and Japanese fans roaring in approval.

“I knew that it was going to be a tiebreaker between the men’s

event,” Malinin said, “so I really just went straight into this, and just went for it. It went exactly the way I wanted, the way I planned. And you know, I’m so thankful for that.”

It wasn’t quite over yet. Sato did everything he could to give Japan a chance.

From his opening quad lutz to his finishing triple lutz, Sato was nearly perfect, producing an easier but cleaner program than Malinin had earlier. He pumped his fist the moment his music ended, then had to wait to hear whether it was enough.

It wasn’t quite.

“I didn’t really think about whether or not I could beat Ilia,” Sato said through a translator, “but I definitely wanted to do it.”

The pairs were first on the ice Sunday night, and Ellie Kam and Danny O’Shea put out the best free skate of their pairs career when the U.S. needed it the most, beating the Canadians to avoid dropping a much-needed point to the winning Japanese pairs team.

That point ended up being the margin of victory in the end.

Kam and O’Shea scored 135.36 points for their program, which opened with “Sweet Dreams” by the Eurythmics

and finished with “Everybody Wants to Rule the World” by Tears for Fears. Miura and Kihara won the segment with a career-best of their own of 155.55 points, pulling the Japanese within two points of the Americans with two events remaining.

“We couldn’t be more proud to be able to perform under what we felt was so much energy,” said the 34-year-old O’Shea, who was an Olympic alternate in 2018 but is making his debut at the Winter Games. “We walked into the day, walked into the rink with positive emotions, with an offensive attitude, and that showed out there on the ice.”

Then the women took the stage with the U.S. swapping out world champion Alysa Liu for Amber Glenn.

The three-time national champion spun out of her opening triple Axel, the most difficult triple jump and one only she tried among the women, and Glenn had to add a late double toe loop after missing an earlier triple as part of a combination. Those two mistakes, and a couple of other errors along the way, left her with 138.62 points — and more crucially, third in the segment.

# Swiss Gremaud again denies Gu gold in slopestyle

Associated Press

LIVIGNO, Italy — Mathilde Gremaud successfully defended her Olympic freeski slopestyle title and denied Eileen Gu a gold medal for a second straight Winter Games.

Gremaud won Monday’s final with a score of 86.96 from the best of her three jumps, while Gu again took silver behind her Swiss rival with her best effort of 86.58.

Gu needed a huge score on her final run when she had one last chance to better Gremaud, but that run barely lasted. Gu skit-

tered off the first rail and toppled to her side, dashing her title hopes.

Knowing she had locked up the gold after Gu fell, Gremaud tied a Swiss flag around her neck and wore it like a cape as she cruised down the course on her victory lap. After coming off the course, she embraced her teammates to celebrate her fourth career Olympic medal. Nearby, ecstatic supporters waved Swiss flags.

Gremaud, who turned 26 the day before the final, has now beaten Gu twice in Olympic fi-

nals by the slightest of margins: 0.33 points in 2022, and 0.38 in 2026.

Canada’s Megan Oldham claimed bronze.

Strong as Gremaud was in the jumps, Gu was undone by the railing section at the start of her run.

Gu led after the first of three runs when she nailed her routine, but Gremaud laid down her winning run on her second go to move to the top of the points table. Gu then wobbled off the rail on her second run; even though she kept her balance, but the

mistake resulted in a low score.

That same rail section had caused Gu to fall during Saturday’s qualifying, when she had to execute perfectly on a second go to advance to the final.

But when it mattered most on Monday and Gu had her last shot to snatch a win, the result was the same: Just seconds into her run she went tipping off the rail and tumbled in the snow.

Gu became a global star at the 2022 Beijing Games where she won three medals, including gold in freeski halfpipe and big air.

# Brunson powers Knicks past Celtics

Associated Press

BOSTON — Jalen Brunson scored 31 points and Josh Hart added 19 to help the New York Knicks beat the cold-shooting Boston Celtics 111-89 on Sunday.

Karl-Anthony Towns had 11 points and 10 rebounds for New York, which never trailed over the final 42 minutes. Mikal Bridges (14 points) and recently acquired Jose Alvarado (12 points) rounded out the double-digit scorers for the Knicks, who shot 14 of 45 (40%) from behind the 3-point line.

Jaylen Brown scored 26 points and Derrick White added 19 for Boston, which saw its five-game winning streak snapped. Baylor Scheierman started in place for the injured Sam Hauser and finished with 10 points, 13 rebounds and five assists.

The Celtics shot 37% for the game and were 7-of-41 (17.1%) from behind the arc.

The matchup pitted two of the top teams in the Eastern Conference, with Boston entering with a one-game lead over New York for second place. They'll meet one more time

during the regular season on April 9 in New York.

The Knicks pushed their advantage to 85-68 entering the fourth quarter after closing the third on a 20-7 run. The lead kept growing when Brunson scored 10 straight points to give them a 23-point lead with four minutes left.

New York led 60-53 at half-time. Brunson had 19 points through two quarters, with 12 coming during the first. The Celtics trailed by as many as 17 points, but made it a two-possession game entering the second half despite shooting 5 of 22 (22.7%) from 3-point range.

**Heat 132, Wizards 101:** Kasparas Jakucionis was 6-for-6 from 3-point range and scored 22 points, Bam Adebayo also had 22 and visiting Miami routed Washington.

Norman Powell added 21 points for the Heat, and Kel'el Ware had 19 points and 14 rebounds. Miami snapped a two-game losing streak and added to its team record with a 14th 130-plus point effort of the season.

Andrew Wiggins had 11 points and 10 rebounds as the

eighth-place Heat closed with-in a half-game of seventh-place Orlando in the Eastern Conference.

Tristan Vukcevic had 14 points to lead the Wizards, who lost back-to-back games for the first time since a nine-game slide from Jan. 7-24.

Alex Sarr added 12 points and 12 rebounds for Washington, which saw both Kyshawn George and Bilal Coulibaly depart early with injuries.

**Clippers 115, Timberwolves 96:** Kawhi Leonard had 41 points and eight rebounds and visiting Los Angeles beat slumping Minnesota.

John Collins had 15 points on 6-of-9 shooting, and Yanic Konan Niederhauser also scored 15 points. The Clippers took command with a 17-3 run closing out the third quarter.

Anthony Edwards led the Timberwolves with 23 points, and Julius Randle had 17. They have lost three of their last four, all to sub-.500 opponents. Minnesota made just 8 of 33 3-point attempts and committed 20 turnovers while being held under 100 points for just the second time this season.

Ayo Dosunmu, making his

T-wolves debut after being acquired in a trade with Chicago, had 11 points and two steals.

Minnesota made just 3 of 18 3-point attempts and committed 13 turnovers in the first half. Edwards was 0-for-6 on 3s and turned it over a team-high four times in the first half.

**Raptors 122, Pacers 104:** Scottie Barnes had 25 points and 14 rebounds to help host Toronto beat Indiana.

Barnes was 12-for-20 from the field and had six assists, four blocks and two steals in 33 minutes. The Raptors won their second straight to move 10 games above .500 at 32-22.

RJ Barrett had 20 points, eight rebounds and five assists, and Sandro Mamukelashvili added 17 points.

Pascal Siakam led the Pacers with 18 points, Jay Huff had 15 and Jarace Walker added 13. Last in the Eastern Conference, injury-ravaged Indiana has lost four straight to fall to 13-40.

Toronto rookie center Collin Murray-Boyles left with 3:47 left in the first quarter and did not return after he sprained his left thumb. He had two points in eight minutes.

## Mara, No. 2 Michigan cruise past Ohio State in blowout

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Aday Mara scored a career-high 24 points, Morez Johnson Jr. and Yaxel Lendeborg had double-doubles and second-ranked Michigan rolled to an 82-61 victory over Ohio State on Sunday.

The Big Ten-leading Wolverines (22-1, 12-1) led throughout as they made 10 3-pointers — including nine in the first half — and dominated in rebounding. Michigan had 17 offensive boards and outrebounded the Buckeyes 44-31.

Johnson had 11 points and 12 rebounds and Lendeborg add-

ed 14 points and 14 rebounds for the Wolverines, who have won six of the past seven meetings.

Bruce Thornton led Ohio State (15-8, 7-6) with 16 points and Devin Royal had 15. The Buckeyes have dropped two of three.

Michigan led 44-34 at half-time and was up by as many as 23 late in the game.

Ohio State was 8 of 25 from the field in the second half.

It was the worst loss by the Buckeyes to the Wolverines at home since Feb. 9, 1976, when Michigan rolled to a 90-66 win.

**No. 13 Texas Tech 70, West**

**Virginia 63:** JT Toppin had 22 points and nine rebounds and the visiting Red Raiders broke a two-game losing skid with a victory over the Mountaineers.

Donovan Atwell added 15 points for Texas Tech (17-6, 7-3 Big 12) and Christian Anderson had 13 points and 11 assists in his return from a one-game absence because of illness.

Brenen Lorient scored 20 points for West Virginia (15-9, 6-5), which lost for just the second time in 15 home games.

The Mountaineers scored the first four baskets after half-

time, all on layups, to trim a 13-point deficit to 39-35, but they went the next four minutes without a basket and got no closer.

The Red Raiders, who never trailed, kept distancing themselves with a steady diet of 3-pointers. Jaylen Petty, Atwell and Toppin each hit from long distance in a span of less than two minutes, and they pushed their lead to 52-37 with 13:17 remaining.

Lorient scored nine points in the final four minutes, but West Virginia's comeback bid came up short.