

## Trump: ‘Full might’ seen in Maduro raid

*Associated Press*

FORT BRAGG, N.C. — President Donald Trump celebrated the Special Forces members who ousted Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, saying last month’s audacious raid means “the entire world saw what the full military might” of the United States can do and ensured “we are feared” by potential enemies around the world.

Addressing soldiers and their families at Fort Bragg, one of the world’s largest military bases, Trump declared, “Your commander in chief supports you totally.” Then, drawing on one of his own campaign slogans, he implored them, “When needed, you’re going to fight, fight, fight. You’re going to win, win, win.”

The president and first lady

Melania Trump also met privately with military families. Trump said after the meeting that “we saw a lot of heroes” and “these are great patriots.” He said he planned to give a Medal of Honor to “one person” for participating in the Venezuelan operation.

But the visit often felt more like a political rally than an official visit to celebrate the U.S. armed forces. Trump’s lauding of the raid that toppled Maduro came only after he called to the stage Michael Whatley, a former Republican National Committee chair who has the president’s endorsement as he now runs for Senate in North Carolina.

Whatley thanked Trump and suggested that the president “is giving me an opportunity to rep-

resent you” — even though the election isn’t until November.

Later, Trump said of the Jan. 3 raid that whisked away Maduro to face U.S. drug smuggling charges, “It was a matter of minutes before he was on a helicopter being taken out.” He called the forces involved “some of our greatest soldiers to ever live, frankly,” while dismissing Maduro as an “outlaw dictator.”

“That night, the entire world saw what the full military might (of) the U.S. military is capable” of, the president said. “It was so precise, so incredible.”

Trump also vowed, “As long as I’m president, we will be the best led, the best trained, the best equipped, the most disciplined and the most elite fighting force the world has ever

seen” and noted of would-be U.S. adversaries, “Everybody knows it.”

“They know exactly what they would be up against. Hopefully, we’ll never have to test them and, because of our strength, and because of what we do, we probably won’t have to be tested,” Trump said.

Even still, the president mentioned sending a second aircraft carrier group to the Middle East amid rising tensions with Iran and said, “America’s respected again. And, perhaps most importantly, we are feared by the enemies all over the globe.”

“I don’t like to say fear,” he said. “But, sometimes, you have to have fear because that’s the only thing that really will get the situation taken care of.”

## Price tag of US surge in Caribbean nears \$3B

*Bloomberg News*

When U.S. forces captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, early in the new year, the Trump administration heralded the operation as concise and deliberate: with overhead air support, about 60 special forces troops descended from helicopters into Caracas, fought off security guards, grabbed their quarry and were airlifted back to a U.S. warship 100 miles off the coast. Over and done in a matter of hours, at minimum cost to the American taxpayer.

But the U.S. military posture in the Caribbean is costing billions. Bloomberg calculations show the operational price tag of the ships deployed there hit more than \$20 million a day at its peak from mid-November

until mid-January. And although most of the costs are covered by defense funding that has already been allocated, combat operations — from flight hours to weapons fired to extra pay — add up on top of that.

“There is no contingency fund in the DOD budget for unexpected operations,” said Mark Cancian of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a bipartisan think tank. “Conflicts cost extra.”

Dozens of U.S. Navy ships, fighter jets, drones and logistics vessels began gathering around Latin America late last summer, part of a buildup dubbed Southern Spear. At its height, the deployment represented 20% of the Navy’s surface fleet, tying up critical assets even as

crises were flaring elsewhere in the world.

The White House has said the operations around Venezuela didn’t cost taxpayers extra, because the forces involved are already deployed. A separate carrier strike group was sent to the Middle East amid a violent crackdown by Iran’s leadership against nationwide protests, and the USS Gerald R. Ford — the centerpiece of the Caribbean operation — was tasked with joining it Friday.

“None of these troops sit in the dry dock waiting for action,” Secretary of State Marco Rubio said after a January briefing with lawmakers on the Maduro raid, Operation Absolute Resolve. “They’re deployed somewhere in the world. If they’re not here, they’re somewhere else.”

Bloomberg analysis, using Pentagon information on operating costs, ship tracking data, satellite photos and public deployment announcements, shows how ships and aircraft were diverted to the Caribbean months before the operation, quietly consuming billions of dollars while potentially constraining U.S. power elsewhere.

Of the ships and vessels waiting in the waters off Venezuela before the raid, the Ford carrier was the biggest hitter.

The bill to have the Ford in the Caribbean alongside its accompanying destroyers, submarines and guided missile cruisers came to \$11.4 million a day, according to calculations based on data from the Congressional Budget Office, the U.S. defense budget and CSIS.

# Marine's adoption of Afghan orphan upheld

Associated Press

The Virginia Supreme Court ruled Thursday that a U.S. Marine and his wife will keep an Afghan orphan they brought home in defiance of a U.S. government decision to reunite her with her Afghan family. The decision likely ends a bitter, years-long legal battle over the girl's fate.

In 2020, a judge in Fluvanna County, Va., granted Joshua and Stephanie Mast an adoption of the child, who was then 7,000 miles away in Afghanistan living with a family the Afghan government decided were her relatives.

Four justices on the Virginia Supreme Court on Thursday signed onto an opinion reversing two lower courts' rulings that found the adoption was so

flawed it was void from the moment it was issued.

The justices wrote that a Virginia law that cements adoption orders after six months bars the child's Afghan relatives from challenging the court, no matter how flawed its orders and even if the adoption was obtained by fraud.

Three justices issued a scathing dissent, calling what happened in this court "wrong," "cancerous" and "like a house built on a rotten foundation."

An attorney for the Masts declined to comment, citing an order from the circuit court not to discuss the case publicly.

Lawyers representing the Afghan family said they were not yet prepared to comment on the decision.

The child was injured on the

battlefield in Afghanistan in September 2019 when U.S. soldiers raided a rural compound. The child's parents and siblings were killed. Soldiers brought her to a hospital at an American base.

The raid was targeting terrorists who had come into Afghanistan from a neighboring country; some believed she was not Afghan and tried to make a case for bringing her to the U.S. But the State Department, under President Donald Trump's first administration, insisted the U.S. was obligated under international law to work with the Afghan government and the International Committee of the Red Cross to unite the child with her closest surviving relatives.

The Afghan government determined she was Afghan and

vetted a man who claimed to be her uncle. The U.S. government agreed and brought her to the family. The uncle chose to give her to his son and his new wife, who raised her for 18 months in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Mast and his wife convinced courts in rural Fluvanna County to grant them custody and then a series of adoption orders, continuing to claim she was the "stateless" daughter of foreign fighters.

When the U.S. military withdrew from Afghanistan and the Taliban took over, the family agreed to leave and Mast worked his military contacts to get them on an evacuation flight. Mast then took the baby from them at a refugee resettlement center in Virginia, and they haven't seen her since.

## Navy head: Golden Fleet will deter aggression

BY GARY WARNER

Stars and Stripes

SAN DIEGO — Navy Secretary John Phelan said the top goal of building the Golden Fleet is deterrence and readiness that will keep enemy forces on the sidelines in conflicts around the world.

"To ensure there are zero cas- kets draped with American

flags," Phelan said in his closing keynote speech at the West 2026 conference. "Who controls the seas controls the future."

Phelan called for industry to step up and bring innovation to the Pentagon plans, especially companies that haven't done business with the Navy before.

"We want to unleash our innovators, uniformed and civilian,"

Phelan said. "We are done with armchair quarterbacks."

Phelan reinforced themes he has spoken about since assuming his role.

Phelan said the most frustrating part of his job is finding where things are going wrong — then trying to get solutions in motion.

He's still finding new prob-

lems in his second year on the job, likening it to "whack-a-mole."

The Golden Fleet is President Donald Trump's plan to build more and larger ships, uncrewed ships and a new class of aircraft carrier bigger than the 100,000-ton USS Gerald Ford, which is the largest military vessel ever built.

## Navy fires commander of destroyer USS Mason

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

The commander of the U.S. Navy destroyer USS Mason was relieved of duty Friday, service officials announced without providing specific details about the decision.

Capt. Chavius G. Lewis, who had commanded the ship since November 2024, was fired by

Rear Adm. Alexis T. Walker, the commander of Carrier Strike Group 10, "due to a loss of confidence in Lewis' ability to command," according to a Navy news release. The Navy often cites "a loss of confidence" when relieving leaders of responsibilities without providing a specific explanation.

"The Navy maintains the

highest standards for leaders and holds them accountable when those standards are not met," the service said in the announcement. Navy officials declined to provide further details about Lewis' removal.

Lewis has been temporarily reassigned to Naval Surface Group Southeast. Navy Capt. Kevin Hoffman has been

named the Mason's commanding officer, according to the service.

The ship in 2023 and 2024, before Lewis assumed command, saw significant action in the Middle East, where it responded to the Iran-backed Houthi rebels' attacks on international shipping lanes from their strongholds in Yemen.

# TSA agents again working without pay

*Associated Press*

A shutdown of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security that took effect early Saturday impacts the agency responsible for screening passengers and bags at airports across the country. Travelers with airline reservations may be nervously recalling a 43-day government shutdown that led to historic flight cancellations and long delays last year.

Transportation Security Administration officers are expected to work without pay while lawmakers remain without an agreement on DHS' annual funding. TSA officers also worked through the record shutdown that ended Nov. 12, but aviation experts say this one may play out differently.

Trade groups for the U.S. travel industry and major airlines

nonetheless warned that the longer DHS appropriations are lapsed, the longer security lines at the nation's commercial airports could get.

Funding for Homeland Security expired at midnight. But the rest of the federal government is funded through Sept. 30. That means air traffic controllers employed by the Federal Aviation Administration will receive paychecks as usual, reducing the risk of widespread flight cancellations.

According to the department's contingency plan, about 95% of TSA workers are deemed essential personnel and required to keep working. Democrats in the House and Senate say DHS won't get funded until new restrictions are placed on federal immigration operations.

It's hard to predict whether, when or where security screening snags might pop up. Even a handful of unscheduled TSA absences could quickly lead to longer wait times at smaller airports, for example, if there's just a single security checkpoint.

That's why travelers should plan to arrive early and allow extra time to get through security.

Experts say flight delays also are a possibility even though air traffic controllers are not affected by the DHS shutdown.

Airlines might decide to delay departures in some cases to wait for passengers to clear screening, said Rich Davis, senior security adviser at risk mitigation company International SOS. Shortages of TSA officers also could slow the screening of checked luggage behind the

scenes.

Most airports display security line wait times on their websites. But John Rose, chief risk officer for global travel management company Altour, advised not to wait until the day of a flight to check them.

"You may look online and it says two-and-a-half hours," he said. "Now it's two-and-a-half hours before your flight and you haven't left for the airport yet."

The White House has been negotiating with Democratic lawmakers, but the two sides failed to reach a deal by the end of the week before senators and members of Congress were set to leave Washington for a 10-day break.

Lawmakers in both chambers were on notice, however, to return if a deal to end the shutdown is struck.

## Experts decry reach of Trump's EPA rollbacks

*Bloomberg News*

President Donald Trump is shrinking the Environmental Protection Agency more quickly and aggressively than ever before, culminating in last week's move to rescind the crucial "endangerment finding" underpinning key regulations of planet-warming pollution.

And unlike Trump's first term, the latest changes may be harder to reverse and result in long-lasting impacts on public health and the economy. Over the past year, the EPA has surpassed the staff and program cuts made during a similar period last time. It has also launched more pollution control rollbacks. The EPA has been able to make such quick work this time around because it's breaking historical precedent and testing the legal boundaries of administrative and environmental laws, according to interviews with more than a dozen current and former EPA staffers, advocates, histori-

ans, scientists and legal experts.

Rescinding the endangerment finding is the most consequential change for an EPA that's been re-oriented around sweeping deregulation. It marks the reversal of a key scientific determination — that greenhouse gases are harmful — supporting a swath of federal climate policy to curb emissions from vehicles and industrial sources. The previous Trump administration had planned a public debate of climate science, at the time considered the first step in challenging the finding, but abandoned the effort.

The move is expected to immediately face legal challenges. That's the point, said Joseph Goffman, assistant administrator of the EPA's Office of Air and Radiation under President Joe Biden. The administration wants to get the issue before the Supreme Court, hoping its conservative majority bucks precedent in upholding the repeal, he said.

## Report: US deportations to 3rd countries cost over \$40M

*The Washington Post*

The Trump administration spent more than \$40 million last year to send hundreds of migrants to at least two-dozen countries that are not their own, a tactic Senate Democrats described in a report Friday as a costly strategy aimed at sowing fear and intimidation in the president's mass deportation campaign.

The 30-page analysis from the minority members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee accuses the administration of entering into opaque financial agreements with foreign governments to rapidly expand a program for "third country" removals that once had been reserved for exceptional circumstances. Its authors contend that the State Department has failed to conduct sufficient oversight to ensure that payments to those countries are not being misspent and that migrants transferred to their custody are not being abused.

The administration "has expanded and institutionalized a system in which the United States urges or coerces countries to accept migrants who are not their citizens, often through arrangements that are costly, inefficient and poorly monitored," Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, the top Democrat on the committee, wrote in a letter to colleagues. "Deporting migrants to countries they have no connection to... has become a routine instrument of diplomacy."

Administration officials have said they have no choice but to partner with foreign governments that are willing to accept undocumented immigrants whose native nations are not willing to take them back.

The analysis focused on El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda, Eswatini and Palau, a committee member involved in the report said. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity.

# Europe rethinks nuclear weapons stance

*Bloomberg News*

When the U.S. briefly stopped sharing battlefield intelligence with Ukraine in March 2025, the results were immediate. Kyiv's forces suffered decisive setbacks on the battlefield as its European allies watched in horror.

The outage only lasted a few days, but it sent shockwaves through Europe as a new reality dawned: Washington was no longer a reliable military partner, and the Continent needed a plan B.

Europe has been fighting to keep an increasingly hostile U.S. in NATO while countries race to rearm. And now for the first time since the end of the Cold War, European capitals are dis-

cussing how to develop their own nuclear deterrent, according to people familiar with the matter, citing conversations between militaries and governments.

Europe depends on the U.S. for its so-called nuclear umbrella, comprised of American weapons based on the Continent and NATO's mutual defense pact. If the U.S. can no longer be trusted, Europe is faced with the sinister prospect of being home alone with a neighbor, Russia, that owns the world's largest nuclear arsenal.

At the moment, only the U.K. and France have atomic weapons. French President Emmanuel Macron is expected to offer

nuclear deterrence to the rest of Europe in a speech this month, according to people familiar with the matter. He already evoked the possibility of extending the French umbrella over the rest of Europe last year following the events in Ukraine.

With enough money, other European countries theoretically could get nuclear missiles. But that would require painful choices: high costs and international treaty violations if countries want to develop their own arsenal, or the acceptance that signing up to defend an ally comes with the likely trade-off of being attacked themselves.

"Imagine that Russia invades Estonia," said Pavel Povdig, a

senior researcher at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. "So, France has this calculation — they have the capability to do a lot of damage to Russia, but Russia would definitely do a lot of damage to France in response. Would that be something Paris would be willing to contemplate?"

Europe is treading carefully. As officials tackle the issue, they have been mindful of what signs they send to Russia, keeping the conversations in bilateral or trilateral formats among countries that have strong trust, a person familiar with knowledge of the talks said. They declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of the issue.

## UN: 6K Darfur killings in 2025 amount to war crimes

*Associated Press*

CAIRO — More than 6,000 people were killed in over three days when a Sudanese paramilitary group unleashed "a wave of intense violence ... shocking in its scale and brutality" in Sudan's Darfur region in late October, according to the United Nations.

The Rapid Support Forces' offensive to capture the city of el-Fasher included widespread atrocities that amount to war crimes and possible crimes against humanity, the U.N. Hu-

man Rights Office said in a report released on Friday.

"The wanton violations that were perpetrated by the RSF and allied Arab militia in the final offensive on el-Fasher underscore that persistent impunity fuels continued cycles of violence," said U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk.

The RSF and their allied Arab militias, known as Janjaweed, overran el-Fasher, the Sudanese army's only remaining stronghold in Darfur, on Oct. 26

and rampaged through the city and its surroundings after more than 18 months of siege.

The 29-page U.N. report detailed a set of atrocities that ranged from mass killings and summary executions, sexual violence, abductions for ransom, torture and ill-treatment to detention and disappearances. In many cases, the attacks were ethnicity-motivated, it said.

The paramilitaries' Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo has previously acknowledged abuses by his fighters but disputed

the scale of atrocities.

The alleged atrocities in el-Fasher, the provincial capital of North Darfur, mirror a pattern of RSF conduct in its war against the Sudanese military. The war began in April 2023 when a power struggle between the two sides exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere across the country.

The conflict created the world's largest humanitarian crisis with parts of the country pushed into famine.

## Navalny found to be poisoned with dart frog toxin

*Associated Press*

LONDON — Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was poisoned by the Kremlin with a rare and lethal toxin found in the skin of poison dart frogs, five European countries said Saturday.

The foreign ministries of the U.K., France, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands said analysis in European labs of samples taken from Navalny's

body "conclusively confirmed the presence of epibatidine." The neurotoxin secreted by dart frogs in South America is not found naturally in Russia, they said.

A joint statement said: "Russia had the means, motive and opportunity to administer this poison."

The five countries said they were reporting Russia to the Organization for the Prohibition of

Chemical Weapons for a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

There was no immediate comment from the organization.

Navalny, who crusaded against official corruption and staged massive anti-Kremlin protests as President Vladimir Putin's fiercest foe, died in an Arctic penal colony on Feb. 16, 2024, while serving a 19-year

sentence that he believed to be politically motivated.

The European nations' assessment came as Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, attended the Munich Security Conference in Germany, and just before the second anniversary of Navalny's death.

Russian authorities said that the 47-year-old politician became ill after a walk and died from natural causes.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Sex workers at brothel fight for unionization**

**NV** PAHRUMP—Nevada is the only state where people can legally purchase sex, and now sex workers at one of the state’s oldest brothels are fighting to become the nation’s first to be unionized.

“We want the same things that any other worker wants. We want a safe and respectful workplace,” said a worker at Sheri’s Ranch in Pahrump, who goes by the stage name Jupiter Jetson and asked that her legal name not be used for fear of harassment.

Prostitution is legal at licensed brothels in 10 of Nevada’s rural counties. The majority of the brothel’s 74 sex workers submitted a petition to unionize with the National Labor Relations Board last week under the name United Brothel Workers, represented by the Communications Workers of America.

Jetson said the drive was spurred by a new independent contractor agreement issued in December that would give the brothel power to use the women’s likeness without permission, even if they no longer work there.

**Pickleball argument sparks brawl at club**

**FL** PORT ORANGE — A dispute over a rule led to a brawl during a pickleball game at a country club, authorities said, with one player hitting his opponent in the face with a paddle and punching him on the ground before others got involved.

A 63-year-old man was

charged Sunday with two counts of felony battery on a person 65 or older, and his 51-year-old wife, who also joined the fight in Port Orange, was charged with a single count of felony battery on a person 65 or older, according to an arrest affidavit.

The players exchanged insults, and at the end of the match, the man insulted his male opponent’s wife. The men exchanged words, and the 63-year-old man attacked his opponent, according to an affidavit.

As many as 20 players became involved in the brawl, the affidavit said.

**Residents complain about feds’ use of tear gas**

**OR** PORTLAND — Multiple residents of an affordable housing complex in Portland have bought gas masks to wear in their own homes, to protect themselves from tear gas fired by federal agents outside the immigration building across the street. Others have taped their windows or stuffed wet towels under their doors, while children have sought security by sleeping in closets.

Some told their stories to a federal judge Friday, as they testified in a lawsuit seeking to limit federal officers’ use of tear gas during protests at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement building following months of repeated exposure.

The property manager of the apartment building and several tenants filed the suit against the federal government in December, arguing that the use of chemical munitions has violated residents’ rights to life, liberty and property by sickening

them, contaminating their apartments and confining them inside.

They have asked the court to limit federal agents’ use of such munitions unless needed to respond to an imminent threat.

**Surfers rescue 6 people after boat capsizes**

**CA** SANTA CRUZ — Surfers in Santa Cruz are being lauded as heroes after they swam toward a capsized boat and pulled six injured people onto their boards until emergency crews arrived.

Droves of surfers were catching large waves Feb. 6 at Steamer Lane when a small motorboat barreled by and collided with a wave, throwing two adults and four children into the water. Several of the passengers were not wearing life jackets, according to an incident report from the Santa Cruz Fire Department.

Vince Tuzzi, who was filming the surfers when the boat capsized, said he knew something was about to go terribly wrong when he saw the fast-moving boat out of the corner of his eye. Afterward he watched as about 10 surfers, two of them just 14 years old, got the people to safety.

**Highway bus crash kills college baseball player**

**IA** TWIN LAKES — A 19-year-old from South Dakota died in a bus crash in rural Iowa that injured 32 other members of a community college’s baseball team.

Carter Johnson was an outfielder from Rapid City in his first year at Iowa Lakes Community College, according to

the team roster. Johnson died Wednesday after the bus overturned in a ditch alongside a highway near Twin Lakes, authorities said Thursday.

The bus went off the road for “unknown reasons,” said Iowa State Patrol Lt. Aaron Smidt, and the crash is under investigation.

Smidt said student-athletes in a vehicle trailing the bus were administering CPR to Johnson when first responders arrived. Johnson was pronounced dead at the scene.

All of the other occupants on the bus — 32 teammates — were injured in the crash but are stable and recovering, Smidt said. Three were airlifted for treatment in the Des Moines area.

**DEA supervisor arrested in visa-fraud investigation**

**FL** MIAMI — A supervisor at the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration’s office in the Dominican Republic has been arrested as part of an investigation into abuse of a U.S. visa program for confidential informants, a current and former U.S. official briefed on the matter told The Associated Press on Thursday.

The arrest comes as the Trump administration has abruptly shuttered the anti-narcotics office in the Caribbean nation over what it said was a “disgusting and disgraceful violation of public trust.”

Melitón Cordero was taken into custody as part of an investigation led by U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the two people said. They spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity because the investigation is ongoing.

— From wire reports



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**Reporting World, National and Military News**

# USA Bobsled maintains strong military ties

By MATT WAGNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

USA Bobsled/Skeleton scours the American collegiate track and field scene every year, seeking potential athletes to fill its ranks.

Even something as small as strength-and-conditioning numbers can catch the organization's attention, as Air Force Senior Airman Jasmine Jones learned while competing for Eastern Michigan University.

Yet another pipeline has become just as important to USA Bobsled: the U.S. military.

Just look at the roster for the 2026 Milan Cortina Winter Olympics: Three of the 16 athletes are service members — Jones, Army Sgt. Frank Del Duca and Army Spc. Azaria Hill. Army Cpl. Hakeem Abdul-Saboor is one of the team's alternates.

Starting Monday with the two-man bobsled and running through Feb. 22, military athletes will be hitting the ice at the Cortina Sliding Centre in Corti-

na d'Ampezzo, Italy.

Even the coaching staff has a military flair. The team's head coach is Lt. Col. Christopher Fogt, and assisting him are Lt. Col. Garrett Hines and Sgt. 1st Class Shauna Rohbock.

USA Bobsled has become a feeder into the Army and Air Force's World Class Athlete Programs, as current members hail the stability the programs give them while in pursuit of their Olympic dreams.

"It seems like a pretty natural fit," Del Duca said. "Just some of the skills you learn as an athlete and in the Army or in the Air Force, they complement each other. Oftentimes, getting experience with both, they help each other."

The connection between the two groups isn't a recent phenomenon.

Nearly a century ago, Eddie Eagan, a World War I Army veteran, became the first Olympian to win gold in different summer and winter events when he and his teammates

placed first at the Lake Placid Games in 1932 — Eagan's only bobsled race.

He won a boxing gold in 1920 in Antwerp, Belgium.

Eagan later rejoined the service with the Army Air Corps in World War II.

The second uniform isn't lost on any of the USA Bobsled military athletes.

"I feel like when I get out there on that line, I'm not only representing myself and my family, but I'm representing my country, I'm representing my teammates, I'm representing a lot of people," Hill said.

The trio and their teammates are hoping to add to the Americans' long history of silverware in bobsled, and they can turn to the three in their ranks who have done it before.

Fogt, Hines and Rohbock each won silver medals in their athletic careers prior to entering the coaching arena. The organization can also bank on the experience of Tuffy Latour, a retired WCAP member who has

played numerous roles as coach and administrator.

They created another avenue that strengthens the bobsled-military connection.

"I aspire to be like them," Abdul-Saboor said. "It would be amazing if I could step into that role."

Del Duca is a driver at heart.

The 34-year-old from Bethel, Maine, was a high school state champion skier, has competed in some autocross and recently got into go-kart racing.

He just can't get enough of the feeling from being in the saddle.

Perhaps that explains how in his 11th season of bobsledding, the former University of Maine sprinter enters his second Olympic Games as the Americans' top driver.

"For me, the act of driving is quite euphoric and calming, despite it being a violent, fast situation," Del Duca said.

Del Duca begins his Olympic competition with the two-man bobsled Monday.

## Taylor, Armbruster chase Nolte after 2 monobob runs

*Associated Press*

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy — The only thing Elana Meyers Taylor has yet to do in her bobsled career is win Olympic gold, which made her process of choosing a strategy for the final two runs of the women's monobob race at the Milan Cortina Games extremely easy.

"I'm chasing," Meyers Taylor said.

Game on. The medal hunt in Cortina could be a wild one Monday night.

Laura Nolte, of Germany, is the leader after Sunday's first two runs of the women's monobob competition, finishing in 1 minute, 59.12 seconds. And right on her heels is a pair of American 40-something mothers in Meyers Taylor and Kaillie Humphries Armbruster, chasing even more Olympic medals for their collections.

Nolte's lead is 0.22 seconds over Meyers Taylor and 0.31 seconds over Humphries Armbruster going into Monday night's final two runs of the competition.

"It's coming down to the wire," Hum-

phries Armbruster said. "There's definitely lots of room to make mistakes on this track. Ice conditions are changing every single run. I've got to work real hard at the start. I'm trying to keep up with mid-20-year-olds and I'm still only year and a half postpartum, so there's definitely still room for improvement."

After the first three, there's a bit of a gap to the rest of the medal-chasing pack: Switzerland's Melanie Hasler is fourth, 0.78 seconds off Nolte's lead, and Kaysha Love of the United States is fifth — 0.89 seconds back.

It is a loaded leaderboard.

Nolte is the reigning World Cup overall monobob champion. Humphries Armbruster won monobob gold at Beijing when the sport debuted in the Olympic program four years ago. Meyers Taylor won the silver in that Olympic race. Hasler is a 10-time World Cup medalist, always seeming to be on the brink of a breakthrough. Love — who clearly wasn't happy after experiencing a ton of trouble in her second heat, dropping one

spot to fifth — won the world monobob title last year at Lake Placid.

"Everything is still open. This is monobob," Hasler said. "It's definitely going to be hard to stay in the fourth place, but I want to attack the medals for sure."

Did Meyers Taylor expect it to be this close?

"No, no," she said. "Actually, I thought it would be even closer. ... It's a very competitive field, the girls are all really great and it's just one of those kinds of tracks where it's anybody's ball game."

Australia's Bree Walker, a winner of five medals — three gold — in seven World Cup races this season, struggled in her first heat but rallied to be seventh going into Monday, one spot behind Lisa Buckwitz of Germany. But they're both about a full second behind Nolte, and well over a half-second behind the bronze-medal spot.

"Olympic Games are four heats and it's a marathon," Walker said. "And you just have to keep going, keep going, keep going."

# Speedskater Stolz looks toward 3rd gold

Associated Press

MILAN — Jordan Stolz is so preternaturally calm and apparently impervious to nerves that the two-time Olympic gold medalist's coach, Bob Corby, does occasionally wonder whether his star speedskating pupil might be a little too relaxed.

One example: Before Stolz was due to compete in the 500 meters at the Milan Cortina Games, Corby found him laying down in the athletes' lounge, not a care in the world, as race time was getting closer.

"I'm like, 'OK, OK. Are we going to warm up? Are we going to warm up?' Finally, I shook him," Corby recounted Saturday following Stolz's victory in the 500 that came on top of an earlier win in the 1,000 at these Olympics. "And he goes, 'Oh, yeah.' Looks at his watch. 'I still have 45 seconds until my alarm goes off.'"

A smiling Corby explained: "That's just normal behavior for him. One of the other coaches asked me one time: 'So do things

bother him?'"

As long as Stolz is healthy, the 21-year-old from Wisconsin tends to finish first, no matter the setting or circumstances. His first career Olympic golds — making him only the second man, along with Eric Heiden at Lake Placid in 1980, to complete the 500-1,000 double at one Winter Games — had been anticipated, if not downright expected, by many before competition began in Milan.

He holds the world record in the 1,000 and is unbeaten in that event this season. He won five of nine World Cup 500s this season. He is a two-time world champion in both of those events, plus the 1,500, which is coming up Thursday.

And then Stolz will race in the mass start Feb. 21, his fourth, and last, event.

Does he ever have a case of the jitters?

"Oh, yeah. For sure," Stolz said. "Before the 1,000, I was feeling nervous, just because it was

the first one and it's, like, the Olympics, right? And it's super important. Even just watching (others race the 5,000 last weekend) made me a little bit nervous, because you've waited four years to get here and now you only have one chance to win. And I've been winning all the 1,000s, I don't know for how long, and I thought, 'I really don't want to lose this one.'"

That triumph meant the tension receded for the 500.

"I felt a lot less pressure today, just because I got the first one out of the way," Stolz said Saturday. "And I thought this one's, like, not worth stressing over, because it's going to be a toss-up, either way."

He used a good start and his usual finishing verve to get past Jennings de Boo of the Netherlands in their head-to-head heat at the sport's shortest distance. On Wednesday, in the 1,000, Stolz also shared the ice with de Boo in a heat and also came through at the end, that time after trailing with 400 meters to go.

Corby called the 500 performance the best of Stolz's career.

"I would agree with that," Stolz said. "I didn't feel too many difficulties in it."

Well, then.

"He loves training. He loves racing. He does not get that anxious and nervous when he's out there," Heiden said. "I don't know if he really is concerned about what everybody else is doing. He's more concerned about: Is he going to perform up to his expectations?"

Stolz's father, Dirk, said he and Jordan spoke on the phone at about midnight Friday night.

"You see some athletes, just mentally — they might be physically all there, but all of a sudden, the pressure comes in and it affects their performance, and I don't see it with Jordan a whole lot. He's pretty relaxed," Dirk Stolz said. "At the end of the day, it's another race at another place, really, with different scenery, right? That's how you got to look at it."

# No medal in GS but plenty of optimism for Shiffrin

Associated Press

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy — Mikaela Shiffrin stood at the start gate atop the giant slalom course at sun-splashed Tofane and made a promise to herself.

"I'm going to do this whole thing here," she said.

Considering the path the American star has taken to reach the Milan Cortina Olympics, and to this event in particular, that was enough. So while the leaderboard near the finish line during Sunday's GS needed to flip to the second page before Shiffrin's name appeared in 11th, the most decorated skier in the history of the sport didn't view her finish as a disappointment.

Disappointment is washing out, which she did four years ago in Beijing. Disappointment is wondering if the speed that once came so easily would ever return

while recovering from a harrowing crash during a World Cup start in Killington, Vt., in late 2024 that left her abdomen punctured and her confidence shaken.

What happened during what Shiffrin called "the greatest show of GS skiing we've had in a really long time" was not disappointment. If anything, it was the opposite.

Yes, Shiffrin finished outside the top 10. The way the snow felt underneath her skis and the razor-thin margin that separated the silver medalists from the chasing pack offered evidence she's trending in the right direction heading into slalom, her best event, on Wednesday.

On Sunday, Shiffrin was right there. A turn here. A turn there. On a course that was a little flatter and a little less technically demanding than what Shiffrin and

the rest of the best skiers in the world usually see — one almost explicitly designed to create a safe and ultracompetitive race — the difference between a medal and the middle was nearly imperceptible.

Shiffrin promised to "learn" after slogging down through the slalom in the women's combined last week, when her skis couldn't seem to "go." Perhaps too aware of the perception of an Olympic slump — the Games are the only place she hasn't won in the last eight years — she did her best to refocus and block out the noise.

"It felt good to push, which was amazing," she said, later adding: "It felt really good to ski high intensity."

Shiffrin's intensity feels as if it is slowly but steadily ramping up. She wore bib No. 3, a nod to the fact she's back in the top 7 in the

world in the GS, something she considered a "challenging task" when the season began.

Her climb back up the GS rankings has been fueled by consistency. The "lights-out speed" she knows is required to finish atop the podium doesn't come quite as easily as it did when she was at the peak of her powers. That's fine.

"The task ahead of me for the coming months (and) in the coming years is to try to bring that kind of intensity and fire and to continue to work with the team to find those hundredths (of a second) that it takes to actually win races," she said.

That didn't happen under the snowcapped peaks of the Dolomites on Sunday. Maybe on another course, one with a more difficult setup that would allow her to lean in to her experience, things might have played out differently.

# Texas Tech hands Arizona 2nd straight loss

Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. — JT Toppin scored eight of his 31 points in a dominant overtime performance and No. 16 Texas Tech sent No. 1 Arizona to its second straight loss, shocking the Wildcats 78-75 on Saturday.

The Red Raiders (19-6, 9-3 Big 12) beat the No. 1 team for the third time in school history. Arizona (23-2, 10-2) was 23-0 before losing to No. 9 Kansas 82-78 on Monday.

The Wildcats had a 64-57 lead with 3:29 left in regulation, but Texas Tech responded with 9-0 run, capped by Donovan Atwell's corner 3-pointer with 25 seconds left for a 66-64 lead. Arizona's Ivan Kharchenkov tied it at 66 with two free throws and Christian Anderson couldn't hit a contested jumper as time expired.

After the short break, Toppin went to work, scoring four baskets on an array of tip-ins and low-post moves. The preseason All-America selection shot 13 of 22 from the field and had 13 rebounds to finish with his 47th career double-double. Anderson added 19 points, hitting six 3-pointers.

Arizona's Tobe Awaka had 16 points and 12 rebounds. Freshman Brayden Burries also scored 16.

**No. 2 Michigan 86, UCLA 56:** Yaxel Lendeborg had 17 points and eight rebounds to lead the host Wolverines over the Bruins that puts the program in position to be ranked No. 1 in the AP Top 25 for the first time since 2013.

No. 1 Arizona lost its first two games this past week against No. 9 Kansas and No. 16 Texas Tech, giving Michigan (24-1, 14-1 Big Ten) a path to the top spot in the poll with its 10th straight win.

**No. 3 Houston 78, Kansas State 64:** Emanuel Sharp had 23 points and six rebounds as the host Cougars rallied from an early deficit to beat the Wildcats for Houston's sixth straight win.

Sharp scored 14 points on 4 of 10 shooting in the first half as the Cougars (23-2, 11-1 Big 12) built a

33-19 halftime lead.

**No. 4 Duke 67, No. 20 Clemson 54:** Star freshman Cameron Boozer had 18 points and the host Blue Devils held the Tigers to 35% shooting in a win.

This marked the Blue Devils' 29th straight home win and eighth victory against an AP Top 25 opponent this year.

**No. 5 Iowa St. 74, No. 9 Kansas 56:** Milan Momcilovic scored 18 points and the host Cyclones shook off a slow start to defeat the Jayhawks, snapping Kansas' eight-game winning streak.

Iowa State (22-3, 9-3 Big 12), coming off Tuesday's 62-55 loss at TCU, began a five-game stretch in which it plays four ranked teams by taking control of this game in the first half despite struggling to make shots in the opening minutes.

**No. 6 UConn 79, Georgetown 75:** Solo Ball had 20 points and Alex Karaban scored 13 of his 18 points in the second half as the host Huskies held off a second-half rally and beat the Hoyas.

Silas Demary Jr. had 15 points, 12 rebounds and nine assists, and freshmen Braylon Mullins and Eric Reibe scored 10 points apiece for UConn (24-2, 14-1 Big East).

**No. 7 Nebraska 68, Northwestern 49:** Pryce Sandfort scored 29 points, Sam Hoiberg added 14 and the host Cornhuskers shook off a slow start to beat the Wildcats.

Nebraska (22-3, 11-3 Big Ten) overcame a season high-tying 18 turnovers and poor shooting in the first half to sweep the season series with Northwestern (10-16, 2-13).

**No. 11 North Carolina 79, Pittsburgh 65:** Jarin Stevenson and Seth Trimble scored 19 points each to help the host Tar Heels beat the Panthers and secure another 20-win season.

Short-handed North Carolina played without star freshman forward Caleb Wilson (bone fracture in left hand) and center Henri Veesaar (illness/lower body in-

jury), who had both started every game this season and are the team's top two scorers and rebounders.

**No. 12 Gonzaga 94, Santa Clara 86:** Graham Ike had 21 points and a season-high 15 rebounds as the visiting Bulldogs held off the Broncos.

Graham shot 7 of 12 and had four assists to help Gonzaga (25-2, 13-1) move a half-game ahead of Santa Clara for first place in the West Coast Conference.

**No. 13 Purdue 78, Iowa 57:** C.J. Cox and Gicarri Harris each had 14 points to help the visiting Boilermakers beat the Hawkeys.

Purdue (20-5, 11-3 Big Ten), wrapping up a stretch of six of eight games on the road, extended its winning streak to four with an efficient offense that consistently found openings.

**No. 14 Florida 92, No. 25 Kentucky 83:** Xaivian Lee scored 22 points, Urban Klavzar added 19 and the host Gators beat the Wildcats for their 10th victory in their last 11 outings.

Thomas Haugh (17), Alex Condon (14) and Rueben Chinyelu (10) also scored in double figures for Florida (19-6, 10-2 Southeastern Conference), which ended a six-game skid against Kentucky (17-8, 8-4) at home.

**No. 15 Virginia 70, Ohio State 66:** Malik Thomas and Sam Lewis each scored 13 points and the Cavaliers (22-3) beat the Buckeyes at Bridgestone Arena in the Nashville Hoops Showdown.

Bruce Thornton scored 28 points for Ohio State (16-9). He also had an assist, the 500th of his career.

**No. 17 St. John's 79, Providence 69:** Dylan Darling had 23 points and eight rebounds and the visiting Red Storm scored eight straight points after a fracas that resulted in six ejections to take the lead and earn their 11th straight victory over the Friars.

**No. 19 Vanderbilt 82, Texas A&M 69:** Tyler Nickel scored 25 points to lead the host Commo-

dores over the Aggies.

AK Okereke added a season-high 23 points while Devin McGlockton had 17 for Vanderbilt (21-4, 8-4 Southeastern Conference), which has won five of six since a three-game losing skid in mid-January.

**No. 21 Arkansas 88, Auburn 75:** Darius Acuff Jr. tied a career high with 31 points and Billy Richmond III scored a career-high 25 to lead the host Razorbacks past the Tigers.

Acuff, who shot 10 of 15 from the field and 7 of 10 from 3-point range, made three straight 3-pointers early in the second half as Arkansas (19-6, 9-3 Southeastern Conference) went on a 19-4 run before the first media timeout after leading by six at halftime.

**No. 22 BYU 90, Colorado 86 (OT):** Rob Wright III scored a career-high 39 points and the host Cougars beat the Buffaloes in overtime.

It was Wright's second straight 30-point-plus game after scoring 30 at Baylor on Tuesday night. AJ Dybantsa added 20 points, 13 rebounds, and eight assists to help BYU (19-6, 7-5 Big 12) win without second-leading scorer Richie Saunders.

**No. 24 Louisville 82, Baylor 71:** Mikel Brown Jr. had a part of every point during the visiting Cardinals' go-ahead run early in the second half as the standout freshman followed up his historic game with 29 points and six assists in Louisville's win over the Bears.

The Cardinals (19-6) went ahead to stay with an 11-3 run that started when Brown had the assist on J'Vonne Hadley's basket with 18:20 left to snap a 39-all tie. Brown made three free throws less than a minute later after being fouled on a long shot, then had back-to-back steals and immediately followed with assists both times — on Sananda Fru's dunk, then another jumper by Hadley. That run ended with Brown's lay-up with 15:06 left that made it 50-42.