

## President keeps diplomacy in Iran mix

BY LARA KORTE  
*Stars and Stripes*

The United States is still leaning toward diplomacy with Iran even as it readies one of the largest military buildups in the Middle East in years, President Donald Trump said.

In his State of the Union address on Tuesday, Trump touted the power of the U.S. military but suggested that a negotiated solution could be reached.

Iran's uranium enrichment program has been the subject of fitful talks for months, and Trump has made it clear that he's willing to use force if Iran doesn't give in to American demands for an end to its uranium enrichment efforts.

"Iranians) want to make a

deal, but we haven't heard those secret words: 'We will never have a nuclear weapon,' " Trump said. "My preference is to solve this problem through diplomacy. But one thing is certain: I will never allow the world's number one sponsor of terror ... to have a nuclear weapon."

The U.S. has deployed a host of warships and fighter jets to the Middle East in recent weeks.

The USS Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group arrived in the Mediterranean Sea on Friday, joining the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group, which is in the Arabian Sea.

In all, the U.S. has deployed some 16 warships to the region and shifted more than 150 air-

craft to bases in Europe and the Middle East, according to publicly available flight tracking data and satellite images reviewed by The Washington Post.

During his speech, the president touted previous military operations against Iran, including the assassination of Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani in early 2020 and last year's Operation Midnight Hammer, which targeted Iran's nuclear facilities.

Trump also emphasized the threat that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose. Iranian missiles already can reach Europe and U.S. bases in the Persian Gulf, and Tehran is working to build missiles that can reach the continental United States, Trump said.

"After Midnight Hammer, they were warned to make no future attempts to rebuild their weapons program in a particular area: nuclear weapons," he said. "Yet they continue starting it all over. We wiped it out and they want to start all over again and are at this moment again pursuing their sinister ambitions."

It is still unclear whether and to what extent Trump is willing to strike Iran. Leaders in Tehran have also indicated that they are interested in making a deal but said they will not hesitate to retaliate should the U.S. attack.

The next round of bilateral nuclear talks about Iran's nuclear program is slated to start Thursday in Geneva.

## US admiral: NATO can't let up on submarine threats

BY ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

ABOARD ITS VIRGINIO FASAN—NATO submarine deterrence from the Arctic to the Mediterranean Sea is unmatched and only stands to get better, but allies can't afford to let up, an American commander in Europe said this week.

Rear Adm. Bret Grabbe and two Italian navy counterparts were aboard this Italian frigate Monday to view the start of NATO's Dynamic Manta, an exercise that showcases allied submarine warfare capabilities. The exercise kicked off in the Ionian Sea near the coast of Sicily.

"We're just really good at what we do," said Grabbe, commander of NATO submarines. He added that detecting, tracking and potentially neutralizing

submarines is "not an easy game" and that adversaries can get lucky.

The exercise is part of NATO's effort to "take luck out of the game" for enemies through repeated training and exercises. NATO can't rest on its laurels, Grabbe said.

The exercise is the southern counterpart to Dynamic Mongoose in the north Atlantic Ocean. It offers participating navies the chance to hone their skills in the deeper, saltier Mediterranean Sea, where sound travels differently through water than it does in the north.

This year's Dynamic Manta includes surface ships, patrol aircraft, helicopters from various countries along with submarines from Turkey, Greece and Italy. Other participants include Canada, Germany,

France, Norway, Portugal, Spain, the U.K. and the U.S.

Grabbe joined Rear Adm. Francesco Milazzo, head of the Italian navy's submarines and underwater dimension department, and Italian Rear Adm. Cristian Nardone, commander of NATO Standing Maritime Group 2, for the start of the exercise and a news conference.

NATO submarine countries — such as Italy, Germany, Greece and the U.S. — have built, are building or have committed to build more submarines.

Plus, the alliance is experimenting with new technology, such as the first-ever underwater deployment of an aerial drone from a U.S. submarine in September during an exercise off the coast of Portugal.

Those investments, including

sophisticated surface ships, aircraft and drones along with continued technological advancement, point to NATO's efforts to revolutionize submarine warfare, Grabbe said.

They also are behind his confidence in the alliance's ability to maintain undersea superiority.

Military officials have repeatedly warned in recent years that Russian submarine activity in the High North is increasing.

In addition, the Baltic Sea has seen suspected sabotage events in recent years, such as the destruction of undersea communication cables.

Nardone noted that the Mediterranean has many of the same vulnerabilities to its infrastructure as the Baltic Sea, but with the added worry of exported terrorism.

# Pilot wounded in Maduro raid honored

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — A helicopter pilot wounded in the raid that captured then-Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro received the Medal of Honor during President Donald Trump's State of the Union address Tuesday evening.

Trump said Army Chief Warrant Officer 5 Eric Slover, who appeared using a walker, was the pilot of the lead CH-47 Chinook helicopter that descended on the "heavily protected military fortress" that held Maduro during a raid that, while successful, left seven U.S. service members with gunshot wounds and shrapnel-related injuries.

"While preparing to land, enemy machine guns fired from every angle, and Eric was hit very badly in the leg and hip, one bullet after another," Trump said, adding that Slover "absorbed four agonizing shots, shredding his leg into numerous

pieces."

Months of covert planning led to the brazen operation that plunged the South American country's capital into darkness as troops infiltrated Maduro's home and whisked him off to the United States to face drug trafficking charges.

Trump's description of Slover's actions that night offer a new, detailed glimpse into the military action that has been largely shrouded in secrecy since it was carried out in the early hours of Jan. 3.

As Slover prepared to land his helicopter, he was confronted with "two machine gunners who escaped the wrath of the previous planes," according to Trump.

"Eric maneuvered his helicopter with all of those lives and souls to face the enemy and let his gunners eliminate the threat," Trump said, "saving the lives of his fellow warriors from

what could have been a catastrophic crash deep in enemy territory."

The president said "the success of the entire mission and the lives of his fellow warriors hinged on Eric's ability to take searing pain."

Lt. Gen. Jonathan Braga, commander of Joint Special Operations Command, presented Slover with the Medal of Honor in the gallery overlooking the House chamber.

Slover was in his dress uniform and used the walker to steady himself. Trump said the soldier was still recovering from his wounds.

Trump also said 10 other service members who took part in the operation will be receiving medals at a private ceremony to be held at the White House.

In addition to Slover, Trump also presented the Medal of Honor to retired Capt. E. Royce Williams, a Navy pilot who shot

down multiple Soviet jets during the Korean War, upgrading his existing award of a Navy Cross.

Trump called the 100-year-old former fighter pilot "one of the last living legends."

Trump asked first lady Melania Trump to present Williams a Medal of Honor for his actions in a secret mission during the Korean War.

A military aide was seen bringing the esteemed award down the stairs of the House gallery where Melania Trump and Williams were sitting before she put it around his neck while a standing ovation took over the chamber.

"He didn't even want to tell his wife. But the legend grew and grew," Trump said about the clandestine mission. "But tonight, at 100 years old, this brave Navy captain is finally getting the recognition he deserves."

## Trump lauds hockey team, makes goals clear in speech

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump declared during a marathon State of the Union on Tuesday that "we're winning so much" — insisting he'd sparked an economic boom at home and imposed a new world order abroad in hopes it can counter his sliding approval ratings.

Trump's main objective was convincing increasingly wary Americans that the economy is stronger than many believe, and that they should vote for more of the same by backing Republicans during November's midterm elections. In all, Trump spoke for a record 108 minutes, breaking — by eight minutes — the previous time mark from his address before a joint session of Congress last

year.

The president largely avoided his usual bombast, only occasionally veering off-script — mostly to slam Democrats. As he did during such addresses in his first term, Trump relied on a series of surprise special guests to dramatically punctuate his message. They included U.S. military heroes and a former political prisoner released after U.S. forces toppled Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Trump drew some of the loudest applause of the night when he invited the Olympic gold medal-winning U.S. men's hockey team into the House chamber.

In a made-for-TV moment, the president announced he would be awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom,

America's highest civilian honor, to the hockey team's goaltender, Connor Hellebuyck. He also bestowed the Purple Heart on Andrew Wolfe — a National Guard member who was shot while deployed on the streets of the nation's capital. Wolfe made his first public appearance since then during the speech.

The president championed his immigration crackdowns and his push to preserve widespread tariffs that the Supreme Court just struck down. He drew applause only from Democrats while describing the high court's decision, which he called "an unfortunate ruling."

Trump vowed to plow ahead, using "alternative" laws to impose the taxes on imports and telling lawmakers, "Congressional action will not be neces-

sary." Trump argued that the tariffs are paid by foreign countries, despite evidence that the costs are borne by American consumers and businesses. "It's saving our country," he said.

The only Supreme Court justices attending were Chief Justice John Roberts, as well as Justices Brett Kavanaugh, Amy Coney Barrett and Elena Kagan.

The president, meanwhile, was mostly optimistic and patriotic, but Trump struck a darker tone in large swaths of his speech to warn about the dangers posed by immigrants. He invited lawmakers from both parties to "protect American citizens, not illegal aliens" and championed proposals to limit mail-in ballots and tighten voter identification rules.

# Marines keep M27, Army will adopt M7

By SETH ROBSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Marine Corps will keep the M27 automatic rifle as its standard service weapon rather than adopt the higher-caliber firearm being fielded by the Army, according to the amphibious force.

“The Marine Corps will retain the M27 for our close combat formations as it best aligns with our unique service requirements, amphibious doctrinal employment of weapons, and distinct modernization priorities,” the Corps said in a statement emailed Wednesday by spokesman Lt. Col. Eric Flanagan.

The M27 is a 5.56 mm rifle produced by Heckler & Koch that first saw combat use with Marines in Afghanistan in 2011. The

Corps adopted it as the standard service rifle for all infantry battalions in 2018.

The Army, by contrast, is adopting the M7 rifle and M250 machine gun made by SIG Sauer to replace the M4 rifle and M249 machine gun.

The Army M7 production contract gave other customers — the Marine Corps included — an option to adopt the new rifle, Army Col. Scott Madore, project manager for soldier lethality, told reporters in April 2022.

The Marine Corps will monitor the Army’s progress with the M7, according to Flanagan’s email.

The Army’s new weapons fire a 6.8-mm round and are designed to provide increased lethality, longer range and advanced optics

that service officials say will reshape small-unit tactics.

On Jan. 30, the Army released photos showing members of a marksmanship unit training 25th Infantry Division soldiers in Hawaii on newly fielded M7 rifles.

“We’re not here to reinvent the wheel,” Sgt. 1st Class Alexander Deal, a member of the marksmanship unit, said in a news release accompanying the photos.

“The fundamentals of marksmanship don’t change, even when the weapon system does.”

Australia-based defense researcher Allan Orr said the Marines’ decision represents a significant rebuke of the Army’s approach. The Marines’ most likely adversaries in a potential future conflict would be Chinese forces

operating in dense urban and jungle terrain across Asia, he said Wednesday.

In those environments, lessons from the Vietnam War still apply, Orr said, adding that “fire-volume is more important than firepower.” Maintaining common ammunition with allied forces is also critical, particularly in Southeast Asia, where partners would be needed to offset China’s numerical advantage, he said.

The issue of diverging cartridge sizes between U.S. services can’t be overstated, he said.

“This announcement (by the Marines) is a massive dis-endorsement of what Army is doing with its small-arms programs and a line drawn now in the Pacific sands,” he said.

## Pentagon warns AI firm to allow unrestricted use

*Bloomberg News*

The Pentagon threatened to invoke a Cold War-era law to compel Anthropic PBC to allow the U.S. military to use the artificial intelligence startup’s technology if the company failed to comply with the government’s terms by Friday, according to people familiar with the matter.

During a meeting Tuesday between Chief Executive Officer Dario Amodei and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, U.S. officials laid out a series of consequences, including threats to declare Anthropic a supply-chain risk and invoke the Defense Production Act to use the AI software anyway, even if the company didn’t agree, the people said.

The ultimatum marks an escalation in a growing dispute between the Defense Department and the AI startup over the company’s insistence on guardrails for use of its Claude AI tool that the military sees as unnecessary. If carried out, the

Pentagon’s threat would put at risk up to \$200 million in work that Anthropic had agreed to do for the military.

In the meeting, according to one of the people, Amodei laid out Anthropic’s conditions: that the U.S. military refrain from using its products to autonomously target enemy combatants or conduct mass surveillance of U.S. citizens. The person said Amodei emphasized that these scenarios have yet to arise during operations in the field.

“We continued good-faith conversations about our usage policy to ensure Anthropic can continue to support the government’s national security mission in line with what our models can reliably and responsibly do,” Anthropic said in a statement following the meeting.

The people who described the discussions did so on condition of anonymity owing to their confidential nature. Axios reported earlier on the meeting’s outcome.

## Hegseth is appealing order blocking Kelly punishment

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth is appealing a judge’s order that blocks him from punishing Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly, a former Navy pilot, for participating in a video that called on troops to resist unlawful orders, according to a court filing.

Justice Department officials filed a notice that they will ask the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to review the Feb. 12 ruling by U.S. District Judge Richard Leon.

“These guys don’t know when to quit,” Kelly wrote on his X account.

Hegseth had vowed to immediately appeal Leon’s decision. “Sedition is sedition, ‘Captain,’” he posted on his X account, referring to Kelly by his rank at retirement.

In November, Kelly and five other Democratic lawmakers appeared on a video in which they urged troops to uphold the Constitution and not to follow unlawful military directives from the Trump administration. Republican President Donald Trump ac-

cused the lawmakers of sedition “punishable by DEATH” days later.

Earlier this month, a Washington grand jury declined to indict the lawmakers over the video.

Kelly sued in federal court to block his Jan. 5 censure from Hegseth. Leon’s order prohibits the Pentagon from implementing or enforcing Kelly’s punishment while his lawsuit is pending.

Leon ruled that Pentagon officials not only violated Kelly’s First Amendment free speech rights, but they also “threatened the constitutional liberties of millions of military retirees.” The judge invoked an old-fashioned rebuke — “Horsefeathers!” — in response to the government’s claim that Kelly is trying to exempt himself from the rules of military justice.

“To say the least, our retired veterans deserve more respect from their Government, and our Constitution demands they receive it!” wrote Leon, who was nominated to the bench by Republican President George W. Bush.

# House rejects aircraft locator system bill

*Associated Press*

The House failed to approve a bill Tuesday that was crafted after last year's midair collision near Washington, D.C., to require all aircraft flying around busy airports to have key locator systems to prevent such crashes. The collision of an airliner and an Army helicopter killed 67 people in January 2025.

The National Transportation Safety Board has been recommending such Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast systems to be installed since 2008. The bill that already passed the Senate would have required aircraft to be equipped with a system that can receive data about the locations of other aircraft. The complementary ADS-B Out system that broadcasts an aircraft's location is al-

ready required.

The families of the victims who died when an American Airlines jet collided with an Army Black Hawk helicopter strongly supported the measure, and a number of them watched the vote from the House gallery. But the Airlines for American trade group, the military and the major general aviation groups that represent business jets and small plane owners backed a competing and more comprehensive House bill that was just introduced last week.

Tim Lilley, whose son Sam was the first officer on the airliner, said he's really disappointed, but he and the other families will continue to press for meaningful reforms. And he hopes that will happen before the next tragedy.

"We're going to end up back here having the same conversation because of another midair (collision) is what's going to happen. Hopefully — fingers crossed — that doesn't," Lilley said.

Under the special process that was used to fast-track the bill, the ROTOR Act needed to receive more than two-thirds support to pass the House. It received 264 votes, but 133 other representatives voted against it. ROTOR stands for "Rotorcraft Operations Transparency and Oversight Reform."

House Speaker Mike Johnson told The Associated Press that the Senate and the House will work together to get an aviation safety bill done.

And House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Chairman Sam Graves said the

House bill could be marked up in committee as soon as next week. That bill is designed to address all 50 of the recommendations the NTSB made, not just the locator technology, but NTSB Chairwoman Jennifer Homendy has said the House bill falls short of accomplishing that.

The cost of the ADS-B In mandate has been a concern. It's not clear exactly how much it would cost partly because the systems haven't yet been designed and certified for every aircraft, but Homendy testified in Congress that American Airlines was able to equip more than 300 of its Airbus a321s for \$50,000 apiece, and general aviation pilots have the option of using a portable receiver that costs about \$400 and works with an iPad.

## Storm piles on additional snow across Northeast

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — Light snow moved through parts of the Northeast on Wednesday as people heading to work and school were trying to navigate their way out of a massive storm that dropped piles of powder on streets and sidewalks from Maryland to Maine.

One to 3 more inches of snow was expected — a far cry from the last storm — but any snow that melted likely froze overnight, resulting in patchy black ice to make for some slippery roads, the National Weather Service said.

The gigantic snowstorm this week left cities scrambling to clear towering heaps that were not showing signs of melting anytime soon.

By Tuesday evening, New York City had spread 143 million pounds of salt, according to Mayor Zohran Mamdani, and signed up at least 3,500 people

as emergency shovelers for \$30 an hour.

But there was plenty more work left to do, especially for the many people with disabilities.

Jeff Peters, spokesperson for the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York, described parts of the city as impassable islands.

Monday's storm blanketed the region with snow, canceled flights, disrupted transit, downed power lines and killed at least one person. More than 3 feet fell in Rhode Island — surpassing snow totals from the historic Blizzard of 1978 that struck the Northeast, the weather service said.

Power had returned for many of the hundreds of thousands who had lost electricity in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Delaware and Rhode Island. But nearly 160,000 customers in Massachusetts were still without power early Wednesday.

## Commissioner: 'Criminal' to pelt cops with snowballs

*New York Daily News*

NEW YORK — NYPD Commissioner Jessica Tisch has launched an investigation into a caught-on-camera clash where a rowdy crowd pelted a group of uniformed cops with snowballs in Manhattan's Washington Square Park.

"The NYPD is aware of certain videos taken earlier today in Washington Square Park showing individuals attacking cops," Tisch wrote on X late Monday. "I want to be very clear: The behavior depicted is disgraceful, and it is criminal."

"Our detectives are investigating this matter," she added.

Mayor Zohran Mamdani last month told school children they could throw snowballs at him for enacting mandatory remote learning on a snow day.

He took a lighter tone that Tisch when talking about the Washington Square Park incident.

"I've seen the videos of kids throwing snowballs at NYPD officers," Mamdani posted on social media. "Officers, like all city workers, have been out in a historic blizzard, keeping New Yorkers safe and cars moving."

"Treat them with respect," he added. "If anyone's catching a snowball, it's me."

Cops were responding to 911 calls of a large disorderly crowd throwing snowballs from the top of the park's bathroom and jumping off the roof about 4:15 p.m. Monday, a police spokesman said.

When cops arrived at the scene, they saw 50 people, mostly teenagers and college-age men, engaged in the heated snowball fight and called for backup. That's when "multiple uniformed officers were struck in the head at close range with snowballs, causing injuries to the head, face, and neck area," an NYPD spokesman said.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Mr. Clean polishes off 68 years as mascot**

**OH** CINCINNATI — Mr. Clean appears to be calling it quits.

The retirement of the bald, animated mascot used in Mr. Clean ads and on products since 1958 was announced in a social media ad posted last Thursday.

That ad features Mr. Clean standing behind a podium with a “breaking news” chyron flashing across the screen.

“After a career with zero stains on the record, he’s ready for new adventures,” the narrator says.

That voice assures consumers the company bearing his name will continue to operate, then asks “What’s next for Mr. Clean?”

Among those wishing the smiling character well on Instagram were the social media teams behind Old Spice grooming products and Brawny paper towels.

“We’ll miss you, legend!” wrote the team at Old Spice.

A separate social media post from Mr. Clean the character seemed to reinforce the notion fans could see him again down the road.

“If you’re reading this, the rumors are true,” that announcement said. “I’m saying goodbye to the world of cleaning in pursuit of new hobbies.”

**Meatballs recall cites metal contamination**

**DC** WASHINGTON — If you have a bag of frozen meatballs tucked away for an easy weeknight dinner, federal officials say it’s time to check the label.

Nearly 9,500 pounds of ready-to-eat frozen, Italian-style meatballs have been recalled nationwide after a consumer reported finding metal fragments inside the product, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety and Inspection Service.

The recall involves 32-ounce bags labeled “Bremer Family Size Italian Style Meatballs,” produced July 30, 2025. The packages carry a “Best By” date of Oct. 30, 2026, timestamps between 17:08 and 18:20, and the establishment number “EST. 4286B” inside the USDA inspection mark.

**FDA to crack down on some weight-loss drugs**

**MD** BALTIMORE — Popular weight-loss drugs, including Ozempic, Wegovy, Trulicity and Mounjaro, produced by independent pharmacy labs, sickened some 8,000 or more Marylanders a year by 2024. The Food and Drug Administration announced this month that it will crack down on compounded versions of GLP-1 drugs, including the popular Hims and Hers brand.

The FDA made the right call, Dr. Rozalina McCoy, a practicing adult endocrinologist and researcher at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, told The Baltimore Sun. These compounded drugs complicate her efforts to treat patients for diabetes and obesity.

“Compounded products are not the same thing as FDA-approved medicines. It’s not a generic version,” McCoy said. “What compounding pharmacies do is try to make that med-

icine in their own lab.”

As many as 12% of Americans are taking some form of glucagon-based drugs, according to a Rand news report. In 2025, the Maryland Poison Center reported a 1500% increase in calls related to compounded GLP-1 medications since 2020.

**Ranger gets probation in stabbing hoax**

**CO** DENVER — The Colorado park ranger accused of stabbing himself in a hoax that sparked a large-scale manhunt at Staunton State Park last August took a deal and pleaded guilty Monday.

Callum Heskett pleaded guilty to attempting to influence a public servant, a felony, and false reporting of an emergency, a misdemeanor, according to a news release from the First Judicial District Attorney’s Office. The plea deal dropped additional charges, according to Jefferson County court records.

Heskett was sentenced to three years of supervised probation and ordered to pay more than \$16,000 in restitution.

His misdemeanor conviction is permanent, but he was granted a deferred sentence on his felony charge, court records show. If he fulfills the terms of his probation, that charge will be removed from his record.

**No pollutants found in river after pipe break**

**CA** SACRAMENTO — Yuba Water Agency and state officials reported encouraging water-quality test results following the large pipe rupture at the New Colgate Powerhouse in Yuba County.

In a Friday news release, the agency said samples collected downstream in the Yuba River and at Englebright Lake showed no “concerning results.”

“We’re encouraged by these initial results, which suggest that any oil that washed into the river is likely limited to oily debris on the surface,” said Yuba Water General Manager Willie Whittlesey. “However, monitoring is ongoing as part of our continued response.”

The rupture occurred Feb. 13, as the agency was wrapping up a major tunnel and penstock upgrade at its New Colgate Powerhouse, a project that had been underway since fall, unleashing a torrent of water, mud and debris down the river and injuring one worker.

**City’s newest snowplow named ‘Abolish ICE’**

**IL** CHICAGO — Chicago’s newest name for a snowplow will be “Abolish ICE,” Mayor Brandon Johnson said Monday.

Johnson announced the name as the winner of a citywide contest. He had earlier given it a “full and complete” endorsement.

Other winning names include Stephen Coldbert, Pope Frío XIV, The Blizzard of Oz, Sven-coolie and Caleb Chilliams.

But the dig at President Donald Trump’s ramped-up deportation efforts became the runaway favorite as the contest progressed. The name was submitted 9,200 times, making up around 70% of all submitted names, according to Block Club Chicago.

— From wire reports

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# Boozer, No. 1 Duke overpower Notre Dame

Associated Press

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Cameron Boozer had 24 points and 13 rebounds as No. 1 Duke beat Notre Dame 100-56 on Tuesday night, handing the Fighting Irish their worst home loss since 1898.

The Blue Devils (26-2, 14-1 Atlantic Coast Conference), playing their first game this season as No. 1, coming off a win over then-No. 1 Michigan on Saturday, ended Notre Dame's streak of six home wins against AP No. 1-ranked teams, starting with UCLA in 1974, when the Irish ended the Bruins' record 88-game winning streak.

The 6-foot-9 Boozer, a national Player of the Year candidate, overpowered Notre Dame, scoring 20 points and grabbing nine rebounds in the first half as Duke rolled to a 54-22 halftime lead. He hit 10 of 12 shots in the first half.

Darren Harris scored 16 points for the Blue Devils and Patrick Ngongba II and Caleb Foster scored 13 points each.

Cole Certa and Brady Koehler scored 14 points each for the Fighting Irish.

**No. 2 Arizona 87, Baylor 80:** Jaden Bradley scored 25 points, Brayden Burries had 24 and the visiting Wildcats outlasted the Bears, giving Arizona a two-game lead in the Big 12 standings with three to play in the regular season.

The Wildcats erased a 10-point deficit early in the second half, then had to withstand a back-and-forth finish. There was a 13½-minute stretch in which the margin never was more than two points and the lead changed hands 13 times.

The remaining four contenders for the Big 12 regular-season title all have 11-4 conference records: No. 4 Iowa State, No. 5 Houston, No. 14 Kansas and No. 16 Texas Tech.

**No. 3 Michigan 77, Minnesota 67:** Elliot Cadeau had 15 points and L.J. Cason scored 11 of his 14 points in the second half as the host Wolverines beat the

Gophers to clinch at least a share of the Big Ten title for the first time in five years.

Michigan (26-2, 16-1) can earn an outright championship with a win at No. 10 Illinois on Friday night or next week at Iowa or at home against 15th-ranked Michigan State.

Minnesota's Cade Tyson scored 20 points, Langston Reynolds had 15 points and Isaac Asuma and Bobby Durkin scored 12 apiece.

**No. 4 Iowa State 75, Utah 59:** Joshua Jefferson scored 21 points, Milan Momcilovic made four 3-pointers to break the Cyclones record for 3s in a season, and visiting Iowa State beat the Utes.

Jefferson recorded his 34th consecutive game in double figures.

Making their first visit to Salt Lake City, the Cyclones (24-4, 11-4 Big 12) held Utah without a field goal — seven straight misses — over a stretch of 9:14 in the second half to turn a five-point lead into a 17-point advantage.

**No. 11 Virginia 90, N.C. State 61:** Thijs De Ridder scored 19 points lead five Cavaliers in double figures as host Virginia beat the Wolfpack, cruising in their final tuneup before Saturday's showdown at No. 1 Duke.

The Cavs (25-3, 13-2 Atlantic Coast Conference) never trailed as they won their ninth straight. There was cause for concern, however, when De Ridder limped off the floor and headed to the locker room with about five minutes remaining.

Paul McNeil Jr. had 22 points and six rebounds for N.C. State (19-9, 10-5). Darrion Williams added 14 points and Ven-Allen Lubin scored 11.

**No. 16 Texas Tech 80, Cincinnati 68:** Christian Anderson had 31 points and a career-high 11 rebounds, leading the host Red Raiders over the Bearcats for a second consecutive victory since star forward JT Toppin's season-ending knee injury.

Anderson's eighth double-

double of the season — and his two-year career — was his first with rebounds and filled the void Texas Tech (21-7, 11-4 Big 12) is facing without Toppin, one of the nation's double-double leaders.

Moustapha Thiam had 21 points and 10 rebounds for Cincinnati (15-13, 7-8), which had a four-game winning streak — tied for its season best — stopped three days after an upset victory at Kansas that dropped the Jayhawks six spots to 14th in the AP Top 25.

**UCF 97, No. 19 BYU 84:** Thomas Fulks had 24 points and 11 assists, Jordan Burks also scored 24 and the visiting Knights shot 14-for-24 from 3-point range to run away from the Cougars for an upset.

Jamichael Stillwell added 12 points, 12 rebounds and six assists as UCF (20-7, 9-6 Big 12) earned its first victory over BYU (20-8, 8-7) by outscoring it 44-34 in the paint and shooting 56% from the field — including 58% on 3s.

AJ Dybantsa led the Cougars with 29 points and eight rebounds. Robert Wright III had 20 points on 7-of-21 shooting, and Aleksej Kostic scored 14 off the bench.

**No. 21 Miami (Ohio) 74, Eastern Michigan 64:** Brant Byers scored 16 points and Antwone Woolfolk added 14 as the visiting RedHawks remained the only undefeated team in Division I men's basketball.

Peter Suder had 13 points and 10 rebounds for Miami (28-0, 15-0 Mid-American Conference), which extended the best start in program history and added to its school record for wins in a season. The RedHawks also boast the best start and longest win streak in MAC annals.

**Missouri 73, No. 22 Tennessee 69:** T.O. Barrett scored a career-best 28 points and Mark Mitchell added 23 to help the host Tigers beat the Volunteers. Tennessee outrebounded

Missouri 42-30, but scored just 20 second-chance points despite grabbing 18 offensive boards. It was the sixth time a ranked Vols team lost to an unranked opponent this season.

**Dayton 77, No. 23 Saint Louis 62:** Amael L'Etang scored a career-high 26 points and Javon Bennett added 17 as the host Flyers beat the Billikens.

After trailing by as many as 25 points in the first half, Saint Louis (25-3, 13-2) got within 11 late in the second half, but couldn't complete the comeback.

**UCLA 81, USC 62:** Donovan Dent scored 19 of his season-high 30 points in the first half, and the host Bruins defeated the Trojans in a meeting of cross-town rivals trying to stay off the NCAA Tournament bubble.

USC's Tournament hopes had already taken a major hit with a 71-70 home loss to Oregon, next-to-last in the Big Ten. At least the Trojans are assured of making the league tournament, which is allowing all 18 teams to participate after limiting it to 15 previously.

**Miami 83, Florida State 73:** Malik Reneau scored 23 points and grabbed 12 rebounds, Tre Donaldson had 21 points, six assists, and six rebounds, and the visiting Hurricanes held on late to defeat the Seminoles.

Miami (22-6, 11-4 Atlantic Coast Conference) led by 11 points with 3:16 remaining in regulation, but FSU cut the deficit to four points down the stretch. The Hurricanes ended the game on an 8-2 run to prevent the comeback.

**Kentucky 72, South Carolina 63:** Denzel Aberdeen scored 19 points, Mouhamed Dioubate had 12 points and a key block down the stretch, and the visiting Wildcats ended a three-game skid.

Kentucky (18-10, 9-6 SEC) secured its first win at the Gamecocks' home stadium since the 2021-22 season.

# Magic get late win against slumping Lakers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Wendell Carter Jr. made a go-ahead put-back with 6.7 seconds to play, Paolo Banchero scored 36 points and the Orlando Magic finished a strong West Coast trip with a 110-109 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers on Tuesday night.

Orlando rallied from an early double-digit deficit to take a five-point lead with 5½ minutes left, but Rui Hachimura hit a tiebreaking 3-pointer with 2:14 to play for Los Angeles. Desmond Bane drilled a go-ahead 3 with 34.6 seconds left, but Luka Doncic found LeBron James under the basket for a dunk to reclaim the lead.

After Carter scored on the Magic's second offensive rebound of their final possession, Doncic belatedly got the ball to James, whose desperation shot didn't go.

"I know I was open, but I just thought I was a little bit far," Doncic said. "Tried to take one dribble to get a little closer. Probably shouldn't have picked up the ball, just tried to attack."

Bane scored 22 points and Carter had 20 points and 12 rebounds for Orlando, which has won six of eight overall after taking three of four on the road out of the break. That surge — capped by their fourth consecutive win over the Lakers — has moved the Magic within a half-game of sixth place in the Eastern Conference.

LA finished 4-4 on a disappointing homestand spanning the All-Star break. The Lakers have lost four of six and fallen into sixth place in the West, repeatedly failing to beat playoff-caliber teams.

**Cavaliers 109, Knicks 94:** Donovan Mitchell scored 23 points, James Harden added 20 and host Cleveland pulled away in the second half for a win over New York.

Jarrett Allen had 19 points and 10 rebounds as the Cavaliers won for the eighth time in nine games.

Jalen Brunson had 20 points and Mikal Bridges scored 18 for the Knicks. Mitchell Robinson pulled down 15 rebounds, one off a season high.

Cleveland and New York are both 37-22 and tied for third place in the Eastern Conference. The Knicks would have the head-to-head tiebreaker edge if the teams are tied at the end of the season after taking two of three meetings.

**76ers 135, Pacers 114:** Joel Embiid had 27 points in his return to the lineup after missing five games with right shin soreness and right knee injury management, Tyrese Maxey scored 32 points and visiting Philadelphia beat Indiana.

Embiid scored 20 points in the first half, sinking 11 of 17 shots in 26 minutes. VJ Edgecombe chipped in with 23 points on 9-for-13 shooting for the 76ers, who shot 58%.

Andrew Nembhard and Micah Potter each scored 23 for the Pacers, with Potter's total a career high. Quenton Jackson had 15 points and rookie Kam Jones added a career-high 13 points.

Indiana leading scorer Pascal Siakam was out with a left wrist sprain. The Pacers were also without Aaron Nesmith, who missed his third consecutive game with right ankle sprain.

**Mavericks 123, Nets 114:** Marvin Bagley III scored 22 points, Naji Marshall had 21 and visiting Dallas beat Brooklyn after both teams arrived in New York earlier in the day.

Both clubs played road games Sunday and neither was able to fly into the New York area because of a blizzard. The Mavericks stayed in Indiana and the Nets remained in Atlanta. Both flew Tuesday and arrived in the early afternoon.

Brandon Williams had 19 points and 10 assists, while Klay Thompson added 17 points for Dallas, which shot 58.5% from the field while playing its fourth consecutive game without No. 1

pick Cooper Flagg because of a sprained left foot.

**Thunder 116, Raptors 107:** Cason Wallace matched his career high with 27 points, Isaiah Joe had 22 and short-handed Oklahoma City beat host Toronto for its fifth win in six games.

Alex Caruso scored 16 points, Luguentz Dort had 15 and Isaiah Hartenstein 11 as the NBA-leading Thunder won their third straight at Scotiabank Arena.

Canadian star and reigning NBA MVP Shai Gilgeous-Alexander remained sidelined for OKC because of an abdominal strain. He didn't travel with the team on its lone regular-season visit to Canada.

**Hawks 119 Wizards 98:** Jonathan Kuminga scored a season-high 27 points in his debut for host Atlanta, which blew by Washington in Trae Young's return to State Farm Arena.

Acquired by the Hawks at the trade deadline after falling out of favor in Golden State, Kuminga came off the bench to make a huge impact for his new team.

Young was the focus at the beginning of the night. The long-time Atlanta star was dealt to the Wizards in early January, ending an eight-year tenure. The point guard has yet to play for his new team, which seems mainly concerned with landing a high draft pick for next season as he recovers from knee and quadriceps injuries.

**Hornets 131, Bulls 99:** Brandon Miller scored 23 points, Kon Knueppel added 21 and hot-shooting Charlotte won a team record eighth straight road game, routing Chicago.

The Hornets shot 51.6% from the field and were on-target from beyond the arc, sinking 25 of 57 3-points attempts, one shy of the team record.

Matas Buzelis scored a career-high 32 points for the Bulls, who were hurt by turnovers with 19 in this one. Patrick Williams and Guerschon Yabusele each had 11 points.

**Pelicans 113, Warriors 109:** Zion Williamson scored 26 points, Dejounte Murray added 13 in his first game in nearly 13 months and host New Orleans beat injury-depleted Golden State.

Saddiq Bey scored 18 points, including a reverse layup he spun off the glass while being fouled to give the Pelicans a 107-101 lead with 1:47 left. Former Warriors guard Jordan Poole added 12 points for New Orleans, which won its second straight and posted its fourth victory in six games.

Moses Moody scored 24 for Golden State, which has lost three of four while taking the court missing several key players. De'Anthony Melton scored a season-high 28 points, but missed a free throw with 1:23 left and his team trailing by just four points.

**Bucks 128, Heat 117:** Kevin Porter Jr. matched his season high with 32 points and Bobby Portis and Ryan Rollins scored 21 apiece as host Milwaukee beat Miami for its fourth win in five games.

Kyle Kuzma added 19 points and Ousmane Dieng 11 for the Bucks.

**Celtics 97, Suns 81:** Derrick White scored 22 points, Neemias Queta had 14 points and 13 rebounds, and visiting Boston used a big third quarter to beat Phoenix.

Sam Hauser shot 6-for-14, including 4-for-10 from 3-point range, to add 16 points and the Celtics — playing without All-Star Jaylen Brown (right knee contusion) — won their fourth in a row and for the ninth time in their last 10 games.

**Timberwolves 124, Trail Blazers 121:** Anthony Edwards scored 34 points and made five 3-pointers to help visiting Minnesota hold off Portland, its fourth win in its last five games.

Jaden McDaniels added 27 points, six rebounds, three assists, two steals and five blocks for the Timberwolves.

# Raiders' ideal QB sounds like Mendoza

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Las Vegas Raiders general manager John Spytek never uttered the name Fernando Mendoza while speaking at the NFL's annual scouting combine Tuesday.

He didn't need to.

As Spytek ran through the list of traits he needs in a franchise quarterback — humility, selflessness, a relentless student of the game, capable of setting the tone in the locker room — it seemed he was using the same words and phrases so often used to describe Mendoza by his college teammates during last season's Heisman Trophy campaign.

And for the team holding the No. 1 pick in April's NFL draft, selecting Mendoza only seems natural.

"You've got to be willing to play through, you know, tough circumstances and to me, it always goes back to the love of the game. The guys that truly love football, they love to practice, they love to prepare, they love to watch film, they love to play hurt, so I think those

things are kind of uncompromising," Spytek said.

Mendoza showed all that and more in his only season at Indiana. He demonstrated his moxie with an incredible last-minute throw to beat Penn State, missed only one play of the Big Ten championship game after getting injured on his first throw and twisted his way into the end zone for the decisive score in the national championship game at Miami.

Las Vegas could certainly use some of that magic after using 10 different starting quarterbacks over the past four seasons. The Raiders haven't had a clear-cut franchise quarterback since Derek Carr was released in February 2023.

Geno Smith was supposed to fill the void after being acquired in a trade last offseason, but a 10-game losing streak sent Vegas spiraling to a 3-14 mark, putting Smith's future with the franchise in peril.

Now, the Raiders are looking for a fresh start.

Las Vegas fired coach Pete

Carroll and replaced him with Klint Kubiak, the offensive coordinator for Super Bowl champion Seattle, and now has a chance to find the perfect pairing for running back Ashton Jeanty, last year's first-round pick.

"I think you want to limit the amount of pressure you have on that guy from the start," Spytek said. "I'm not necessarily in favor of running him out there right away, either. So, you know, having another quality player that can play the quarterback position could help. You have a young quarterback, you want to have a great offensive line, a run game, all the things that can like really limit his chances to have him really get killed — and a great defense, too."

The Raiders believe the centerpiece of their defense will continue to be Pro Bowl defensive end Maxx Crosby, who has been the subject of trade speculation this offseason. Spytek said Tuesday that he speaks routinely with Crosby as he rehabs at team headquarters, and that he expects

Crosby to be in a Vegas uniform next fall.

But will he be joined by Mendoza, who led what had been the longest program in FBS history to Indiana's first national championship in a season filled with highlights?

While Spytek said he will listen to trade offers and won't put need ahead of value, it sure seems like Mendoza would be the perfect match for the Raiders — right down to Mendoza's Boston roots and his embrace of Vegas co-owner Tom Brady, who played in both New England and Florida, where Mendoza attended high school.

"I think whoever is playing quarterback for the Raiders has a unique opportunity to learn from the best," Spytek said. "You know, Tom's got a lot of humility to him, and just because he did it a certain way, he doesn't have expectations that you do it that way, too. But there are some things he's uncompromising on, and I think that whoever the quarterback is for the Raiders, I think Tom is a great resource."

## Pirates top prospect Griffin shows off power with 2 homers

Associated Press

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Konnor Griffin, the Pittsburgh Pirates' latest can't-miss prospect, didn't miss against the Boston Red Sox and newcomer Ranger Suarez on Tuesday. The 19-year-old shortstop, considered the top prospect in baseball, hit a pair of homers in Pittsburgh's 16-7 Grapefruit League win over Boston.

Griffin took a pitch from Suarez, who signed a five-year, \$130-million deal with the Red Sox in January after two standout seasons in Philadelphia, over the left-field wall for a two-run homer in the second inning. Griffin did it again two innings later, turning on a two-strike pitch from Seth Martinez and sending it 440 feet.

"Got some good swings off, so kind of smoked them," Griffin

told reporters afterward.

The 6-foot-4 Griffin, who sprinted through the lower levels of the Pirates' farm system last season, began the day searching for his first hit of the spring and ended it with four RBIs and a pair of swings that offered a flash of his potential. Griffin acknowledged that having success against two proven major league pitchers — Suarez was an All-Star in 2024 and Martinez has appeared in over 100 games over the last five seasons — was "special" but added he was trying to stay in the moment and not get caught up in who he was facing.

"I stepped in the box and I was ready to compete," he said. "I wasn't worrying about who was on the mound. I was just worrying about what his stuff was and how I

could have the best approach."

Griffin has tried to keep his head down while the buzz around him has built, just as reigning National League Cy Young winner Paul Skenes did during his first spring training with Pittsburgh two years ago. Skenes began the 2024 season in the minors before making his big league debut in May.

There's a chance Griffin might not have to wait even that long. The left side of the Pirates' infield is a question mark. Jared Triolo is an excellent defender who can play either third or short and Nick Gonzales is also in the mix. Neither, however, has the potential at the plate that Griffin offers.

"He's definitely going to hit," Pittsburgh pitcher Carmen Mlodzinski told reporters.

"There's not a whole lot of swings you see like that, especially from a teenager. The best way to say it is his swing stays in the zone forever."

Suarez, who allowed two runs on three hits with a pair of strikeouts in 1½ innings, tipped his cap to the young player who was all of 12 when Suarez made his major league debut with the Phillies in 2018.

"When you're the top prospect in the game, people expect that from you," Suarez said through an interpreter. "He did that today, and I wasn't surprised."

Suarez said he felt good about his performance overall as he begins to ramp up his workload ahead of the World Baseball Classic, where he will pitch for his native Venezuela.