

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Senate opens Trump impeachment trial

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate opened the impeachment trial of President Donald Trump with quiet ceremony Thursday — senators standing at their desks to swear an oath of “impartial justice” as jurors, House prosecutors formally reciting the charges and Chief Justice John Roberts presiding.

The trial, only the third such undertaking in American history, is unfolding at the start of the election year, a time of deep political division in the nation. Four of the senators sitting in judgment on Trump are running for the Democratic Party’s nomination to challenge him in the fall.

“Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye!” intoned the Senate’s sergeant at arms, calling the proceedings to order just past noon.

Senators filled the chamber, an unusual sight in itself, sitting silently under strict rules that prohibit talking or cellphones, for a trial that will test not only Trump’s presidency but also the nation’s three branches of power and its system of checks and balances.

The Constitution mandates the chief justice serve as the presiding officer, and Rob-

erts made the short trip across the street from the Supreme Court to the Capitol. He has long insisted judges are not politicians and is expected to serve as a referee for the proceedings. Senators rose quickly when he appeared in his plain black robe.

“Will all senators now stand, and remain standing, and raise their right hand,” Roberts said.

“Do you solemnly swear that in all things appertaining to the trial of the impeachment of Donald John Trump, president of the United States, now pending, you will do impartial justice according to the Constitution and laws, so help you God?”

The senators responded they would, and then they lined up to sign an oath book.

Trump faces two charges after the House voted to impeach him last month. One, that he abused his presidential power by pressuring Ukraine to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden, using military aid to the country as leverage. Trump is also charged with obstructing Congress’ ensuing probe.

The president insists he did nothing wrong, and he dismissed the trial anew on Thursday at the White House: “It’s totally

partisan. It’s a hoax.”

Eventual acquittal is expected in the Republican-controlled Senate. However, new revelations are mounting about Trump’s actions toward Ukraine.

The Government Accountability Office said Thursday that the White House violated federal law in withholding the security assistance to Ukraine, which shares a border with hostile Russia.

At the same time, an indicted associate of Trump’s personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, Lev Parnas, has turned over to prosecutors new documents linking the president to the shadow foreign policy being run by Giuliani.

The developments applied fresh pressure to senators to call more witnesses for the trial, a main source of contention that is still to be resolved. The White House has instructed officials not to comply with subpoenas from Congress requesting witnesses or other information.

The Senate will issue a formal summons to the White House to appear, with the president’s legal team expected to respond by Saturday. Opening arguments will begin on Tuesday.

## ISIS’ ‘very own Jabba the Hutt’ is captured in Iraq

Stars and Stripes

IRBIL, Iraq — An Iraqi SWAT team this week captured a high-ranking Islamic State official whose pictures show crammed into the bed of a police pickup truck after his arrest in Mosul.

The arrest of ISIS mufti Shifa al-Nima, also known as Abu Abdul Bari, was announced by the Iraqi government’s security media cell in a statement Thursday.

Bari, a preacher known for “provocative speeches against the security forces” is considered one of the top leaders of “ISIS gangs,” the statement said.

Considered by ISIS to be an authority in Quranic law, Bari

issued religious rulings, or fatwas, ordering the execution of scholars and clerics who refused to pledge allegiance to the terrorist group when it occupied Mosul, the statement said. He also ordered the July 2014 destruction of a mosque built at the site believed to be the burial place of the biblical prophet Jonah, who once had a notable encounter with a whale.

The mosque was one of several cultural sites the extremist group destroyed as it swept across Syria

and Iraq, claiming large swaths of territory for its self-styled caliphate. The group has been ousted from all the territory it once held but remains an

insurgent threat in the region.

Memes including “He puts the fat in fatwa” spread on social media after photos were posted of Bari seated on cushions inside his apparent hideout in one image and loaded into the back of a pickup truck in another.

The images of his arrest would strike a psychological blow against ISIS, Maajid Nawaz, founder of the London-based counter-extremist organization Quilliam, wrote on Facebook.

“Gluttony is frowned upon by jihadists. But also, ISIS branded themselves as fighters possessing rare courage & discipline ... meanwhile this walrus was their top religious

cleric,” he said.

Macer Gifford, a British anti-ISIS activist who fought with a U.S.-backed Kurdish militia in Syria, applauded the arrest in a Twitter post.

“I’m delighted to say that the Islamic State’s very own Jabba the [Hutt] has been captured,” he wrote, comparing the cleric to the slug-like gang lord of the Star Wars universe who lived on the desert planet Tatooine. “Good luck hanging him in Iraq.”

Iraqi officials did not immediately respond to inquiries about the raid, which occurred as U.S.-led coalition forces reportedly resumed their support for government anti-ISIS operations.

# Naval officer relieved of destroyer command

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The commander of a San Diego-based, guided-missile destroyer has been fired, the Navy announced Thursday without citing a reason why the officer was removed.

Cmdr. Bob Bowen was relieved of command of the USS Decatur by Capt. Dan Cobian, the commander of Destroyer Squadron 21, who lost “confidence in his ability to command,” according to a Navy statement. Bowen had commanded the ship since April 2018, leading it through a deployment largely in the Pacific that concluded in April 2019.

Navy officials on Thursday declined to provide additional details about Bowen’s

firing, but one official said it came several weeks after an investigation was completed.

The official did not detail the nature of that probe but said it included no criminal allegations.

Bowen will be assigned temporarily to a job in San Diego, according to the statement announcing his firing.

Cmdr. Jerry Jackson, a former commander of the destroyer USS Sampson, will temporarily command the Decatur until its executive officer, Cmdr. Derek Rader, takes command at a later date, the Navy said.

The recent deployment of the Decatur saw the ship participate in several multinational exercises. In October 2018, the Decatur helped rescue a crew of seven

fishermen stranded off the coast of Sri Lanka in an inoperable boat. A few weeks earlier, the Decatur was in the news after it nearly collided with a Chinese destroyer in the South China Sea.

In that incident, the Chinese destroyer, the Luyang, aggressively approached the Decatur and issued warnings for it to leave the area, coming within about 45 yards of the American ship, Navy officials said at the time.

Bowen, from Jacksonville, N.C., was previously an enlisted sailor, rising to the rank of chief petty officer before commissioning as a surface warfare officer. He has served previously in Bahrain and Europe and was the executive officer of the Decatur before taking command of the ship.

## US troops were injured in strike on base in Iraq

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — Eleven U.S. troops were injured following the Jan. 8 Iranian strikes on a base in Iraq, defense officials said Thursday, reversing assurances from President Donald Trump and the Pentagon that no Americans had been hurt.

Those troops are still being assessed for concussion symptoms following the blast, Navy Capt. Bill Urban, a spokesman for U.S. Central Command, said in a statement.

Eight U.S. troops were evacuated to a U.S. base in Germany, he said, and the other three were sent to Camp Arifjan in Kuwait.

“When deemed fit for duty, the service members are expected to return to Iraq,” Urban said.

U.S. officials disclosed numerous concussions as early as Jan. 13 but did not disclose the evacuations until Defense One reported those details.

The acknowledgement marks a sharp turn from initial reports from defense officials and the president, who described the effects of the missile salvos launched in retaliation for

a U.S. strike that killed Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad.

“No Americans were harmed in last night’s attack by the Iranian regime. We suffered no casualties. All of our soldiers are safe, and only minimal damage was sustained at our military bases,” Trump said soon after the attack.

But concussions are not always as immediately evident as shrapnel or gunshot wounds, and in the ensuing days, U.S. troops were assessed for blast injuries. The 11 evacuated were sent for further care and screening “in an abundance of caution,” Urban said.

The missile barrage last week against the sprawling Ain al-Asad Air Base in western Iraq left deep craters and the crumpled wreckage of living quarters and a helicopter launch site. At least two soldiers were thrown through the window of a meters-high tower.

Although there was some speculation that the attacks were designed to avoid casualties, commanders at the base believe that the strikes were intended to kill U.S. troops.

## Army general to lead new team to counter drones

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Army Maj. Gen. Sean Gainey will lead a new 60-person team for the Defense Department to develop new methods to counter drone strikes, which are increasing on the battlefields of the Middle East and Afghanistan, Pentagon officials announced earlier this week.

“The idea is to take all of the effort in terms of development and fielding and come up with three to five systems which are the best for counter-[unmanned aerial systems],” Ellen Lord, undersecretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment, said Tuesday to reporters at a Defense Writers Group meeting.

Those systems consist of hardware — like radars — and software that can detect, access, and engage hostile drones, as well as the personnel who operate the system.

The use of drones on battlefields by military units and terrorist groups has grown during the last few years as the technology has become more accessible. The Washington Post

and The New York Times have reported the Islamic State uses off-the-shelf drones that were configured to drop grenades on targets.

“It’s important for the public to understand that the [drone strike] threat is real, and the department is taking it very seriously,” a defense official said on the condition of anonymity to discuss the threats posed by drones to service members. “Ten years ago, [improvised explosive devices] were the primary threat because they were hidden, relatively inexpensive and represented a deadly stand-off capability. Today, small UAS’s are extremely cheap, and represent both an [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance] and direct threat capability against U.S. service members around the world.”

In December, Lord announced the Army was going to take responsibility for the Defense Department’s efforts to develop new methods to counter drone strikes. She said the department needed to “continue to focus heavily on counter-UAS systems and strategies,” after traveling to the Middle East and Afghanistan.

# Pentagon funds for border wall sought

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Department of Homeland Security has asked the Pentagon to fund the construction of 270 miles of border wall this year as part of a counter-drug effort, defense officials said Thursday.

The officials said the request came in Wednesday, and the Pentagon is beginning what will be a two-week assessment to determine what will be approved. The officials, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity, would not provide any cost estimates.

The request comes amid sharp divisions about the border wall between President Donald Trump and members of Congress who have opposed the use of military funding for the construction.

The border wall is one of Trump's signature issues. He also has claimed that Mexico is paying for the wall, but that has not happened.

Instead, money has been diverted from military construction projects and drug interdiction funding, setting up a

persistent source of conflict between Democratic lawmakers and Trump in the budget bills each year.

Defense officials said the request is for construction or replacement of border barriers, lighting and roads in six sectors across several states. The six areas, the officials said, are high traffic areas that include some urban sections near border crossings.

Earlier this week, officials said the Trump administration was weighing whether to shift

billions more in military funding to build the border wall. And House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Nita M. Lowey and other lawmakers said the administration was planning to "steal" \$7.2 billion in counternarcotics and military construction funding to pay for the wall.

Officials on Thursday said there have been no decisions about any funding levels. A final decision would be made by Defense Secretary Mark Esper.

## Groups protest blessing of Bible for U.S. Space Force

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — Some religious liberty groups are protesting a blessing ceremony for a Protestant Bible to be used by the new U.S. Space Force, saying the ceremony this weekend violates church-state barriers and is an insult to America's diversity.

Washington National Cathedral, seat of the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, tweeted an image Sunday of Cathedral Dean Randy Hollerith and the Rev. Carl Wright, the denomination's bishop for military branches and federal agencies, blessing a King

James Bible along with Maj. Gen. Steven Schaick, the Air Force chief of chaplains.

The Space Force, part of the Department of the Air Force, is the newest branch of the U.S. military and is dedicated to space warfare.

"The men and women of our Armed Services are a microcosm of our nation's rich diversity. An official Christian Bible for the #SpaceForce oath violates the constitutional right to exercise religious freedom that these Air Force officers swear to defend," the Anti-Defamation League tweeted Tuesday.

Also Tuesday, the Freedom From Religion Foundation

tweeted that it was "protesting a ceremony where the newly formed U.S. #SpaceForce designated and blessed its own bible. Selecting one book as the official 'holy book' of a governmental branch is improper and an egregious violation of the Establishment Clause."

The Rev. Canon Leslie Nunez-Steffensen, assistant to Wright, wrote in a statement that the cathedral "misspoke" by using the word "official" in its tweet. Using a holy book of any kind or none is fine in military culture, Steffensen wrote. Wright was traveling and not available for comment.

A spokeswoman for the Air

Force said Wednesday that there is no official sacred text for any branch of the U.S. military. High-ranking leaders often use a Bible or other sacred text for their swearing-in ceremonies, said Ann Stefanek, but members of the military taking an oath in the typical promotion ceremony simply raise their right hand with no text.

She said the Bible that was blessed in the Sunday ceremony was used Tuesday at the White House swearing-in of Gen. John Raymond, who leads the new Space Force.

## Latest Taliban-US talks expected to last for several days

*The Washington Post*

ISLAMABAD — Taliban and American negotiators are meeting in Qatar for what a Taliban spokesman called "fruitful discussions" that are expected to continue for "several days."

The two sides "discussed the signing of the agreement and the ceremony for it," Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen tweeted Friday.

It's unclear what agreement Shaheen is referring to. Neither

Shaheen nor the State Department responded to requests for comment.

Negotiators reached a draft deal in September that was abruptly scrapped by President Donald Trump. That agreement would have required the withdrawal of thousands of American troops from Afghanistan in exchange for a Taliban pledge not to harbor terrorists.

In the years before he ran for president, Trump called for ending U.S. military involve-

ment in Afghanistan. Reducing American troop levels now would increase pressure on Afghan government forces, which continue to struggle to carry out operations without close U.S. support.

Friday's announcement comes after statements from Pakistani and Taliban officials that the insurgent group is prepared to reduce violence in an effort to reboot stalled peace talks. But those statements lacked specifics on how long

it would last, where it would apply and whether it would include the cessation of attacks on both Afghan and American forces.

The Associated Press reported that Taliban officials said the group gave U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad "a document outlining their offer for a temporary cease-fire in Afghanistan that would last between seven and 10 days."

The Afghan government is demanding a full cease-fire.

# Organizers appeal Virginia rally gun ban

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring urged the state Supreme Court on Friday to reject an effort by pro-gun groups to overturn a gun ban at a rally that's expected to draw tens of thousands of activists to Richmond next week amid fears of violence.

The legal arguments have unfolded as the FBI helped police arrest six men linked to a violent white supremacist group known as The Base. At least three of them were believed to be planning to attend the rally in Richmond, according to a law enforcement official who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss

an active investigation.

Herring argued that an executive order by Gov. Ralph Northam banning guns from the state Capitol grounds for Monday's rally is necessary to prevent the kind of violence seen during a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville in 2017. One woman was killed and more than 30 other people were hurt when a white supremacist drove his car into a crowd of counter protesters.

"Determined to prevent another tragedy, the Governor issued a carefully limited Executive Order. The Order does not prevent anyone from speaking, assembling, or petitioning the government. Instead, it temporarily precludes private possession of firearms in a sensitive public place dur-

ing a specified time to protect public safety and safeguard the rights of all citizens to peacefully speak, assemble, and petition their government," the legal brief says.

It was not clear when the Supreme Court would rule.

The Virginia Citizens Defense League and Gun Owners of America filed an emergency appeal after Judge Joi Taylor ruled Thursday that the governor has the authority under state law to take action related to "the safety and welfare" of the state.

"Without relief from this court, petitioners and thousands of other rally participants will be irreparably denied their right to bear arms," the groups' attorneys argued.

## Weinstein's attorneys want trial to be moved

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Harvey Weinstein's lawyers went to court Thursday with a last-minute demand to halt jury selection and move his rape trial out of New York City, where they say intense publicity, protesters and even the consideration of supermodel Gigi Hadid as a juror have turned the case into a "media and entertainment circus."

Weinstein's lawyers detoured to the Manhattan appellate court for oral arguments hours after the 24-year-old Hadid was dismissed from the jury pool and as jurors were starting to be picked for the case. By the end of the day, seven jurors — four men and three women — had been selected from about 145 potential jurors who remained in the pool after an initial

round of questioning.

Weinstein's lawyers, who floated similar concerns in a losing effort to move the trial in October, said a "carnival-like atmosphere" has taken hold during eight days of jury selection, making it impossible for Weinstein to get a fair trial in his hometown.

"The deluge of publicity adverse to Mr. Weinstein has engulfed the potential jury pool resulting in untoward pressure upon jurors to convict a man demonized and prejudged guilty," Weinstein's lawyer Arthur Aidala wrote in a filing that spurred Thursday's trip to the appellate court.

Weinstein, 67, is charged with raping a woman in a Manhattan hotel room in 2013 and sexually assaulting another woman in

2006. He has pleaded not guilty and said any sexual activity was consensual. If convicted, Weinstein could face life in prison.

His lawyers acknowledge media coverage of the ex-movie mogul's case extends beyond the city, but they argue the furor has reached an only-in-New-York degree.

"You're in the media capital of the world," Weinstein attorney John Esposito told appellate Justice David Friedman.

Prosecutors oppose moving the trial, pointing to the plethora of potential jurors still in the running — all pledged they could be fair and impartial — as evidence that the process is working. Moving to a smaller community with a smaller jury pool would only make it more difficult to find jurors, they added.

## Ascendent Steyer makes campaign swing in Nevada

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Driving on any freeway in Las Vegas, you're likely to see Tom Steyer's face. Turn on the radio, you might hear his voice. Turn on the television, you'll probably run across his campaign ad.

But Alondra Escobedo didn't expect to run into the Democratic presidential candidate near the snack aisle at her local Mexican grocery store Wednesday night.

Steyer, flanked by twin signs for his campaign, was standing on a low stage in front of a display of chips, popcorn and peanuts at an east Las Vegas market, speaking about his immigration policy to several dozen people seated in folding chairs.

Steyer, a billionaire environmental activ-

ist from California, was on a two-day campaign swing through Nevada, riding high on recent polling showing him ascendant in the early voting state.

Steyer entered the 2020 race late and has only started building up his staff in Nevada in recent months. He is making a concerted push to reach Latinos with Spanish-language ads, and is ramping up his appearances in the state, including his visit this week.

Steyer, worth an estimated \$1.6 billion according to Forbes, has become a familiar face after running television ads over the past few years calling for President Donald Trump's impeachment. Since jumping into the presidential race in July, he's spent tens

of millions of dollars on campaign ads, and in Nevada, he's had the airwaves largely to himself until recently, when fellow candidate and billionaire Michael Bloomberg launched TV ads.

Steyer has so far mostly drawn modest crowds to his campaign events. He's eschewed big rallies, instead turning up at a number of issue-focused town halls — or, as was the case Wednesday night, near Aisle 8 at the grocery store with immigrant advocacy group Mi Familia Vota.

Nevada, considered the first test of a candidate's appeal before a diverse electorate, boasts a population that's 29% Latino — a population that Steyer's campaign has made a concerted effort to court.

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Dog gives birth to bright green puppy

**NC** CANTON — The Avengers may have gained a canine sidekick after a North Carolina family's dog gave birth to a bright green puppy named "Hulk."

Gypsy, a white shepherd owned by Haywood County resident Shana Stamey, delivered eight puppies Friday morning. Gypsy's hour labor was going smoothly until the fourth puppy came out as a small, but mighty tuft of lime green fur, Stamey said.

"I started freaking out," Stamey told news outlets. "But everybody was healthy."

Liquid from inside Gypsy's stomach likely stained the white dog's fur during pregnancy, Suzanne Cianciulli, manager of Junaluska Animal Hospital in Waynesville, told news outlets.

Regular baths and daily licks from Gypsy are expected to fade Hulk's green hue in a few weeks, Stamey said.

## Police: Teens used replica gun to rob man

**MA** BOSTON — Boston police have arrested 13- and 15-year-old boys they say used a replica Uzi machine pistol to rob a man on a city street.

The victim was walking in the city's Dorchester neighborhood at about 11 p.m. Tuesday when he felt a sharp jab in his lower back, Sgt. Detective John Boyle told The Boston Globe.

One suspect rifled through the victim's pockets, taking his phone, some cash, and a gift card, Boyle said.

One suspect hit the victim in the face while holding the suspected weapon in his hand, demanding the victim provide the code needed to unlock his phone, Boyle said.

The suspects were arrested

minutes later as they left a nearby Dunkin' restaurant, carrying the victim's iPhone, gift card, and a replica Uzi machine pistol, police said.

## Woman accused of stealing dog at gunpoint

**DC** WASHINGTON — A woman accused of stealing a dog at gunpoint in Maryland has been identified and charged, police said.

Juanell Huff, 26, is in custody in Washington, D.C., Prince George's County police said in a news release Tuesday.

The owner of the puppy, named Lobo, told police he was on a walk in Landover last month when an armed woman demanded the dog. The woman, now identified as Huff, got into a struggle with the man. He let go of the gun when an accomplice, a man, approached, according to police.

Huff reportedly pulled the trigger several times but the gun didn't fire. She took the dog and she and the man drove away, police said. The accomplice hasn't been identified.

A person found Lobo alone in Washington the next day. The puppy was later reunited with his owner.

## Town baffled by tree cutting mystery

**RI** TIVERTON — A Rhode Island community is trying to figure out who cut down about two dozen trees on a town-owned waterfront lot without permission.

The trees in Tiverton were reported cropped to a height of about four feet on Jan. 3.

Police have conducted "an exhaustive investigation," and are asking that anyone with information contact them, Chief Patrick Jones told The Newport Daily News for story published Wednesday. The culprit could

face charges including theft and vandalism and destruction of town property.

Authorities have contacted all the area tree companies, the electric company and the town's public works department to see if they may have done it, but they all denied it, Town Clerk Nancy Mello said.

She suggested someone may have wanted to improve the view of the water.

## Sheriff found guilty of drunken driving

**NH** CONCORD — A New Hampshire sheriff was found guilty Tuesday of drunken driving.

A judge sentenced Merrimack County Sheriff Scott Hilliard to spend five days in the Belknap County jail. Hilliard was also found guilty of transporting an alcoholic beverage.

Hilliard was arrested in August in a restaurant parking lot in Tilton after officers responded to a call about a driver swerving on the road. The off-duty sheriff smelled of alcohol and was swaying when police encountered him walking to his car.

## Couple allegedly traded drugs for food stamps

**AZ** PHOENIX — State prosecutors say the owners of a Glendale convenience store have been arrested for allegedly selling illegal drugs in exchange for food stamps and cash.

The Arizona Attorney General's Office announced Tuesday that Bejar Sadiq Abdulaziz and Gretel De La Fuente Gamez are accused of trading drugs for food stamps or cash since 2017 at the Azad Market they ran.

According to a grand jury indictment, the drugs included cocaine, spice, meth and THC

vape cartridges.

Abdulaziz and Gamez are accused of fraudulent schemes and artifices, money laundering, illegal control of an enterprise, theft, assisting a criminal syndicate, sale or transportation of dangerous/narcotic drugs and unlawful use of food stamps.

## Stolen artifacts returned to museum

**RI** PROVIDENCE — Native American arrowheads have been returned to the Rhode Island museum they were stolen from nearly 30 years ago.

Agents from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security located the 34 white-quartz arrowheads in an eBay advertisement, WPRI-TV reported Tuesday.

The couple who attempted to sell the arrowheads say they did not know there were stolen, and claim to have traded a case of wine for the collection on Craigslist in 2017.

## Woman accused of stealing \$2M in jewelry

**CA** SANTA ANA — A 54-year-old California woman was arrested after authorities say she pulled a large kitchen knife on staff at a jewelry store and stole \$2 million worth of their merchandise.

Costa Mesa police officers arrested Karen Yvonne Floyd of Newport Beach on Monday, The Orange County Register reported Tuesday.

Floyd walked into a store Saturday, asked to try on multiple high-end pieces and proceeded to walk out of the store wearing them, authorities said. Floyd was stopped by store security when she allegedly pulled out the knife and threatened them, authorities said.

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# Chiefs' Reid most experienced of four

Associated Press

Of the coaches in the NFL's Final Four, Andy Reid is the outlier.

Only Kansas City's coach has been the head coach in a Super Bowl. Only Reid is close to having a Hall of Fame-worthy résumé. Only Reid has been around for a couple of decades.

So, while Tennessee's Mike Vrabel, Green Bay's Matt LaFleur and San Francisco's Kyle Shanahan might look up to Reid and his career achievements, they also recognize that whichever of them wins the NFL title will be doing so for the first time as a coach.

No, despite his longevity as Eagles and then Chiefs coach, and his 15 trips to the postseason, Reid has never lifted the Lombardi Trophy.

"Listen, you've known me a long time, I'm thinking more about the players than I'm thinking about myself," Reid said. "That's now where I go — I'm trying to get the guys ready, I'm going to make sure I'm ready, then I'm going to go

play. I don't really look at it that way: It's more a disappointment for the other teams, they worked their tails off and fell short."

What Shanahan and LaFleur certainly can admire about Reid is his forward-thinking approach on offense. Both of them are bred in offense, and they rarely back off. While Reid has been a bit more conservative — at least until Patrick Mahomes showed up — Shanahan and LaFleur rarely get shy with the ball.

Vrabel has a defensive background, having won three Super Bowls as a linebacker in New England. Though nobody who saw him catch passes, including for a touchdown in the 2005 game against Reid and the Eagles, can forget his hand in the Patriots offense.

That's hardly the only connection among this quartet.

The ties between the Niners and Packers coaching staffs run deep. LaFleur worked under Shanahan on staffs in Houston, Washington and Atlanta before heading in his own direction.

LaFleur's brother, Mike, is the passing game coordinator in San Francisco and was blocked by Shanahan this past offseason when Matt wanted to hire him as offensive coordinator in Green Bay.

"It's always a little bit different just because of how close you are with the other person," Shanahan said. "I know Matt and Mike are as close as any brothers could be just like most people are with siblings, but it really doesn't matter. There's a lot of talk to it and stuff, but I mean, there's no feeling when that game goes on, there's no feelings when you're studying and preparing.

"Everyone cares about the other person. I know if we weren't in it, I know he'd be pulling for his brother just like when I wasn't going against my dad (long-time coach Mike Shanahan), I was always pulling for him. But, I know when you go against each other, that stuff doesn't matter. Everyone's got a job to do and everyone is pretty competitive and wants to win, also."

Matt LaFleur also has a very tight relationship with 49ers defensive coordinator Robert Saleh. They were roommates as graduate assistants at Central Michigan and have been close friends since. Saleh recommended LaFleur for his first NFL job as a quality control offensive assistant with the Texans in 2008-09, when Shanahan was offensive coordinator.

"I was messing with him the other day," LaFleur said. "I asked him to call me. I shot him a text message. I said, 'Hey, would you give me a call? I have a couple questions about your defense.'

"That was the last of the communication."

Shanahan also spent a year as offensive coordinator in Cleveland when Packers defensive coordinator Mike Pettine was head coach in 2014. Shanahan resigned from that job after one season and left to take the same position in Atlanta.

Vrabel doesn't have any connections in that way. He is the only one of the four who has won a Super Bowl.

## Titans' gamble on Vrabel one victory from paying off

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Titans safety Kenny Vaccaro listened to how coach Mike Vrabel praised his performance in Tennessee's wild-card win with the hint of a smile.

"I know how Vrabel is," Vaccaro said. "He's tough. He wants you to be physical, gritty, grindy, and he just likes guys that are going to hit. I was hitting people like I've always hit people. I appreciate the compliment because he doesn't really give out too many."

No, the second-year head coach doesn't waste much time with praise.

That's not why the Titans fired Mike Mularkey two years ago after losing in the divisional round of the playoffs, preferring to gamble on hiring a coach who could push them

to compete for championships. They chose Vrabel as a first-time head coach, and the former 14-year linebacker with three Super Bowl rings has the Titans a win away from the franchise's second Super Bowl berth and first since the 1999 season.

Vrabel's message since mid-April has been pushing the Titans to find a way to go from good to great after three straight 9-7 seasons. Tennessee went 9-7 again during the regular season, but Vrabel isn't ready to grade his team yet, not before the AFC championship game Sunday at Kansas City (13-4). It will be the Titans' first time playing for the conference title since the 2002 season.

"Well, I think that we have certainly improved," Vrabel said. "I think we've made progress. Something that we focused

on a while back is just trying to continue to improve each and every week. So, how close we are, I don't know that. I know that we're going to do what we've done for a long time, and what we know is to prepare to try to go in and play with confidence and execute."

That focus on improvement has endeared him to the Titans. He has a hands-on approach, whether he's banging away at a football being carried by Derrick Henry during a running back drill or wearing a blocking pad to work on technique with linebackers and defensive linemen. Four-time Pro Bowl defensive lineman Jurrell Casey loves how Vrabel and all his coaches are involved and detail-oriented at practice.

Vrabel dealt with numerous injuries during his first season, including starting quarterback

Marcus Mariota missing the regular-season finale, which the Titans lost with a playoff berth on the line.

His biggest challenge came in mid-October this season. The Titans had scored only one touchdown in a 10-quarter stretch capped by a 16-0 loss at Denver that dropped Tennessee to 2-4. At that point, Vrabel benched Mariota for veteran Ryan Tannehill, who had been acquired in a trade with Miami to upgrade the backup position.

The Titans (11-7) are 9-3 since then, including winning their last three on the road. They clinched the AFC's No. 6 seed in the regular-season finale against AFC South champ Houston, beat the defending Super Bowl champion Patriots in New England and then knocked off the top-seeded Ravens in Baltimore.

# New Mets manager Beltran steps down

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Carlos Beltrán's 2½-month tenure as New York Mets manager ended Thursday before he spent a game on the bench, the latest fallout from the Houston Astros' sign-stealing scandal that has rocked Major League Baseball.

The Mets announced the decision in a news release, saying Beltrán and the team "agreed to mutually part ways." The move came two days after Boston cut ties with manager Alex Cora, who was Houston's bench coach in 2017 when Beltrán played for the Astros.

A day before that, manager

AJ Hinch and general manager Jeff Luhnow were fired by Houston soon after they were suspended for the 2020 season by Commissioner Rob Manfred for their roles in the cheating scheme.

Next to fall was Beltrán, the only Astros player mentioned by name Monday when MLB issued its findings from an investigation into the club's conduct. No players were disciplined, but the nine-page report said Beltrán was among the group involved in the team's illicit use of electronics to pilfer signs during Houston's run to the 2017 World Series championship.

"Over my 20 years in the

game, I've always taken pride in being a leader and doing things the right way, and in this situation, I failed," Beltran said in a statement issued through agent Dan Lozano.

"As a veteran player on the team, I should've recognized the severity of the issue and truly regret the actions that were taken. I am a man of faith and integrity and what took place did not demonstrate those characteristics that are so very important to me and my family. I'm very sorry. It's not who I am as a father, a husband, a teammate and as an educator. ... I hope that at some point in time, I'll have the opportunity to return to this game that I

love so much."

Mets general manager Brodie Van Wagenen and Chief Operating Officer Jeff Wilpon met with MLB deputy commissioner Dan Halem and Bryan Seeley, who headed the investigation, on Wednesday morning in New York, then with Beltrán at the team's spring training complex in Florida on Wednesday night and Thursday morning.

"Considering the circumstances, it became clear to all parties that it was not in anyone's best interest for Carlos to move forward as manager of the New York Mets," Van Wagenen and Wilpon said in a statement.

## College basketball roundup

# Elleby, Washington State knock off No. 8 Oregon

Associated Press

PULLMAN, Wash. — CJ Elleby scored 25 points and Washington State beat a Top-10 team for just the third time, surprising No. 8 Oregon 72-61 on Thursday night.

Elleby, who was held to a season-low six points in his last game, helped Washington State (11-7, 2-3 Pac-12) to its first win over a Top-10 opponent since 2007.

Elleby shot 9-for-20, including 4-for-7 from three-point range, and added a season-high 14 rebounds. Isaac Bonton finished with 12 points and six assists, and Jeff Pollard scored 11 for the Cougars.

Payton Pritchard had 22 points and five assists for Oregon (14-4, 3-2), which had its three-game winning streak halted. Chris Duarte had 15 points for the Ducks.

Trailing by five points with 3:24 left, Pritchard made a clutch jumper in the paint, then converted a free throw to make it 60-58.

On the ensuing possession, Elleby converted a three-point play to make the score 63-58.

Washington State then went on a 9-0 run that closed out Oregon.

**No. 1 Gonzaga 105, Santa Clara 54:** Joel Ayayi scored 19 points and Filip Petrushev and Admon Gilder each scored 18 as the Bulldogs pounded the Broncos for their 33rd straight home win, the longest streak in the nation.

Corey Kispert added 16 points for Gonzaga (19-1, 5-0 West Coast).

Josip Vrankic scored 12 points and Trey Wertz 11 for cold-shooting Santa Clara (15-4, 2-2), which is off to its best start in decades. But the Broncos have lost 20 straight to Gonzaga, dating to 2011.

The Broncos were doomed by 30% shooting in this game, including 3 of 25 from three-point range.

Gonzaga has won 11 games in a row since its only loss to Michigan.

**No. 20 Colorado 68, Arizona State 61:** Tyler Bey scored 19 points, Lucas Siewert added 14 and the Buffaloes overcame a slow start to beat the Sun Devils.

Colorado (14-3, 3-1 Pac-12)

won its first road game in conference play and has won seven of eight overall. Siewert hit 4 of 6 three-pointers and Bey made his only attempt from long range to give the Buffaloes some much-needed offense.

Arizona State (10-7, 1-3) has dropped five of its last seven.

Remy Martin scored 25 points and Romello White had 19 points and 10 rebounds for the Sun Devils, who shot just 30% from the field in the second half, including 4-for-19 (21%) from three-point range.

**No. 22 Memphis 60, Cincinnati 49:** DJ Jeffries scored 18 points, Precious Achiuwa added 12 points and 11 rebounds and the host Tigers used a rally midway through the second half to defeat the Bearcats.

Lester Quinones added 13 points, seven coming in the final five minutes, as Memphis (14-3, 3-1 American Athletic Conference) broke a six-game losing streak in the series with Cincinnati.

Jarron Cumberland, the defending American Athletic Conference player of the year, led Cincinnati (10-7, 3-2) with

19 points, while Keith Williams scored 12, going 4-for-14 from the field, part of the Bearcats struggling to a 30% shooting night from the field.

**Army 79, Holy Cross 67:** Matt Wilson scored 23 points, Tommy Funk had 18 points and seven assists, and the visiting Black Knights won a game postponed due to a fatal car crash involving the Crusaders women's rowing team.

The game was scheduled for Wednesday night but was pushed back a day after the Holy Cross rowing team was involved in a crash during a winter training trip to Vero Beach, Fla. The school announced 20-year-old Grace Rett passed away as a result of injuries sustained in the accident.

Alex King added 11 points, Lonnie Grayson had six rebounds and Wilson made 10 of 13 shots for Army (6-10, 1-4 Patriot League), which snapped its five-game losing streak.

Matt Faw scored a career-high 22 points and had three blocks for the Crusaders (2-16, 1-4). Joe Pridgen added 17 points and Connor Niego had 13 points.

## NHL roundup

## Ovechkin's 3 goals push Caps past Devils

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — When Alex Ovechkin took an errant stick to the face that made him bleed, his Washington Capitals teammates knew it wouldn't be good for the New Jersey Devils.

A fired-up Ovechkin came back from the bloody mouth to record his 25th career hat trick and lead the Capitals past the Devils 5-2 on Thursday night. Ovechkin knew New Jersey's Miles Wood didn't mean to high-stick him and the referees didn't see it, but that didn't stop him from exacting some revenge with his second consecutive multigoal game.

"He always plays better when he's a little (angry), so there you go," Capitals center Nicklas Backstrom said. "It was drawn up like that. He came back, got a little mad, scored two and then he was just waiting for the third."

"That's just the story of Ovi." Ovechkin reached 31 goals this season and joined Mike

Gartner as the only players to score 30 or more in each of his first 15 NHL seasons. He has five over his past two games to get to 689 total, one back of Mario Lemieux for 10th on the NHL's career list.

"It never gets old, but without my team, without my teammates, I'd never reach that milestone, I'd never reach those numbers," Ovechkin said. "(Lemieux was) one of my idols when I'm growing up. I get lucky I have a time to play against him, was on the ice with him a couple times. It's huge."

Carl Hagelin and Jakub Vrana also scored for Washington, which has won two in a row since a 5-1 drubbing at the hands of the Devils five days earlier. The Capitals looked much more like a first-place team Thursday than they did in these teams' most recent meeting.

**Golden Knights 4, Senators 2:** Mark Stone scored a goal and picked up an assist in his return to Ottawa, leading Vegas past his former team in Peter

DeBoer's debut as coach.

**Rangers 3, Islanders 2:** Chris Kreider scored a power-play goal with 25 seconds left to give the visiting Rangers the victory.

**Avalanche 4, Sharks 0:** Philipp Grubauer made 27 saves for his first shutout of the season and host Colorado got goals from four players in a win over San Jose.

**Canadiens 4, Flyers 1:** Ilya Kovalchuk scored twice and Carey Price recorded 40 saves as visiting Montreal avoided a season series sweep.

**Bruins 4, Penguins 1:** Patrice Bergeron scored his 20th goal, Karson Kuhlman and David Pastrnak both had two assists, and host Boston topped Pittsburgh.

**Panthers 4, Kings 3:** Brian Boyle scored the eventual winning goal and host Florida held off a late surge to beat Los Angeles.

**Flames 2, Maple Leafs 1 (SO):** Matthew Tkachuk scored the only goal of the shootout, leading visiting Calgary past

Toronto.

**Blue Jackets 3, Hurricanes 2:** Nick Foligno scored the tie-breaking goal with 1:41 left in the game, Elvis Merzlikins had 32 saves and host Columbus edged Carolina.

**Wild 3, Lightning 2:** Zach Parise scored his team-leading 17th goal and Ryan Suter added his seventh as host Minnesota snapped a four-game losing streak.

**Ducks 4, Predators 2:** Rickard Rakell had a goal and an assist, and John Gibson made 33 saves in visiting Anaheim's victory.

**Sabres 4, Stars 1:** Rasmus Dahlin scored a tiebreaking goal in the second period, and Linus Ullmark made 28 saves to lead visiting Buffalo to its season-best third straight win.

**Canucks 3, Coyotes 1:** Jake Virtanen scored the go-ahead goal midway through the second period and Jacob Markstrom made 34 saves to lead Vancouver past Arizona.

## NBA roundup

## Ingram, Pelicans halt Jazz's 10-game winning streak

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Brandon Ingram scored a career-high 49 points, and the New Orleans Pelicans stopped the Utah Jazz's 10-game winning streak with a 138-132 victory Thursday night.

Utah led 132-127 on Bojan Bogdanovic's three-pointer with 2:28 to go in overtime, but went scoreless the rest of the way. The Pelicans scored 11 straight on layups by Derrick Favors and E'Twaun Moore and seven free throws.

Favors finished with 21 points, 11 rebounds and three blocks against his former team. Moore had 16 points for New Orleans, which has won 10 of

14 and has two games to play before the NBA's top overall draft choice, Zion Williamson, is slated to make his Pelicans debut on Wednesday night.

Utah star Donovan Mitchell tied his career high with 46 points before missing several shots in the final minutes of overtime. Bogdanovic scored 26, and Rudy Gobert had 17 points, 14 rebounds and three blocks.

The Pelicans thought they had won the game in regulation on Ingram's off-balance jumper with .2 seconds left. But Jaxson Hayes was called for holding Gobert as Utah attempted a desperation tip-in on the inbound pass.

**Bucks 128, Celtics 123:** Giannis Antetokounmpo had 32 points, 17 rebounds and seven assists, and NBA-leading Milwaukee won its fifth straight by beating visiting Boston.

It was Antetokounmpo's 35th double-double of the season. Khris Middleton scored 23 points for Milwaukee (37-6), and Donte DiVincenzo had 19.

**Clippers 122, Magic 95:** Kawhi Leonard scored 32 points, leading host Los Angeles past Orlando.

Leonard also had five rebounds and five assists in his fourth consecutive game with at least 30 points. He was 12-for-20 from the field.

**Suns 121, Knicks 98:** Deandre Ayton had 26 points and

a career-high 21 rebounds, powering Phoenix past host New York.

The Suns shot 51% (47-for-92) from the field and placed five players in double figures in their third win in four games. Devin Booker scored 29 points, and Ricky Rubio had 25 points and 13 assists.

**Nuggets 134, Warriors 131 (OT):** Malik Beasley made two free throws with 8.9 seconds left in overtime, and short-handed Denver handed Golden State its 10th consecutive loss.

Will Barton had a season-high 31 points in the Nuggets' fifth win in six games. Nikola Jokic added 23 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists, and Beasley finished with 27 points.