

STARS AND STRIPES®

Friday, January 24, 2020

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

New Gl's might be in Mideast 'a while'

Associated Press

ABOARD THE USS BATAAN — Over the past eight months, the United States has poured more than 20,000 additional troops into the Middle East to counter the escalating threat from Iran that peaked with the recent missile attack on American forces in Iraq.

Despite President Donald Trump's pledge to bring troops home, the top U.S. commander in the Middle East on Thursday said the most recent forces to enter the region could be there for "quite a while."

"You're here because I requested that you come," Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie told sailors and Marines aboard the USS Bataan amphibious assault ship, his voice booming over the ship's loudspeaker. "I'm not sure how long you're going to stay in the theater. We'll work that out as we go ahead. Could

be quite a while, could be less than that, just don't know right now."

The Bataan and two other U.S. warships moved into the Middle East on Jan. 11. By Thursday, they were in the north Red Sea, roughly 50 miles south of the Sinai Peninsula. They are the latest additions to America's troop presence in the region. Since May, their numbers have grown from about 60,000 to more than 80,000.

Those increased deployments came despite two significant hurdles: Trump's persistent pledge to end the wars and bring troops home, and U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper's insistence that U.S. forces be shifted to the Asia-Pacific as a bulwark against threats from China.

In making its case for troops in the Middle East, the U.S. military points to Iran's Jan. 8 launch of as many as two dozen

ballistic missiles at two Iraqi bases where U.S. troops were stationed. The attack was in retaliation for a U.S. drone strike that killed Qassem Soleimani, Iran's top general.

"Iran continues to pose a very real threat," McKenzie told reporters traveling with him to the Bataan. "I do believe that they are deterred right now, at least from state-on-state actions by our response. And so I think that while that threat remains, I think we're in a period where they're certainly not seeking to escalate anything."

He added, however, that Iranian proxy forces, who could strike with or without direction from Iranian leaders, still present a threat. He noted that Iranian attacks against Saudi Arabia last fall came as a surprise.

"Iran is very hard to read," McKenzie said. "So I would say the fact that things are quiet

for a while does not mean that necessarily things are getting better."

To help deter additional Iranian attacks, McKenzie asked to have the USS Bataan Amphibious Ready Group, which includes two other ships and a Marine Expeditionary Unit, divert from their original mission in Europe and go through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea. There are about 2,500 Marines and 1,500 sailors on the three ships.

That decision is the latest move since May to bolster the American presence in the region, including the deployment of the 1st Brigade, 82nd Airborne division, to Kuwait and Iraq after the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad was attacked. The U.S. also moved an aircraft carrier into the region last year. It has left and was replaced by the USS Harry S. Truman.

Dems launch their final arguments in Trump's trial

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democratic House prosecutors launched their final arguments Friday at Donald Trump's impeachment trial insisting the president only released congressionally approved military money to Ukraine because he had "gotten caught" withholding it.

"The scheme was unraveling," said Rep. Jason Crow, of Colorado, a former Army Ranger, as the prosecution wrapped up its presentation on the first article of impeachment, abuse of power, before turning to the charge of obstruction of Congress.

As Democrats pressed their case before skeptical Republican senators for a third day,

the president's legal team was preparing its defense, expected to start Saturday.

The president is being tried in the Senate after the House impeached him last month, accusing him of abusing his office by asking Ukraine for politically motivated probes of political foe Joe Biden and Biden's son Hunter while withholding military aid from a U.S. ally that was at war with bordering Russia. The second article of impeachment accuses him of obstructing Congress by refusing to turn over documents or allow officials to testify in the House probe.

Crow, a freshman lawmaker, said the money for Ukraine was released once Congress intervened.

"It wasn't lifted for any legitimate reason," Crow told the senators. "It was only lifted because President Trump had gotten caught."

Republicans have defended Trump's actions as appropriate and are casting the process as a politically motivated effort to weaken him in his reelection campaign. Republicans hold a 53-47 majority in the Senate, and acquittal is considered likely.

The Senate is heading next week toward a pivotal vote on Democratic demands for testimony from top Trump aides, including acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney and former national security adviser John Bolton who refused to appear before the House. It would take

four Republican senators to join the Democratic minority to seek witnesses, and so far the numbers appear lacking.

"This needs to end," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a Trump confidant. He said he doesn't want to hear from Bolton or the Bidens.

Rep. Adam Schiff, the Democratic chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, made an emotional plea late Thursday for senators to consider what was at stake.

"Let me tell you something. If right doesn't matter, it doesn't matter how good the Constitution is," Schiff told a pin-drop-quiet room. "If you find him guilty you must find that he should be removed. Because right matters."

Pentagon: 34 troops suffered brain injuries in Iranian attack

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon said Friday that 34 U.S. service members suffered concussions from the Iranian missile attack Jan. 8 on al Asad Air Base in Iraq and it will review its injury reporting requirements amid the shifting narrative about casualties resulting from that strike.

Eight of the troops diagnosed with traumatic brain injuries as a result of the attack have been transported to the United States where they will receive treatment as outpatients at either their home stations or at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Maryland, said Jonathan Hoffman, the Pentagon's chief spokesman. Seventeen of the 34 have returned to duty at al Asad since their diagnoses, he said.

The Pentagon's announcement Friday marked at least the third official adjustment to

the number of troops injured when Iran launched 11 ballistic missiles into al Asad as retaliation for the U.S. drone strike Jan. 3 in Baghdad on Iran's most powerful military official, Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the commander of its elite Quds Force.

Initially, the Pentagon and President Donald Trump announced no Americans were injured or killed in the barrage. On Jan. 16, the Pentagon for the first time acknowledged publicly that service members had been injured, announcing 11 service members had been evacuated from Iraq for evaluation of suspected brain injuries. This week, officials at U.S. Central Command acknowledged additional troops had been evacuated from al Asad with concussion symptoms, but they declined to provide updated numbers or answer questions about those injuries.

Hoffman said Friday that 18 American troops were evacu-

ated from Iraq with concussions or other TBIs. Of those troops, one has returned to duty in Iraq, nine remain at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany and the others arrived in the United States on Thursday. Hoffman said it was possible additional troops could be sent back to the United States and the number of concussion diagnoses could grow further. The remainder of the 34 service members diagnosed with TBI remained in Iraq throughout their recovery and have returned to work, he said.

The review of Defense Department injury reporting, which Hoffman announced Friday, will be led by Matt Donovan, the Pentagon's acting personnel and readiness chief. He has been charged with working with the Joint Staff to determine whether the reporting requirements for injured service members should be updated, Hoffman said.

Taliban was frustrated with more US demands

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — The Taliban, in a rambling commentary published on their website, expressed frustration with what they describe as additional U.S. demands in peace talks — even after they had offered a “reduction of violence.” They have not publicly outlined what that would entail and did not explain the new Washington demands.

The insurgents' gesture of reduced violence, though never quantified, was meant to open a window for the signing of a peace agreement that could see the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the end to the 18-year war in Afghanistan, America's longest conflict.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International said in a statement Friday that to talk about a “reduction of violence” was an “absurdity.”

“In a conflict marked by attacks on civilians, the term ‘violence reduction’ is an absurdity. There can be no acceptable level of violence,” said Omar Waraich, deputy South Asia director at Amnesty.

“The United States and the Afghan Taliban must commit to abide by the laws of war and end all attacks on Afghan civilians,” he added.

Earlier, Taliban officials familiar with the talks told The Associated Press the Taliban had offered a cease-fire, lasting seven to 10 days, to Washington's peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad during their latest round of talks last week in the Gulf Arab state of Qatar, where the Taliban maintain a political office.

However, Khalilzad had previously sought a more comprehensive end to the fighting, and it was never known whether Washington would have agreed to a temporary truce. The U.S. State Department has withheld comment.

Iraqis rally to demand US troops leave

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Thousands rallied in Baghdad on Friday to demand that American troops leave the country, although their numbers fell short of the “million-man” march called for by an influential Shiite cleric. The rally came amid heightened anti-U.S. sentiment after a U.S. drone strike this month killed a top Iranian general in the Iraqi capital.

Large crowds began gathering mid-morning on the Muslim day of prayers as loudspeakers blasted “No, no America!” at a central square in Baghdad. A child held up a poster reading, “Death to America. Death to Israel.” But by the afternoon the rally had failed to reach the critical numbers called for by radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

Apparently seeking to show control, al-Sadr's supporters did not engage in altercations with security forces or target the separate, anti-government protests in neighboring Tahrir Square,

a possibility feared by activists in the lead-up to Friday's march. Officials and experts said the rally was the cleric's attempt to capitalize on brewing anti-American feeling and show he had the upper-hand on the Iraqi street as negotiations among political elites over who should be the next prime minister stumble on.

Al-Sadr, whose party won the most seats in the May 2018 parliamentary elections, had called for a “million-man” demonstration to demand the withdrawal of American troops.

Later Friday night, two anti-government protesters were shot and killed by security forces in separate demonstrations a few miles from where the big anti-U.S. rally had taken place, two medical officials and one security official said.

In addition, at least 26 protesters were wounded when security forces opened fire with live ammunition to disperse the crowds, officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

China expands lockdown and builds hospital

Associated Press

BEIJING — China is swiftly building a 1,000-bed hospital dedicated to patients infected with a new virus that has killed 26 people, sickened hundreds and prompted unprecedented lockdowns of cities during the country's most important holiday.

On the eve of the Lunar New Year, transportation was shut down Friday in at least 10 cities with a total of about 33 million people. The cities are Wuhan, where the illness has been concentrated, and nine of its neighbors in central China's Hubei province.

"To address the insufficiency of existing medical resources," Wuhan authorities said in a Friday notice, the city is constructing a hospital modeled after the Xiaotangshan

SARS hospital in Beijing. The facility will be a prefabricated structure on a 270,000-square-foot lot, slated for completion Feb. 3.

The SARS hospital was built from scratch in 2003 in just six days to treat an outbreak of a similar respiratory virus that had spread from China to more than a dozen countries and killed about 800 people. The hospital featured individual isolation units that looked like rows of tiny cabins.

Normally bustling streets, malls and other public spaces were eerily quiet in Wuhan on the second day of its lockdown. Masks were mandatory in public, and images from the city showed empty shelves as people stocked up for what could be an extended isolation. Train stations, the airport

and subways were closed; police checked incoming vehicles but did not entirely close off roads.

Hospitals in Wuhan were grappling with a flood of patients and a lack of supplies. Videos circulating online showed throngs of frantic people in masks lined up for checks. Some users on Weibo said their family members had sought diagnoses but were turned away at hospitals that were at capacity.

At least eight hospitals in Wuhan issued public calls for donations of masks, goggles, gowns and other protective medical gear, according to notices online. Administrators at Wuhan University People's Hospital set up a group chat on the popular WeChat messaging app to coordinate donations.

2 dead after warehouse explosion shakes Houston

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Two people died after a massive explosion Friday leveled a warehouse in Houston, damaging nearby buildings and homes and rousing frightened people from their sleep miles away, authorities said.

The explosion happened about 4:30 a.m. inside a building at Watson Grinding and Manufacturing, which makes valves and provides thermal-spray coatings for equipment in various industries, authorities said. The building was reduced to burning rubble and debris, and some of the surrounding buildings suffered heavy damage to parts of their walls and roofs.

Police Chief Art Acevedo confirmed the deaths Friday. He said authorities don't believe the explosion was intentional though a criminal investigation is underway.

Acevedo asked residents who live nearby to search their homes and neighborhoods for any debris — including body parts — and to contact police if they find anything that could aid in the investigation.

Houston Fire Chief Samuel Pena said hazardous materials crews have secured the valve on a 2,000-gallon tank of propylene that had been leaking. Propylene is a colorless gas used to produce chemicals in plastics, synthetic rubber and gasoline. It is highly flammable and can explode in a fire. People exposed to propylene can become dizzy and light-headed, and the gas can also cause liver damage.

Nearby homes sustained significant damage. Some were knocked off their foundations.

Danny Wilson, 63, who lives less than a mile from the site, said he was sleeping when his wife woke him up.

"She heard a big noise and the (grand-kids) were running out of their rooms," Wilson said. "She said it was some kind of explosion or somebody was trying to get in."

Wilson said he first checked inside his home to make sure nobody had broken in and then he went outside and talked to neighbors to find out what was going on and to check for any damage.

"I didn't notice any broken glass, and I looked at the back window and it was shattered big time," Wilson said.

Mark Brady, who lives near the site, told TV station KPRC that the explosion "knocked us all out of bed."

"It busted out every window in our house. It busted everybody's garage door in around here ... and closer toward the explosion over here, it busted people's roofs in and walls in," he said.

New York City Council votes to ban cashless businesses

Associated Press

NEW YORK — New York City lawmakers voted Thursday to require stores and restaurants to accept cash for payment, saying businesses that accept only credit and debit cards are discriminating against New Yorkers who lack bank accounts and credit cards.

"This practice punishes the underbanked," City Council Speaker Corey Johnson said

before the council's 43-3 vote in favor of the bill.

Under the bill, businesses that refuse cash will be fined \$1,000 for the first violation and \$1,500 after that. The measure, which is expected to go into effect by the end of the year, also prohibits stores from charging higher prices for paying in cash.

Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio is expected to sign the legislation. A spokeswoman for

the mayor said that he supports the intent of the bill but that his administration will review it.

Backers of the cashless model say the benefits include greater efficiency and eliminating the risk of theft, but opponents say millions of Americans still rely on cash.

In adopting the ban on cashless businesses, New York City joins a growing backlash against the digital-only economy.

Philadelphia became the

first U.S. city to ban cashless stores last year. San Francisco and New Jersey passed similar measures soon after. Only one jurisdiction required businesses to accept cash before 2019: Massachusetts, which passed a law nearly 40 years ago.

Backers of the New York City bill said that hundreds of thousands of city residents don't have bank accounts or credit cards and that others simply prefer to use cash.

2020 will be super

New films coming from DC, Marvel and Valiant Comic universes

BY DAVID BETANCOURT
The Washington Post

This new year won't give us another "Avengers" movie, but there will still be plenty of superheroes on the big screen. Warner Bros. and DC Comics are releasing films featuring their two most popular characters of the moment (Wonder Woman and Harley Quinn), Valiant Comics is finally seeing one of its heroes hit the big screen (Bloodshot) and a Venom sequel hopes to best its previous movie's \$856 million worldwide haul.

Marvel Studios is looking to provide a mild Avengers flashback ("Black Widow") before moving on to out-of-this-world aspirations ("Eternals").

Here's the upcoming superhero movie slate for 2020.

'Birds of Prey,' Feb. 7

Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie) gets a new movie and a new team all in one film in this post-Joker-breakup adventure (no Jared Leto in sight, but no worries, he appears later on this list). Helping Quinn in the fight are lethal archer the Huntress (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), ultrasonic-voiced Black Canary (Jurnee Smollett-Bell), quick-handed Cassandra Cain (Ella Jay Basco) and veteran Gotham City cop Renee Montoya (Rosie Perez), as they go up against a Batman villain not commonly known by the general public (Ewan McGregor's Black Mask).

'Bloodshot,' March 13

Vin Diesel gets a superhero role with a lot more lines than when he played Groot in the "Guardians of the Galaxy" series. He stars as an indestructible soldier looking to put together the mystery of a past he can't remember. This is the first live-action film from the Valiant Comics universe, which features other heroes hoping to make it to the movies, such as X-O Manowar and Shadowman.

'The New Mutants,' April 3

Can a classic Marvel Comics series make for a good horror movie without the involvement of Marvel Studios? There's a scary thought. "The New Mutants" is Twentieth Century Fox's last stand with the X-Men universe as this film wrapped before it merged with Disney. Whether it will link to whatever Disney has planned for the X-Men is unknown. What we do know is this film features young mutants from that universe, as they get in touch with their powers for the first time while in a very creepy, prisonlike institution of some kind. Magik's (Anya Taylor-Joy) mystic sword looks cool, though.

'Black Widow,' May 1

Scarlett Johansson finally gets a solo-starring turn as superhero/Russian spy Natasha Romanoff. This movie obviously takes place before her death in "Avengers: Endgame" and involves her connecting some dots about her past. David Harbour also stars as Russia's version of Captain America, the Red Guardian.

'Wonder Woman 1984,' June 5

Is this DC's most anticipated sequel ever? "Wonder Woman" was DC's first undisputed hit of the Justice League era and this follow-up, set in Washington in the 1980s, could be the biggest superhero hit of 2020. Going up against Gal Gadot's Princess Diana is Pedro Pascal's Max Lord, and Chris Pine's Steve Trevor is back.

'Morbius,' July 31

Jared Leto's Joker didn't work out at DC, so he's giving the role of Marvel's second-most-popular vampire a try. (We see you, Blade.) Morbius the Living Vampire is a classic Marvel character, and is another example of Sony trying to milk its rights to Spider-Man. A rumored appearance by J.K. Simmons as J. Jonah Jameson could go a long way.

'Venom 2,' Oct. 2

Speaking of Spider-Man villain movies, Tom Hardy's Venom is back. This time, he'll likely be up against the villain everyone wanted to see in the first movie (Carnage, played by Woody Harrelson). Both Hardy and Harrelson should get some top-notch CGI movement instruction from "Venom 2" director Andy Serkis.

'Eternals,' Nov. 6

So far all we know about "Eternals" is that Kumail Nanjiani got super-swole for his role as Kingo, and the film will also feature Salma Hayek, Angelina Jolie, Gemma Chan, Brian Tyree Henry and "Game of Thrones" actors Richard Madden and Kit Harington. The Eternals are an alien race with the power of apparently being Marvel Studios' next big thing.

2 elephants escape from circus, take tour of Russia

Associated Press

Russia is said to be the place where bears roam the streets — but for a short while, it was a free-for-all for elephants.

Residents of Yekaterinburg were flabbergasted to see a couple of elephants wandering the snowy streets of Russia's third-largest city after they escaped from a circus.

Unreceptive to attempts to bring her back, one of the female elephants crossed

a busy street and headed to a residential building to roll and cavort in the snow on Thursday. One man who tried to stop her by holding on to her trunk was pushed across the street, his feet sliding on the ice.

The local circus said the two elephants — Karla and Ranni — belonged to an Italian company that ran a show in Yekaterinburg during the New Year holidays.

When its troupe tried to load the animals into a truck to head to the next destination,

they resisted and walked away. The circus said that Ranni loitered near the loading point but the more adventurous Karla decided to take a tour of the city.

Handlers finally got a rope around one of the elephant's front legs, but it took a dozen people to pull her back. She reluctantly obeyed after playing in the snow.

"The elephants wanted to get some new experiences before a long journey, and they got them," the circus commented.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Man built bomb to hurt ex-girlfriend

MS LAUREL — A Mississippi man is accused of creating an improvised explosive device in his home after watching internet videos about bomb making, prosecutors say.

Brian Richard Sanders intended to maim or kill his ex-girlfriend, a special agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives wrote in a criminal complaint.

Federal agents and the Biloxi police bomb squad searched Sanders' home in Laurel, the complaint states. The agents say they found the bomb, two bottles of black powder, a fuse, several guns and ammunition.

Sanders' ex-girlfriend had been living with him in Laurel. The two had a dispute over drug use in the home and she took his motorcycle and car when she left the residence, the complaint states.

Man charged after mom left in feces-filled home

IA BRANDON — A man whose elderly mother was found in a feces-filled house with 18 dogs in northeast Iowa has been given jail time and probation.

The Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier reported that David Rogers, 61, was sentenced to a year in jail with all but 60 days suspended. He also will have to serve two years of probation. He'd pleaded guilty to reckless dependent adult abuse with injury, two counts of animal neglect with serious injury or death and to 11 counts of animal neglect.

Rogers and his mother lived in a Brandon home and last August he went to a hospital for a lengthy stay without making arrangements for care of his mother or the dogs, authorities

said.

The house floor was covered in debris and several inches of feces, authorities said. A shower was filled with garbage and the remains of two dogs were found in the kitchen.

Vaccine fights 'swamp cancer' in wild ponies

VA CHINCOTEAGUE — A vaccination program to protect a Virginia island's wild horses from a swamp disease that killed seven ponies in 2018 is showing encouraging results, the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company said.

The fire company, which manages the herd, said it will continue giving yearly boosters to the Chincoteague ponies as part of its efforts to prevent Pythiosis, also called "swamp cancer." The disease comes from a fungus-like organism that leaves ponies with painful lesions, The Salisbury (Md.) Daily Times reported. While it can be curable, it can cost thousands of dollars to treat.

2 thieves take \$200K from mall jewelry store

NC RALEIGH — Two people wearing hooded sweatshirts robbed a jewelry store during the day at a North Carolina mall, taking at least \$200,000 in merchandise, authorities said.

Raleigh police responded to the Triangle Town Center mall for a reported smash-and-grab robbery at Regent Jewelers, news outlets reported. A person in a green hoodie smashed the display cases using a hammer-shaped object and another person in a black hoodie took the merchandise, according to surveillance footage.

Owner Khaleel Mohammed said the thieves targeted the high-end cases and took an estimated \$200,000 to \$250,000 in

Rolex watches and gold chains.

Ex-waitress sentenced for slot machine scam

PA WILKES-BARRE — A former cocktail waitress at a Pennsylvania casino has been sentenced for her role in a \$420,000 slot machine scam.

Rochelle Poszeluznyj, 39, was sentenced to two years of probation with the first six months on house arrest, The Morning Call reported.

Poszeluznyj pleaded guilty to a federal money-laundering conspiracy charge. Prosecutors said she passed on players' card information to a former casino executive, Robert Joseph Pellegrini, and her boyfriend, Mark Joseph Heltzel, between May 2014 and April 2015 to defraud the Mohegan Sun Pocono casino.

Teacher accused of recording 2 females

IA BETTENDORF — A high school science teacher in Davenport has been accused of secretly recording nude videos of two females who'd stayed at his Bettendorf home.

Clinton Van Fossen, 58, is charged with five misdemeanor counts of invasion of privacy and with other crimes.

Davenport Community School District officials said Friday that Van Fossen had been placed on administrative leave with pay. He is listed as a science teacher at Davenport West High School.

Bettendorf officers searched Van Fossen's home and seized spy cameras from a bedroom and from a hallway. Van Fossen denied any knowledge of the cameras. However, police said officers saw video from October that showed Van Fossen with his cellphone looking

in the direction of the camera and then manually adjusting the camera's direction.

Police kill man who held frying pan and cleaver

TX DENTON — A police officer in north Texas fatally shot a man at an apartment complex early Tuesday after the man refused to drop a frying pan and cleaver that he was holding, officials said.

One officer was stabbed in the melee but officials said the injuries aren't life-threatening.

The officers responded to an apartment complex in Denton, about 35 miles north of Dallas, after several people called 911 to report a man was banging on doors and shattering light fixtures in a hallway of the complex, Denton city officials said in a press release.

Police used a Taser on the man but it was ineffective, so an officer opened fire, striking the man, the press release said.

City frustrated with theft of historic bricks

OH NELSONVILLE — The ongoing theft of historic bricks has frustrated officials in a small Ohio city who spent a lot of time tracking down the bricks for downtown sidewalks.

At least 50 so-called Nelsonville Star Bricks have been taken since early January, said Nelsonville city manager Chuck Barga. The bricks are a legacy of the city's brick-making history, and won first prize at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. Each has a star imprinted in its center.

Though millions of Star Bricks were manufactured between the late 1800s and about 1920, they are no longer made, which makes the thefts all the more frustrating, Barga said.

From wire reports

Your objective source for military news
updated 24/7 from bases
around the world.
Now online at www.stripes.com.

STARS AND STRIPES®

On Basketball

Player ballots make mockery of All-Star selection process

Associated Press

Once again, LeBron James and Giannis Antetokounmpo are All-Star captains.

Once again, the fans — mostly, anyway — got who they wanted as the game's starters.

And once again, too many NBA players made a mockery of their vote to decide which colleagues should start the league's showcase exhibition.

It's time for the NBA to take the vote away from the players. It's clear too many don't want the job.

While fan voting pretty much set the tone for who will start Feb. 16 in Chicago, an AP analysis of the numbers shows that 380 players took part in the voting. The players, like the media and fans, voted for three front-court players and two guards apiece from the Eastern and Western Conferences.

A look inside those numbers reveals a growing concern.

Antetokounmpo — the league's reigning MVP — got the most player votes, with 258. That means 67.9% of players who voted thought he was worthy of an All-Star start. More importantly, that means 32.1% of players who voted thought he should either come off the bench or not be an All-Star at all.

James didn't appear on 38.2% of the player ballots. If there's one thing that can be agreed upon, it's that Antetokounmpo and James have been among the three best forwards in their conferences this season.

Sounds reasonable, but apparently it's not obvious to their peers.

James and Antetokounmpo were the only two starters who got more than 50% of the vote from their player peers. Put another way: 52% of players didn't think Anthony Davis should be a starter; 56% didn't

vote for Luka Doncic; 59% didn't vote for Kawhi Leonard; 62% didn't vote for James Harden, 67% didn't vote for Joel Embiid; 70% didn't vote for Kemba Walker; 72% didn't vote for Pascal Siakam; and a whopping 83% of players didn't vote for Trae Young.

If there can be two days of outrage and counting over Derek Jeter getting 99.7% of the vote from the Baseball Writers Association of America for inclusion into the Hall of Fame — missing a unanimous selection by one measly vote — then there should be some outrage for this.

The Pro Bowl is less than ideal, given that players who made the Super Bowl aren't taking part and neither are plenty of other players who could be on the field in Orlando this weekend. The NHL All-Star game this weekend is missing Alex Ovechkin. The latter innings of baseball's All-Star Game are usually featuring players who most fans didn't vote for, because the starters' evenings have long been over.

And the NBA's All-Star game gets ripped most every year for being a no-defense exhibition.

It's doubtful any of that will change. The days of Pete Rose running over Ray Fosse at home plate in an All-Star game are over.

But that doesn't mean NBA players shouldn't take the vote seriously.

The players made their voice heard in some cases. Fan pick Kyrie Irving wasn't named a starter; Walker got that nod instead — based on player and media voting.

Irving or Walker can be a legit debate, but some player voting was comical.

■ Zion Williamson got two votes, which on the surface doesn't look so bad; after all,

he was the No. 1 overall pick last season. Consider, however, that the two votes were cast before he made his NBA debut on Wednesday.

■ Tacko Fall — the 7-foot-5 Boston center who has spent most of his rookie season in the G League — got seven votes from players. He has appeared in four games.

■ Justise Winslow, who has missed most of Miami's season, got one vote. So did Heat teammate KZ Okpala, which is one more vote than he has NBA points.

■ Thanasis Antetokounmpo got six player votes. Kostas Antetokounmpo got five, a big number for someone who hasn't scored yet this season. Perhaps players got confused. Perhaps those votes were supposed to go to Giannis. Who knows?

■ Bol Bol got a vote. He hasn't played yet. Miye Oni got a vote. He's made three scoreless appearances. The list of 'this guy got votes?' goes on and on and on and on.

In all, 292 players got at least one vote from their peers. That's a new record, three more than the ridiculous number set last year.

The system changed four years ago after 768,112 people voted for Zaza Pachulia in 2016 and nearly made him a starter. Pachulia's "candidacy" was fueled by social-media influencers and many votes from the former Soviet republic of Georgia, his homeland.

The NBA was right to act then and change the rules, going to a formula where starters get picked in a system where fans make up 50% of the vote, media 25% and players the other 25%.

Change the rules again.

NBA roundup

James, Lakers top Nets

Associated Press

NEW YORK — LeBron James had 27 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists in his 10th triple-double of the season, and the Los Angeles Lakers made a season-high 19 three-pointers to pull away and beat the Brooklyn Nets 128-113 on Thursday night.

James closed within 17 points of Kobe Bryant for third place on the NBA's career scoring list with a flurry in the fourth quarter. He can pass Bryant on Saturday at Philadelphia, where the five-time champion with the Lakers was born.

James has 33,626 points. Bryant finished with 33,643.

Anthony Davis had 16 points and 11 rebounds, and Dwight Howard finished with 14 points and 12 boards in his first start of the season.

Kyrie Irving scored 20 points after missing a game with right hamstring tightness, but the Nets lost their fifth straight. Brooklyn has won just two of its last 14 games.

Mavericks 133, Trail Blazers 125: Luka Doncic scored 27 points to go with nine assists and six rebounds, and Dallas made 22 three-pointers in a win over host Portland.

The 43 combined three-pointers made by Dallas and Portland tied an NBA record.

One game after scoring a career-high 61 points, Damian Lillard finished with 47 points for Portland in the loss. He became the first player in franchise history to score 100 points over two games.

Wizards 124, Cavaliers 112: Bradley Beal scored 36 points and weary Washington, overcoming an overtime loss and early morning arrival in town, defeated visiting Cleveland.

Cleveland has lost six in a row and 11 of 13.

Australian Open

Youth served: Gauff wins, Serena falls

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Perhaps Serena Williams, now 38, will win a 24th Grand Slam title someday.

And maybe Coco Gauff, still just 15, never will earn her first major championship.

Sure felt, though, as if a generational shift was being signaled Friday at the Australian Open, with a pair of monumentally significant third-round results hours apart in the same stadium: a surprising first-week loss by Williams, then a historic victory by Gauff.

First, Williams faltered down the stretch for her earliest exit at Melbourne Park in 14 years, a 6-4, 6-7 (2), 7-5 loss to 27th-seeded Wang Qiang of China. It pushed Williams' gap between Slam trophies to three years.

"I'm way too old to play like this at this stage of my career," Williams said. "Definitely going to be training tomorrow, that's first and foremost — to make sure I don't do this again."

Gauff also was planning a practice session for Saturday,

but hers was to prepare for a fourth-round match.

That's because the 67th-ranked Gauff took the latest step in her quick progression, becoming the youngest player in the professional era to eliminate the defending women's champion at the Australian Open, beating former No. 1 Naomi Osaka 6-3, 6-4.

Only once the last point had been played did the preternaturally poised Gauff turn into a rather typical teen, joking about wanting to take "a selfie for Instagram" with Rod Laver, the 11-time major champion after whom the tournament's main stadium is named.

"Honestly, like, what is my life? Like, oh, my gosh!" Gauff told the crowd. "Two years ago, I lost first round in juniors and now I'm here. This is crazy."

It certainly is remarkable.

With a booming serve, a top-flight backhand and a winner's mentality, Gauff reversed the result from the first time she was across the net from Osaka, a former No. 1 who already owns two major titles at the age

of 22.

When they played each other at the U.S. Open last September, Osaka won in two quick sets and then consoled Gauff, encouraging her to speak to the spectators who were pulling for her.

One reminder of just how young Gauff is: Most of the entrants in this year's junior Australian Open are older than she is.

Another: She doesn't have an official driver's license quite yet, stuck practicing behind the wheel with a learner's permit.

But put a tennis racket in her hands and move out of the way: Gauff is now 8-2 in her nascent Grand Slam career, with three of those wins coming against women who have multiple major titles. Her next match is against No. 14 Sofia Kenin, a 21-year-old American who beat Zhang Shuai of China 7-5, 7-6 (7).

The most intrigue in men's action came at the very end of the night — at nearly 1 a.m., actually, when Roger Federer reeled off the last six points to

edge 47th-ranked Australian John Millman 4-6, 7-6 (2), 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (8).

Federer had lost to Millman at the 2018 U.S. Open and it sure seemed this one might be headed that way again.

"Oh, God, it was tough," Federer said.

Williams vs. Wang was a rematch from Flushing Meadows last season — and the reverse result also happened for them. At the U.S. Open, Williams won 6-0, 6-1 in 44 minutes.

Wang credited that with prompting her to spend more time in the gym so she could add more oomph to her shots.

"I always believed I could do this one day," Wang said with a laugh. "I didn't know which day."

Like Wang, Gauff was much better Friday than in New York. Gauff's improvement revealed itself in her serving — she put 15 of her initial 16 first serves in play — and her steadiness.

Gauff declared herself more calm for this matchup.

"That," she decided, "made the difference."

College basketball roundup

Brunk, Hunter help Indiana knock off Michigan State

Associated Press

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — Joey Brunk made an immediate impact from the moment he arrived on Indiana's campus.

Jerome Hunter needed to be more patient.

On Thursday night, the graduate transfer from Butler and the redshirt freshman teamed up for the Hoosiers' final flurry. Brunk scored 14 points including a layup with 1 minute to go, Hunter grabbed a rebound with 0.2 seconds left and made two free throws to seal Indiana's 67-63 victory over No. 11 Michigan State.

"He had 14 and six (rebounds) tonight and he earned

them all," coach Archie Miller said when asked about Brunk. "It's not measurable what Joey has meant to us. He's giving his absolute max on everything he does. He's improved as much as any player I've been around from month to month."

Without Brunk — or Hunter — the Hoosiers may not have salvaged this one.

The Hoosiers (15-4, 5-3 Big Ten) have won two straight, four of their last five and now trail conference co-leaders Michigan State and Illinois by just one game.

No. 12 Oregon 79, Southern California 70 (20T): Chris Duarte had 30 points and 11

rebounds, Payton Pritchard reached a Pac-12 milestone for career points, rebounds and assists, and the host Ducks outlasted the Trojans in double overtime.

With 24 points and seven assists, Pritchard became the first player in the Pac-12 to reach 1,500 career points, 600 assists and 500 rebounds.

No. 23 Colorado 78, Washington State 56: Lucas Siewert scored 16 points, D'Shawn Schwartz had 13 and the host Buffaloes pulled away in the second half to beat the Cougars.

Evan Battey added 12 points and joined Siewert in pulling

down 10 rebounds for Colorado (15-4, 4-2 Pac-12), which bounced back from a loss at Arizona last week. The Buffaloes outrebounded the Cougars 45-28 despite playing without Tyler Bey, the leading rebounder in the conference.

No. 25 Houston 63, UConn 59: DeJon Jarreau had 18 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists, Caleb Mills scored 20 points and the Cougars beat the visiting Huskies for their third straight win.

Jarreau and Mills combined for the final 17 points, including 12 free throws, as Houston overcame a six-point deficit in the final 5:15.

Giants quarterback Manning retires

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Eli Manning retired from the NFL after 16 seasons just the way he wanted, as a hard-working, career-long New York Giant who did it his way in leading the franchise to two Super Bowls.

Saying he had no regrets, the 39-year-old Manning officially ended his career on Friday at a packed news conference surrounded by his family, friends and former teammates and coaches and two Lombardi trophies.

Manning said he had no immediate plans, although he admitted he would miss the time with teammates, the preparation and the beers in the back of the bus after wins. He plans to spend some time reliving the positive memories, enjoying himself and being an assistant coach on his daughter's third-grade basketball team. A job with the Giants is a possibility, he said.

"From the very first moment I did it my way," said the low-key Manning, who comes from a well-known football family. "I could not be someone other

than who I am. Undoubtedly, I would have made the fans, the media, even the front office more comfortable being a rah-rah guy.

"But that's not me," Manning said. "Ultimately I choose to believe that my teammates and the fans learned to appreciate that. What they got was pure unadulterated Eli."

The Giants also got their career leading passer in almost every category in a career that started after New York acquired him on draft day in 2004 from the Chargers. He led the Giants to titles after the 2007

and '11 seasons, beating the Patriots both times.

Manning had a string of 222 consecutive starts between the end of his rookie year until late into the 2017 season. His final season ended with him being replaced by rookie Daniel Jones as the starting quarterback after two games. He did have a final hurrah, starting and winning a game over the Dolphins after Jones was hurt in December.

"That was my farewell and a moment I will cherish forever," he said.

Sports briefs

LSU rewards Orgeron with extension through 2026

Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. — LSU coach Ed Orgeron has agreed to a new contract extension worth more than \$7 million annually and which runs through the 2026 season, the university announced on Friday.

The new six-year agreement comes on the heels of the Tigers' 15-0 national championship season that concluded earlier this month with a 42-25 victory over Clemson in the national title game in New Orleans.

Contract language, which remains subject to approval by the board of supervisors, calls for a base salary of \$6 million plus various performance-related bonuses.

"Coach O has set a new standard at LSU," athletic director Scott Woodward said. "He has proven that he is not only a championship coach, but also a leader of a program committed to doing things the right way. He has represented our institution and our state with great pride, on and off the field of play."

Woodward added that the new contract "should make clear our commitment to Coach O and the direction of our foot-

ball program."

The 58-year-old Orgeron was the consensus 2019 national coach of the year.

He has led LSU to a 40-9 mark since initially taking over on an interim basis in 2016. Of his 40 wins at LSU, 12 have come against teams ranked in the top 10 at the time of the match-up, including seven in 2019, which stands as the most in college football history for a single season.

His 40 wins through the first 49 games of his career ties for the most by any coach in LSU history.

"I'm happy to represent LSU and this great state," Orgeron said. "My family and I are very grateful, and I look forward to working as hard as possible to continue to win championships at LSU."

Shiffrin earns first WC victory of 2020

BANSKO, Bulgaria — Mikaela Shiffrin mastered a tricky course to win a women's World Cup downhill Friday for her fifth victory of the season and first in 2020.

The three-time overall champion from the United States

was one third of a second off the lead at her second split but remained flawless on the rest of the technically demanding Marc Girardelli course.

"I was really excited about this track and the challenges in it," said Shiffrin, who earned the 65th victory of her career. "It's not easy. It's a little bit scary. At the start I was like, 'OK, you got to get tough now.' It's for sure a nice track for me."

Shiffrin beat Federica Brignone of Italy by 0.18 seconds, with Joana Haehlen of Switzerland five hundredths further back in third.

4-time All-Star Beard retires after 15 years

LOS ANGELES — Alana Beard, a two-time Defensive Player of the Year who won a WNBA championship with the Los Angeles Sparks, is retiring after 15 years.

In 2016, she helped the Sparks win a third WNBA title. She is third in all-time steals in the league with 710. Beard won Defensive Player of the Year honors in 2017 and '18. She also played for the Washington Mystics.

The guard-forward from Shreveport, La., was a four-time All-Star.

"I am so grateful for the many years I've been able to play the game I love, for the amazing players I've had the opportunity to play with and compete against, and for the tremendous fans I've been lucky enough to play in front of," Beard said. "I am excited for my next chapter and ready to pursue my next career."

Brown released after judge grants bail

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — NFL free agent Antonio Brown was granted bail on Friday after turning himself in at a Florida jail on charges that he and his trainer attacked the driver of a moving truck that carried some of his possessions from California.

Broward County Judge Corey Amanda Cawthon set a \$110,000 bond and imposed conditions including a GPS monitor, no possession of weapons or ammunition, a mental health evaluation and surrender of his passport. Brown also must undergo random drug testing.