

## Iran raid on S. Korean ship ups tensions

*Associated Press*

SEOUL — Armed Iranian Revolutionary Guard troops stormed a South Korean tanker and forced the ship to change course and travel to Iran, the vessel's owner said Tuesday, the latest maritime seizure by Tehran amid heightened tensions with the West over its nuclear program.

The military raid on Monday on the MT Hankuk Chemi was at odds with Iranian explanations that they stopped the vessel for polluting the waters of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Instead, it appeared the Islamic Republic sought to increase its leverage over Seoul ahead of negotiations over billions of dollars in Iranian assets frozen in South Korean banks amid a U.S. pressure campaign targeting Iran.

An Iranian government spokesman, when asked on Tuesday about the seizure, offered Tehran's bluntest acknowledgement yet of a link with the frozen assets.

"If anybody is to be called a hostage taker, it is the South Korean government that has taken our more than \$7 billion hostage under a futile pretext," spokesman Ali Rabiei said.

Iran on Monday also began enriching uranium up to 20%, a small technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%, at its underground Fordo facility. That move ap-

peared aimed at pressuring the U.S. in the final days of President Donald Trump's administration, which unilaterally withdrew from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers.

An official at DM Shipping Co. Ltd. of Busan, South Korea, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity as he wasn't authorized to talk to journalists, offered details of the Hankuk Chemi's seizure. The vessel had been traveling from Jubail, Saudi Arabia, to Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates when Iranian forces reached the ship and said they would board it.

Initially, Iranian forces said they wanted to run an unspecified check on the ship, the official said. As the vessel's captain spoke to company security officials back in South Korea, armed Iranian troops stormed the tanker as an Iranian helicopter flew overhead, the official said. The troops demanded the captain sail the tanker into Iranian waters over an unspecified investigation and refused to explain themselves, the official added.

The company has since been unable to reach the captain, the official said. Security cameras installed on the ship that initially relayed footage of the scene on the deck to the company are now turned off, the official

said.

The U.S. Navy's Mideast-based 5th Fleet routinely patrols the area along with an American-led coalition monitoring the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of the world's oil passes. A separate European-led effort also operates there.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said Tuesday it plans to dispatch a delegation of officials to Iran for talks on securing the early release of the ship and its crew members. The crew included sailors from Indonesia, Myanmar, South Korea and Vietnam, according to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. South Korea's Defense Ministry said it was sending its anti-piracy unit to near the Strait of Hormuz — a 4,400-ton-class destroyer with about 300 troops.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Choi Youngsam said Iranian officials have assured South Korea that the ship's crew were all safe.

The U.S. State Department joined South Korea in calling for the tanker's immediate release, accusing Iran of threatening "navigational rights and freedoms" in the Persian Gulf in order to "extort the international community into relieving the pressure of sanctions."

## Yokosuka Naval Hospital in next phase of vaccinations

**BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS**

*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The naval hospital at the home of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet began the next phase of coronavirus inoculations on Tuesday by vaccinating a group it designated "highest priority fleet personnel."

The move indicates progress toward vaccinating everyone at Yokosuka Naval Base against COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus.

"While vaccine remains in extremely limited supply, we are excited to transition to [phase] 1b and begin administering vaccine to the highest priority fleet personnel today!" the Yokosuka Naval Hospital wrote on its Facebook page Tuesday.

Six U.S. installations in Japan, including Yokosuka, received about 8,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine Dec. 26 and began vaccinating phase 1a personnel: health care providers, first responders and security forces.

Yokosuka was the only one of the six to report moving past the first phase of inoculations. Spokespeople at Camp Zama, Naval Hospital Okinawa, Misawa Air Base and Yokota Air Base said Tuesday they have not yet moved into phase 1b.

A representative for Kadena Air Base on Okinawa could not be reached Tuesday.

Tuesday marked the first day that sailors and civilians outside frontline roles were eligible for the vaccine at Yokosuka. Subjects must volunteer to be inoculated because the Moderna vaccine was approved by the Food

and Drug Administration for emergency use.

The Defense Department prioritized its vaccine distribution according to a phased sequence set out by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. After phase 1a comes phase 1b, a three-part category that covers "other essential workers."

That includes personnel involved with "critical national capabilities," followed by personnel preparing to deploy outside the continental U.S. and, finally, "other critical and essential support personnel."

The remaining population of service members, civilian workers and families are the end of the line, although those with a heightened risk for coronavirus are ahead of those deemed healthy.

# US cavalry unit begins Lithuania mission

*Stars and Stripes*

A Fort Hood, Texas-based cavalry officially began an eight-month mission in Lithuania, focused on deterring Russian aggression in the region, as it uncased its colors at a ceremony this week, Lithuanian and U.S. officials said.

The 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment took up position in Lithuania along with its heavy weaponry, including Abrams tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles.

Having a U.S. military presence in the region was key to deterring Russian aggression against the former Soviet Republic, said Lithuanian Defense Minister Ar-

vydas Anusauskas, who, along with U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania Robert Gilchrist, attended the ceremony Monday in Pa-brade, around 30 miles northeast of Vilnius and six miles from the border with Belarus.

When the unit arrived in Lithuania on Dec. 4, Anusauskas said Lithuania would welcome a permanent U.S. military presence on its soil, saying it would strengthen “the security of the entire eastern flank of NATO.”

“We are prepared to host U.S. forces and provide all conditions they need to carry on with training cycles and completion of

tasks,” he said at the time.

The Army has, since 2019, been sending a battalion-sized element to Lithuania for most of their nine-month deployments, adding firepower near the heavily militarized Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, which is wedged between Lithuania and its southern neighbor, Poland.

The 2nd Battalion is part of the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division rotation in Europe, which is expected to last through the summer. The majority of the regiment’s force is anchored in Poland, but smaller elements are spread out along NATO’s eastern flank.

## Air Force moves drones, airmen to Romania to boost Black Sea efforts

**By JOHN VANDIVER**

*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — The Air Force has moved 90 airmen and an unspecified number of MQ-9 Reaper drones to Campia Turzii Air Base in Romania, boosting military capabilities in a region where allies have expressed concern about Russia’s military might.

“The forward and ready positioning of our MQ-9s at this key strategic location reassures our allies and partners, while also sending a message to our adversaries, that we can quickly respond to any emergent threat,” Gen. Jeff Harrigian, U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa commander, said in a statement Monday.

The MQ-9s will operate under the 31st Expeditionary Operations Group, Detachment 1, until the squadron is fully operational, the statement said. The units are subordinate to the 31st Fighter Wing at Aviano Air Base in Italy.

The Reapers will boost surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities in the Black Sea region, where the U.S. has regularly accused Russia of dangerous intercepts of aircraft, and other incidents have caused tensions to flare. In 2008, Russia fought a brief war in the region with the Republic of Georgia, and still has troops in that country’s breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In 2018, Russia opened fire on Ukrainian vessels in the Black Sea’s Kerch Strait and took Ukrainian

sailors captive.

The MQ-9s also will “fly freedom of maneuver missions and integrate with joint and coalition forces in the region,” USAFE said. Former Defense Secretary Mark Esper in August said he envisioned a larger force in Romania and that more deployments there were likely. Last year, USAFE sent MQ-9 Reaper drones based in Poland on a temporary rotation to the Turzii site. Air Force fighter jets also have made rotations to Campia Turzii.

The Pentagon has spent millions of dollars in recent years to upgrade the Cold War-era base in central Romania and enable larger missions, and the National Defense Authorization Act for 2021 includes \$130.5 million to renovate Campia Turzii, in what would be the biggest overseas military construction project under the Pentagon’s European Deterrence Initiative.

That initiative was launched shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine’s Crimea region and instigated conflict eastern Ukraine in 2014, to reassure allies of a continued U.S. commitment to their security.

The funds are intended for upgrades including dangerous cargo landing pads, more parking aprons for tactical fighter aircraft squadron rotations, fuel storage and a depot to support a deployable air base system.

Campia Turzii currently hosts two squadrons of Romanian-built LanceR-C interceptors, a modernized version of the MiG-21, and two Puma helicopter squadrons.

## Army drill sergeant dies after being shot on interstate

*USA Today*

Authorities in Texas are investigating the death of Staff Sgt. Jessica Mitchell, found fatally shot on a San Antonio interstate on New Year’s Day.

Police officers responding to a call of a stranded vehicle in the left lane on Interstate 10 shortly after 2 a.m. local time found a white Dodge Challenger with multiple bullet holes to the driver’s side door and window, San Antonio police said in a statement.

“Officers opened the vehicle door and checked for a pulse on the victim (who) appeared to have been struck multiple times,” police said.

Mitchell was transported by ambulance to University Hospital where she was pronounced dead. The investigation is ongoing.

Joint Base San Antonio issued a statement saying Mitchell’s death is being investigated by the Army’s Criminal Investigation Division.

Mitchell, 30, was on holiday leave from her assignment as a dental specialist and drill sergeant at Army Medical Center of Excellence on JBSA-Fort Sam Houston.

Mitchell had a 10-year-old son, according to Francesca Toby, Mitchell’s childhood friend.

# Trump: I'll 'fight like hell' to keep job

*Associated Press*

DALTON, Ga. — With mounting desperation, Donald Trump declared he would “fight like hell” to hold on to the presidency and appealed to Republican lawmakers to reverse his election loss to Joe Biden when they convene this week to confirm the Electoral College vote.

Electoral voters won by President-elect Biden are “not gonna take this White House!” he shouted as supporters cheered at an outdoor rally Monday night in Georgia. Trump’s announced purpose for the trip was to boost Republican Senate candidates in Tuesday’s runoff election, but he spent much of his speech complaining bitterly about his election loss — which he in-

sists he won “by a lot.”

Earlier, in Washington, he pressed Republican lawmakers to formally object Wednesday at a joint session of Congress that is to confirm Biden’s victory in the Electoral College, itself a confirmation of Biden’s nationwide victory Nov. 3.

Though he got nothing but cheers Monday night, Trump’s attempt to overturn the presidential election is splitting the Republican Party. Some GOP lawmakers backing him are rushing ahead, despite an outpouring of condemnation from current and former party officials warning that the effort is undermining Americans’ faith in democracy. All 10 living former defense secretaries wrote in an op-ed that “the time for ques-

tioning the results has passed.”

It’s unclear the extent to which GOP leaders in Congress will be able to control Wednesday’s joint session, which could drag into the night, though the challenges to the election are all but certain to fail. Trump himself is whipping up crowds for a Wednesday rally near the White House.

Vice President Mike Pence, who is under pressure to tip the results for Trump, will be closely watched as he presides in a ceremonial role over Wednesday’s joint session.

“I promise you this: On Wednesday, we’ll have our day in Congress,” Pence said while himself campaigning in Georgia ahead of Tuesday’s runoff elections that will determine control of the Senate.

## CIA’s new recruitment website aims to diversify agency

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Wanted: Spies from all backgrounds and walks of life.

Striving to further diversify its ranks, the CIA launched a new website Monday to find top-tier candidates who will bring a broader range of life experiences to the nation’s premier intelligence agency.

The days of all American spies being white male graduates from Ivy League schools are long gone. The CIA director is a woman and women head all five of the agency’s branches, including the directorates of science and technology, operations and digital innovation.

But while the CIA has been diversifying for years, intelligence agencies still lag

the federal workforce in minority representation. With thousands of job applicants annually, the CIA wants to do more to ensure its workforce reflects national demographics.

The revamped website has links for browsing CIA jobs complete with starting salaries and requirements, sections on working at the agency, and a streamlined application process.

“We’ve come a long way since I applied by simply mailing a letter marked ‘CIA, Washington, D.C.’,” said CIA Director Gina Haspel, who joined the agency in 1985. She said in a statement that she hopes the new website piques the interest of talented Americans and gives them a sense of

the “dynamic environment that awaits them here.”

Haspel has made recruitment a priority since she became the first female director in May 2018. Since then, the CIA has started advertising on streaming services, launched an Instagram account and an online “onion site,” a feature that makes both the information provider and the person accessing information more difficult to trace.

Last year, the CIA designated its first executive for Hispanic engagement, Ilka Rodriguez-Diaz, a veteran of more than three decades with the agency. She first joined after attending a CIA job fair in New Jersey.

## Proud Boys leader arrested, accused of burning banner

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Police in the nation’s capital on Monday arrested the leader of the Proud Boys, who is accused of burning a Black Lives Matter banner that was torn down from a historic Black church in Washington last month.

Henry “Enrique” Tarrio, 36, was arrested by Metropolitan Police Department officers after he arrived in Washington ahead of protests planned by supporters of President Donald Trump to coincide with the congressional vote expected Wednesday to affirm Joe Biden’s election victory.

Tarrio was taken into custody after a

warrant was issued for his arrest for destruction of property, police said. He was also facing weapons charges after officers found him with two high-capacity firearm magazines when he was arrested, a police spokesman said.

A pro-Trump rally in December ended in violence as hundreds of Trump supporters, some wearing the signature black and yellow of the Proud Boys, sought out confrontations with activists and counter-protesters attempting to bar them from Black Lives Matter Plaza, near the White House. By nightfall, vandals tore down a Black Lives Matter banner and sign from

two historic Black churches and set the banner ablaze.

Video posted online showed people pouring an accelerant on a Black Lives Matter banner near the Asbury United Methodist Church and setting it ablaze last month. One of the videos showed someone walking up about a minute later and using a fire extinguisher to put out the flames.

Tarrio told The Washington Post he had participated in the burning of the Black Lives Matter banner and said he would plead guilty to destruction of property and pay the church the cost of the banner.



# Pharmacist thought virus vaccine was unsafe

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — A Wisconsin pharmacist convinced the world was “crashing down” told police he tried to ruin hundreds of doses of the coronavirus vaccine because he believed the shots would mutate people’s DNA, according to court documents released Monday.

Police in Grafton, about 20 miles north of Milwaukee, arrested Advocate Aurora Health pharmacist Steven Brandenburg last week following an investigation into the 57 spoiled vials of the Moderna vaccine, which officials say contained enough doses to inoculate more than 500 people. Charges are pending.

“He’d formed this belief they were unsafe,” Ozaukee County District Attorney Adam Gerol said during a virtual hearing. He added that Brandenburg was upset because he and his wife are divorcing, and an Aurora employee said Brandenburg had taken a gun to work twice.

A detective wrote in a probable cause statement that Brandenburg, 46, is an admitted conspiracy theorist and that he told investigators he intentionally tried to ruin the vaccine because it could hurt people by changing their DNA.

## New York

ALBANY — In an effort to speed up what has been a sluggish rollout of the coronavirus vaccine, New York’s governor threatened Monday to fine hospitals up to \$100,000 if they don’t finish their first round of inoculations by the end of the week.

Hospitals have been receiving vaccines over the past three weeks as part of a program prioritizing frontline medical workers. But Gov. Andrew Cuomo said that as of early Monday, hospitals had only administered the first dose of 46% of their allocated vaccines.

That amounts to roughly 300,000 out of roughly 650,000 allocated doses so far, according to Cuomo.

The Democrat blamed bureaucracy as the chief reason for delays, at public hospitals in particular.

## Texas

AUSTIN — Texas was on the brink Monday of surpassing a record 13,000 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 as the number of new cases after the Christmas holiday continued surging, including Rep. Kay Granger, who said she tested positive upon returning to Washington for the new Congress.

In a statement, Granger’s office said the 77-year-old Republican is asymptomatic and “feeling great!” It was unclear how she contracted the virus, but Granger, a ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee, had received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in December.

She had been scheduled to receive the second dose Wednesday but will now wait until she is through quarantining, said Michelle Koepp, a spokeswoman for Granger. People are expected to get some level of protection within a couple of weeks after the first shot, but full protection may not happen until a couple of weeks after the second shot.

Texas has set new highs for hospitalized COVID-19 patients seven times in the past eight days. Nearly 16,000 new cases were reported Monday, and along the U.S.-Mexico border, the small Texas city of Roma announced that longtime Police Chief Jose Garcia had died after contracting COVID-19. He had led the department for more than 27 years.

## Iowa

DES MOINES — Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds appears to be prepared to push schools to return students to classrooms this month, reinforcing her plans to prioritize in-person learning even when a local school board believes it’s too risky.

In November, the state approved requests for 90 school districts or buildings to go to online learning as virus cases escalated, causing many schools to run short of staff members as they tested positive or had to quarantine due to exposure. Student absenteeism also surged at many schools.

Eleven districts had been approved during December, but the Des Moines school district’s request on Dec. 28 was the first to be rejected since August.

Virus conditions deteriorated in Iowa in November with a spike in hospitalizations and deaths. Trends appeared to improve in early December, although the positivity rate in Iowa has started to tick back up again in recent weeks.

## Illinois

CHICAGO — Some Chicago Public Schools teachers expected to report to the classroom ahead of preschool students’ anticipated return next week stayed home Monday over coronavirus concerns.

The nation’s third-largest district plans to bring students back in phases. Starting next week, preschool and some special education students can return or continue remote

learning. Students in K-8 have the option Feb. 1. A date for high school students hasn’t been set.

The Chicago Teachers Union opposed the plan over safety. Dozens of aldermen also objected with concerns over health and racial equity. District data show that roughly 37% of eligible students planned to return, a number that was disproportionately white.

CPS officials said the plan is as safe for teachers as it is for principals, custodians and others who’ve worked through the pandemic.

Roughly 5,800 teachers and staff were expected in classrooms Monday, according to The Chicago Tribune. It wasn’t clear how many showed.

## Louisiana

BATON ROUGE — Louisiana pharmacy phone lines and websites were inundated Monday with people seeking the coronavirus vaccine, after the state unveiled the list of 107 pharmacies that will begin offering immunizations this week for people 70 and older.

With demand certain to outstrip limited supplies and interest running so high, the state website crashed within minutes of the information’s release. The Louisiana Department of Health quickly reworked the website to get the list back online.

Hoping to avoid long lines seen in other states with people awaiting vaccination, the health department stressed that appointments for the immunizations are required. Still, people started showing up at their local pharmacies and calling them days ahead of the expanded eligibility, seeking vaccines for themselves or elderly family. Monday’s release of the specific pharmacies offering the vaccine only heightened interest.

## Alabama

BIRMINGHAM — The mayor of Birmingham has been hospitalized with COVID-19 pneumonia, five days after announcing he tested positive for the coronavirus, officials said.

Birmingham Mayor Randall L. Woodfin was admitted to the hospital Monday night “to address symptoms connected to COVID pneumonia,” according to his doctor, the City of Birmingham tweeted.

The tweet said Woodfin remained “in good spirits and thanks everyone for their well wishes.”

Alabama on Monday hit a new high for the number of COVID-19 patients in state hospitals with more than 3,000 hospitalized.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Person hit by car while helping crash victims, then warned

**CT** WESTPORT — A pedestrian was struck by a vehicle on a Connecticut highway while helping victims of a previous car accident, state police said.

The person was hit in Westport and taken to a hospital with minor injuries, Hearst Connecticut Media reported.

State police said a driver from Buffalo, N.Y., tried to avoid the earlier crash in the center lane, veered into the right lane and struck the pedestrian, a 45-year-old who was trying to help the accident victims.

The person who was hit was given a verbal warning for “reckless use of the highway by a pedestrian,” state police said.

### Senior rescued from storm drain after its grate gave way

**NY** ISLIP — A man in his 90s was rescued after falling about 10 feet down a storm drain on Long Island, N.Y., firefighters said.

Fire officials said it appears a storm drain grate gave way when the man stepped on it in Central Islip. He was found by a neighbor who heard him moaning for help, authorities said. It took first responders about 45 minutes to get the man out, said Central Islip Fire Chief Christopher Portelli.

### Father's ashes stolen with woman's purse after wedding

**MS** GULFPORT — A Mississippi woman is looking for an urn carrying her father's ashes that was stolen along with her purse while she was celebrating her wedding.

The Sun Herald reported that Jen Mulaney Jones had the ashes in a black and gold urn inside her purse when she got married on New Year's Day at the beachfront Jones Park in Gulfport. After the wedding, she and her groom, Daniel Jones, went to the Veterans of Foreign

Wars building in Gulfport, where she has worked for the last decade. Someone took her purse and the ashes that were in it from her vehicle parked outside the VFW.

“I’m absolutely gutted right now,” she told the newspaper. The veterans helped search the area.

### Vets fix owl's wing, release it back to wild after recuperation

**LA** BATON ROUGE — Staff and students at the Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine nursed an injured owl back to health over the last two months and then released the recovered bird back into the wild.

WBRZ reported that the barred owl flew back into the wild after convalescing for two months from a severely broken wing.

“It’s just awesome. It feels awesome every time we release one. It’s such a great feeling to send them back where they belong,” said vet student Amy Crumlich.

The school performed surgery, and then Crumlich took care of the owl while it recovered inside a special flight cage.

### Boy found safe in cemetery, is then reunited with father, dog

**OH** HINCKLEY — An Ohio police chief said a young boy found in a cemetery two days before Christmas has been placed in the care of his father and reunited with his dog.

Chief David Centner of the Hinckley police department said in a Facebook post that Tony’s father had expressed his appreciation for the public’s generosity and said the child is “doing very well.”

Centner stressed that the father was “in no way involved” with the incident and has been “extremely cooperative” with officials.

Police were called to Hope Memorial Gardens Cemetery where a witness reported seeing a car speeding away and a little boy “running after the car followed by a dog.”

Centner said a woman was “the focus of

our investigation and is currently in the care of a local medical facility.” He said his department was working with the Municipal Law Director on charges following her release.

### Recovering officer gets police escort back home

**MI** MIDLAND — A police officer who was injured in a Christmas Eve fire was escorted home from the hospital by his fellow officers.

A line of 10 cars with Midland police and sheriff’s deputies led Tyler Hollingsworth to his home, the Midland Daily News reported.

Hollingsworth and another officer were injured while trying to save a 49-year-old man who had doused himself with fuel on Dec. 24.

Fire broke out in the Midland garage, and the man died.

### New game: Pinball Pete’s fans rally to help arcade

**MI** EAST LANSING — Arcade fans are responding with more than just quarters to keep the doors open at Pinball Pete’s in two Michigan college towns.

The owners were reluctant to pass the hat with an online fundraiser. But more than \$87,000 was raised on GoFundMe.

Many donors are former students from Michigan State University and the University of Michigan with fond memories of playing pinball, PAC-MAN, Skee-Ball and other games. Some who grew up in East Lansing recall going to Pinball Pete’s as teenagers.

“It was sort of like the melting pot of the community,” said Marya Peters, 45, who donated \$100.

“We could go down there and play video games and casually hang out and meet kids from other schools.”

Both locations in East Lansing and Ann Arbor were open recently.

— From wire reports

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# Alabama, Ohio State faced hurdles

*Associated Press*

Alabama breezed through the regular season and college football's semifinals, surviving a solitary scare in the Southeastern Conference championship game to reach its expected destination.

Ohio State wasn't exactly a shoo-in with its abbreviated schedule but resoundingly proved it belonged in the College Football Playoffs with a semifinal thrashing of Clemson.

The Buckeyes and Crimson Tide traveled different paths to get to Monday's title game at Hard Rock Stadium in South Florida, but both had to navigate the challenges of a pandemic-altered season.

"I know this has been a little bit of a trying year for a lot of folks," Nick Saban, the coach of the top-ranked Crimson Tide, said Monday.

It's not a finale that could be taken for granted.

No. 3 Ohio State's odyssey included an abbreviated Big Ten season with three games canceled because of COVID-19 issues, including an outbreak among the Buckeyes.

"This team, this program, we persevered through so much," Ohio State running back Trey Sermon said Monday.

"To have the opportunity to play on such a big stage, it means a lot to us.

"We've been through a lot. I mean, we fought to just play, and just to be able to get the job done, to make it to this level, it just means a lot to us."

The Tide (12-0) advanced with a 31-14 victory over Notre Dame in the Rose Bowl, played in Arlington, Texas, rather than southern California in yet another example of just how different this season has been.

Before that Alabama navigated 11 consecutive SEC games, including victories over three teams currently ranked among the top 11 before facing Notre Dame.

The Tide also won the Iron Bowl against Auburn with offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian — who takes over the Texas Longhorns program following the game — running the show while Saban was sidelined by COVID-19.

In addition to Sarkisian's imminent departure, Alabama has to take care of some Heisman Trophy business while preparing for the matchup with Ohio State. Both wide receiver DeVonta Smith and quarterback Mac Jones are among the four Heisman finalists, along with quarterbacks Trevor Lawrence of Clemson and Kyle Trask of Florida.

Smith isn't interested in talking about the award being handed out virtually on Tuesday, saying his focus is on preparing for the

Buckeyes.

"Right now I'm not really worried about the Heisman Trophy," he said.

Monday's game is a rematch of a semifinal game in the first College Football Playoffs six years ago. Ohio State (7-0) won that meeting en route to the national title.

There were questions whether this Buckeyes team deserved to be in CFP, but Ohio State routed favored Clemson, erasing sentiments by doubters that another Tigers-Crimson Tide title showdown was all but inevitable.

If Smith shared those expectations, the Alabama wide receiver kept them to himself.

"I mean, I'm not part of the committee, so I have no say-so in who they put in and who they wanted to put in," Smith said. "At the end of the day, we just show up here, practice, and get ready for whoever the next opponent is."

The big question for Ohio State on Monday was the health of quarterback Justin Fields, who took a vicious shot to the side in the first half against Clemson.

"Oh, yeah, I definitely expect him to play, but we don't get into specifics on injuries," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. "We give our availability report at the end of the week. That's always been our policy."

## Stefanski positive for COVID, will miss playoff game

*Associated Press*

CLEVELAND — The Cleveland Browns will play their first playoff game since 2002 without first-year coach Kevin Stefanski, who tested positive for COVID-19 just two days after leading the team back to the postseason.

The team announced Stefanski's positive result on Tuesday — 18 years to the day since the Browns' last postseason game. Also, Pro Bowl left guard Joel Bitonio and wide receiver Khasean Hodge also tested positive along with two staff members — tight ends coach Drew Petzing and defensive backs coach Jeff Howard.

Special teams coordinator

Mike Priefer will be the acting head coach Sunday.

Bitonio and Hodge played in Sunday's win over the Steelers, who rested quarterback Ben Roethlisberger and several other top players to be fresh for the playoffs.

In other NFL news:

■ Carolina Panthers offensive coordinator Joe Brady is becoming a popular name for NFL teams looking to fill head coaching vacancies.

### Muckler, who won 5 Stanley Cups, dies

John Muckler, who coached four NHL teams and won five Stanley Cup championships with the Edmonton Oilers, has died. He was 86.

The Oilers confirmed Muckler's death Monday night. No cause was given.

Muckler was part of the staff that put together the Oilers dynasty of the 1980s. He joined Edmonton in 1982 as an assistant coach under Glen Sather and won five Stanley Cups with the organization from 1984-90.

### NBA adopts tougher mask policy on benches

The NBA is adopting a tougher policy regarding masks, telling teams Monday that players on the active roster will have to wear the face coverings in the bench area until they enter games.

That memo, obtained by The Associated Press, was released

on the same day the Brooklyn Nets ruled All-Star forward Kevin Durant out for Tuesday's game against Utah in accordance with the league's health and safety protocols for dealing with coronavirus.

Among the new rules, which take effect Tuesday: Players who are dressed for games and eligible to participate must wear a face mask until they enter the game, all players and coaches must wear face masks when outside the team environment if they are around other players and coaches, and players must report the names of any private trainer, therapist, chiropractor or other specialist who they work with outside of the team facility.



# Tatum helps Celtics overtake Raptors

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Jayson Tatum scored 40 points and the Boston Celtics rolled to a 126-114 win over the Toronto Raptors on Monday night.

Playing without three of their top guards, the Celtics shook off a slow start to lead by as many as 26 points in the second half. They shot 48.8% overall.

Tatum turned the game around with 21 points in the second quarter. He hit five three-pointers and converted all 13 free throws, finishing one point short of his career high set against New Orleans last January.

Rookie guard Payton Pritchard had 23 points and eight assists for Boston (5-3), and Jaylen Brown scored 19. Robert Williams III came off the bench to contribute 11 points and 15 rebounds.

Fred VanVleet led the Raptors (1-5) with 35 points and eight rebounds.

**Mavericks 113, Rockets 100:** Luka Dončić had 33 points, 16 rebounds and 11 assists, and Tim Hardaway Jr. added 30 off the bench as Dallas used a big fourth quarter run to win at Houston.

The Mavericks were on top by three with about seven minutes remaining before using a 14-3 spurt, with seven points from Hardaway, to extend the lead to 106-92 with about 2½ minutes remaining. The Rockets couldn't get anything going as Dallas took over. Houston missed five shots and had two turnovers in that span.

**Bucks 125, Pistons 115:** Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 43 points and host Milwaukee defeated Detroit and moved above the .500 mark for the first time this season.

The reigning two-time MVP scored 30 points by halftime, shot 17-for-24 from the floor overall and finished with nine rebounds.

The Bucks (4-3) have won their last eight regular-season meetings with the Pistons, which represents the longest streak for either team in the history of the series.

Detroit (1-6) played without two of its top three scorers in Blake Griffin and Josh Jackson.

Jerami Grant and Derrick Rose led the Pistons with 24 points each.

**Nicks 113, Hawks 108:** Julius Randle scored 28 points and grabbed 17 rebounds, Austin Rivers hit a huge three-pointer and New York rallied to beat Atlanta.

Taking their second straight home loss after a 4-1 start to the season, the Hawks squandered a 13-point lead early in the second half and faded in the closing minutes.

**Heat 118, Thunder 90:** Kelly Olynyk made five three-pointers on his way to 19 points, Bam Adebayo led all scorers with 20 on 9-for-10 shooting and host Miami beat Oklahoma City.

The Heat have played six games, alternating losses then wins in all six, and have used a different starting five every time.

**76ers 118, Hornets 101:** Joel Embiid had 14 points and 11 rebounds, Tobias Harris scored 22 points and host Philadelphia beat Charlotte for its fourth straight win.

The Sixers swept the two-game set necessitated on the schedule this season because of the pandemic and beat the Hornets for the 13th straight time. Philadelphia has not lost to Charlotte since Nov. 2, 2016.

**Magic 103, Cavaliers 83:** Aaron Gordon broke out of a shooting slump with 6-for-9 sniping from three-point range and scored a season-high 24 points, leading Orlando over visiting Cleveland.

The Magic snapped a two-game losing streak that had followed four straight victories to open the season. They made a season-high 15 three-pointers, easily surpassing their previous season high of 11.

**Pacers 118, Pelicans 116 (OT):** Malcolm Brogdon capped a 21-point, 11-assist performance by bouncing in a driving, one-handed floater with 1.7 seconds left in overtime, and Indiana won at New Orleans.

Victor Oladipo scored 25 points for the Pacers, hitting a 29-foot three-pointer and following that up with a steal from Lonzo Ball to spark a six-point comeback in the final 20 seconds of regulation.

**Warriors 137, Kings 106:** Stephen Curry followed up his career-high 62 points a night earlier with another 30 points, nine rebounds and eight assists to lead suddenly clicking Golden State past visiting Sacramento.

At 92 points over the past two nights, Curry posted his third-highest point total over a two-game span, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. He scored 97 combined on Feb. 25 and 27, 2016, and 93 on Feb. 24-25, '16.

## This season, teams will see the same refs more often

Associated Press

There are nine people who have been on the court to start four different games at Staples Center so far this season.

Only eight of them are players.

The other is referee Scott Foster.

There might be no better way to explain how and why the NBA has changed the travel rules for officials this year than Foster's work schedule to this point. He was scheduled to work a game in Houston on Dec. 23, only to see the matchup called off when the Rockets didn't have enough people available to play in accordance with the league's health and safety protocols regarding the coronavirus. From there, Foster flew to Los Angeles. He worked four games in six days,

and never left L.A.

That simply would have never happened in past years, when the policy typically was that officials would go at least 13 days between working games in the same city and six days between seeing the same team after reffing one of its games. Those rules will almost certainly come back when the world returns to normal, but for now, in the interest of safety — and common sense — teams are seeing referees more often than usual.

"It changes things a little bit," Milwaukee coach Mike Budenholzer said. "But obviously, for safety and our health and the health of the officials, it makes all the sense in the world."

It can lead to some awkward moments.

Consider the case of Utah's Jordan Clarkson. He gave referee Karl Lane a bit of a shove — it didn't appear to be premeditated or violent — in a game against the Clippers on Thursday, earning a technical foul. The next night, the Jazz were back on their home floor, with Lane part of the officiating crew again and after Clarkson got fined \$25,000 for the shove. If there were any hard feelings from the night before, none showed.

Clarkson got called for only one foul in the Friday game, a charge. Lane was the official who made that call, which in fairness was an easy one. "Great way to start to 2021! a team win and \$25k lighter!" Clarkson wrote on Instagram.

# Men's March Madness will be all in Indiana

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The NCAA is giving Indiana an exclusive ticket to showcase March Madness and the basketball-crazed state can't wait to take center stage this spring.

The NCAA announced Monday that its showcase event — the Division I men's basketball tournament, all 67 games of it — will be played entirely in or near Indianapolis. The hope is to limit the possibility that the coronavirus pandemic cancels the wildly popular and lucrative tournament for a second consecutive season.

"There are a number of world-class facilities in a close location and that was critical because you have to run a large number of games simultaneously that you can manage and control," NCAA President Mark Emmert said. "There were a number of cities that were very interested in hosting this event, but the immediate opportunity to do this in Indianapolis was pretty self-evident for several reasons. For one, we were already going to be there."

Indy was already scheduled to host the Final Four and it didn't take long for the city to emerge as the favorite.

The original plan was for the 67 games to be played at 13 sites across the country, starting with the First Four in Dayton, Ohio. Regional sites were set for Minneapolis, Denver, New York City and Memphis, Tenn.

Instead, the buzzer beaters and jaw-dropping performances will all take place in a state known perhaps more than any other for its love of basketball.

"I really don't care if they play the tourna-

ment on Saturn or in Indianapolis," Louisville coach Chris Mack said. "Hopefully, we're a part of it and we do our part to get there. And wherever they put it, they put it."

Logistically, Indy made sense, too.

Dozens of restaurants or hotels are within walking distance of Lucas Oil Stadium, home of the NFL's Indianapolis Colts, and Bankers Life Fieldhouse, home of the NBA's Indiana Pacers and WNBA's Indiana Fever. Many of those businesses and venues are connected by skywalks that allow players, coaches or fans to stay indoors.

Hinkle Fieldhouse, the historic home of the Butler Bulldogs, and the Indiana Farmers Coliseum, where the IUPUI Jaguars play, are just short drives from the downtown area. Mackey Arena at Purdue and Assembly Hall at Indiana also are about an hour's drive from downtown.

All of those venues are slated to host games.

Playing in a state where the sport is revered and basketball stars are considered royalty doesn't hurt, either. Oscar Robertson, Larry Bird, Rick Mount, Damon Bailey and the late John Wooden were all stars here at one level or another. Bob Knight, Gene Keady and the late Tony Hinkle, originator of the orange basketball, all coached in the state, which for decades had a single-class state tournament won famously in 1954 by Milan High, the inspiration for Hollywood's "Hoosiers."

So perhaps bringing March Madness back home to Indiana, home of the NCAA's headquarters, was the natural choice.

"Last year, we had to rip March Madness away from all the teams and all the fans at the very last minute," Emmert said. "We

know it was the right thing to do, but it was a painful thing to do. So we want to deliver this year on the promise of March Madness. They deserve it."

Some things aren't expected to change.

Selection Sunday is still set for March 14, the tourney field is expected to remain at 68 and the Final Four games are still scheduled for April 3 with the title game two days later. CBS Sports and Turner Sports will continue to televise and stream the games.

But this tourney will have dramatically a different atmosphere.

Two courts will be constructed inside cavernous Lucas Oil Stadium, though only one game will be played at a time because of potential distractions from whistles and horns going off. NCAA vice president of basketball Dan Gavitt said fewer games may be played each day because of longer breaks needed to properly clean the facilities. Preliminary round dates have not yet been set.

"If we're going to be able to do it, it's got to be done safely," Creighton coach Greg McDermott said. "The more you can limit travel the better. To do it in the middle of the country makes it easier for everybody. ... You want to be there, you want to be part of it. It's going to be an historic event."

Fewer fans are expected, too.

NCAA officials said a limited number of family members of players and coaches can attend games, but they will consult local and state public health officials to determine final attendance.

COVID-19 testing will be conducted before each game and each team will be assigned its own floor and its own meeting spaces inside its hotel.

## Siena finally starts season 298 days after last game

Associated Press

LOUDONVILLE, N.Y. — The reigning Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference men's basketball champions are back on the court at long last — after a 298-day hiatus.

After three pauses in team activities since November due to several positive COVID-19 tests, the Siena Saints returned to action with a two-game series at home against Monmouth (3-4) and won both — 78-77 in Sunday's opener and 76-62 on Monday night — to run their winning streak to 12 games dating to last season.

"Super proud of this group. Resilient

group," Siena coach Carmen Maciariello said. "We talk about coming together during adverse times and growing our togetherness and our bond, and I think we did that. We found a way to win."

The Saints, who had to cancel December games against Drexel and Towson, hadn't played since beating Manhattan in the MAAC Tournament quarterfinals on March 11, the longest period of time between games since the program paused activities from 1943-46 while the country was at war. Siena experienced the pauses following multiple positive COVID-19 test results stemming from the program's Tier 1

personnel and was the last MAAC team to get underway. It was the latest season-opener in program history, which dates to 1938.

**No. 14 West Virginia 87, Oklahoma State 84:** Derek Culver had 22 points and 19 rebounds to help the Mountaineers rally from 19 down in the second half to beat the host Cowboys.

Miles McBride scored 19 of his 21 points after halftime for West Virginia (9-3, 2-2 Big 12), including 14 in the final four minutes. Freshman star Cade Cunningham had 25 points and nine rebounds for Oklahoma State (7-3, 1-3).