

Warnock makes history with Senate win

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Democrat Raphael Warnock won one of Georgia's two Senate run-offs Wednesday, becoming the first Black senator in his state's history and putting the Senate majority within the party's reach.

A pastor who spent the past 15 years leading the Atlanta church where Martin Luther King Jr. preached, Warnock defeated Republican incumbent Kelly Loeffler.

It was a stinging rebuke of outgoing President Donald Trump, who made one of his final trips in office to Georgia to rally his loyal base behind the state's Republican candidates.

In an emotional address early Wednesday, Warnock vowed to work for all Georgians whether they voted for him or not, citing his personal experience with the American dream. His mother, he said, used to pick "somebody else's cotton" as a teenager.

"The other day, because this is America, the 82-year-old hands that used to pick somebody else's cotton picked her youngest

son to be a United States senator," he said. "Tonight, we proved with hope, hard work and the people by our side, anything is possible."

His victory marks a "reversal of the old southern strategy that sought to divide people," Warnock told ABC's "Good Morning America."

The focus now shifts to the other race between Republican David Perdue and Democrat Jon Ossoff.

Ossoff held a small lead as of Wednesday morning, though it was too early to call the race. Under Georgia law, a trailing candidate may request a recount when the margin of an election is less than or equal to 0.5 percentage points.

If Ossoff wins, Democrats will have complete control of Congress, strengthening President-elect Joe Biden's standing as he prepares to take office on Jan. 20. A Democratic sweep would also make it more difficult for Republicans to block Biden's ambitious progressive agenda, along with his Cabinet picks and judicial nominations.

Warnock's victory is a symbol of a striking shift in Georgia's politics as the swelling number of diverse, college-educated voters flex their power in the heart of the Deep South. It follows Biden's victory in November, when he became the first Democratic presidential candidate to carry the state since 1992.

The Associated Press declared Warnock the winner after an analysis of outstanding votes showed there was no way for Loeffler to catch up to his lead. Warnock's edge is likely to grow as more ballots are counted, many of which were in Democratic-leaning areas.

Loeffler refused to concede in a brief message to supporters shortly after midnight.

"We've got some work to do here. This is a game of inches. We're going to win this election," insisted Loeffler, a 50-year-old former businesswoman who was appointed to the Senate less than a year ago by the state's governor.

Navy calls for more activity in Arctic region

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Navy released its strategy Tuesday on how the service plans to become more active in the Arctic as the region opens up to more economic and military competition from Russia and China.

"In the face of increasing aggressive activity in the high north from both Russia, which is an Arctic nation, and China, which claims to be a near Arctic nation, we in the United States must maintain a favorable balance of power in this region for ourselves and for our allies," Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite told reporters ahead of the document's release.

With more navigable waters due to melting sea ice, the Navy's strategy refers to the region as a "Blue Arctic." Russia and China, both nations mentioned in the 2018 National Defense Strategy as "great-power" competitors with the U.S., have increased their mil-

itary and economic presence in the Arctic in recent years due to the opening of arctic waters, the Navy said.

"Without sustained American naval presence and partnerships in the Arctic region, peace and prosperity will be increasingly challenged by Russia and China, whose interests and values differ dramatically from ours," according to the 25-page document.

The U.S. is an Arctic nation and has maintained a presence there for decades, including submarines and the U.S. Coast Guard's icebreakers. The Navy's recently reestablished 2nd Fleet and 6th Fleet also operate and participate in exercises with other Arctic countries in the region, according to the document, which was referred to by officials as a "blueprint."

The strategy was signed by Braithwaite, Adm. Michael Gilday, the chief of naval operations, and Gen. David Berger, the commandant of the Marine Corps, and it lays out the economic and military necessity of a

greater Navy presence in the Arctic in the next two decades.

About 90% of trade travels across the oceans, and that is expected to double within 15 years, according to the Navy document. The Arctic has the potential to "connect nearly 75% of the world's population" as ice melts and trade routes open up shorter routes to and from Asia, Europe and North America.

The area also has an "estimated 30% of the world's undiscovered national gas reserves, 13% of global conventional oil reserves and [\$1 trillion] in rare earth minerals," the document states.

Russia has been reopening old military bases and moving forces there, and it operates a large icebreaker fleet. China is increasing its shipbuilding and port infrastructure in the region. The document also states that the U.S. Navy expects to see more Chinese naval deployments in the Arctic, both on the surface and underwater.

SEAL to plead guilty in Green Beret's death

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Navy SEAL accused of choking an Army Green Beret to death while they were deployed to Mali in 2017 will plead guilty later this month to his role in the killing, his lawyer said Tuesday.

Chief Petty Officer Tony DeDolph, a member of the elite SEAL Team 6, reached an agreement with the Navy to plead guilty to several charges in the June 4, 2017, death of Staff Sgt. Logan Melgar and "accept responsibility" for his actions, his civilian attorney Phillip Stackhouse wrote in an email. DeDolph is expected to enter his guilty plea Jan. 14 during a hearing at Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia.

He will become the third of four defendants in the case to plead guilty for his role in what

others involved in Melgar's killing have described in court as a booze-fueled hazing incident gone wrong. Like the other two special operators who pleaded guilty in 2019 — former Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer Adam C. Matthews and former Marine Raider Staff Sgt. Kevin Maxwell Jr. — Stackhouse maintained DeDolph never intended to injure Melgar.

"The fact that [Staff Sgt.] Melgar's death was not intentional may not lessen the righteous feelings of grief by family and friends, but perhaps the resolution of this case will further help them find closure and peace," Stackhouse said Tuesday.

The Navy in November 2018 charged DeDolph, Matthews, Maxwell and another Marine Raider, Gunnery Sgt. Mario Madera-Rodriguez, with a series

of crimes including felony murder, involuntary manslaughter, conspiracy, obstruction of justice, hazing and burglary for their roles in Melgar's death.

Stackhouse said he would not reveal the charges to which DeDolph will plead guilty. The Daily Beast, citing unnamed officials familiar with the agreement, reported the SEAL is expected to plead guilty to involuntary manslaughter, obstruction of justice and hazing.

The attorney said DeDolph agreed as part of the plea deal not to profit from "publication or dissemination of information," such as a book deal while he is imprisoned, should he be sentenced to confinement. Stackhouse also said DeDolph had no plans to write a book or profit from his time as a SEAL.

DeDolph first enlisted in the

Navy in 2003 and had been assigned to SEAL Team 6 since 2008, according to Navy records.

In previous court testimony, others involved in the case fingered DeDolph as the primary instigator of a hazing plan launched during a night of binge drinking at bars in Mali's capital, Bamako.

Maxwell in June 2019 testified DeDolph and another SEAL regularly bullied Melgar, a member of the Army's 3rd Special Forces Group, while they were sharing a house in Bamako during deployments in support of counterterrorism operations in the West African nation. DeDolph — who Maxwell described as employing a sense of "dark humor" — hatched a hazing plan over drinks meant to embarrass Melgar for a perceived slight against another special operator.

Pentagon gets diversity inspector general in bill

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — Defense legislation passed in spite of President Donald Trump's veto will bring a heightened focus on diversity issues and efforts to combat white supremacy and extremist behavior within the U.S. military.

Along with billions of dollars for new weapons systems and a pay raise for troops, a new deputy inspector general's position was created by the bipartisan defense authorization bill to carry out audits, investigations and evaluations of military personnel policies, programs and systems to ensure they address diversity priorities.

The new watchdog will also have a key role in responding to white supremacist and criminal gang activity by military personnel, according to the legisla-

tion passed on Jan. 1 over Trump's veto.

The deputy inspector general "will keep the heat on the military to make sure that racial inequality does not fade from the priority list, that these provisions are implemented successfully, and that Congress will receive an independent source of findings and recommendations," said Rep. Jackie Speier, the California Democrat who heads the House Armed Services Committee's military personnel panel.

Once the position is filled, the deputy inspector general could, for instance, review the extent to which the military services are examining social media posts of recruits or personnel needing security clearances to see if they've disclosed support for extremist organizations.

Marine silent drill platoon member killed at home

By CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

A 20-year-old Marine who was shot and killed while on leave in his Idaho hometown last week was a member of the service's high profile silent drill platoon.

Lance Cpl. Davis Mosqueda was with a group of friends at an apartment in Boise on Dec. 30 when Devon Arnold, the suspect in the fatal shooting, showed up just after 1 a.m., the Boise police said in a statement.

Mosqueda left the apartment to check on a friend when he was shot near the parking lot, the police said.

The young Marine was taken to a hospital with multiple gunshot wounds, Ada County coroner Dotti Owens said in a statement last Thursday, but efforts to save him failed and he was pronounced dead in the emer-

gency department.

"I didn't believe it," Mosqueda's mother, Monica Mouw, told KTVB television news. "I was positive they had made a mistake and that it was someone else."

Mosqueda enlisted in July 2018 and had been stationed at Marine Barracks Washington, D.C., since February of the following year, where he was a member of the U.S. Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon, the Corps said in a statement.

Arnold, 21, stayed on the scene after the shooting and was arrested and booked into county jail after a police investigation, officials said. He has been charged with first-degree murder and use of a firearm in the commission of a felony, Ada County court records show. A preliminary hearing is set for Friday.

Trump pressures Pence on electoral count

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Wednesday tightened the screws on his most loyal soldier, trying to pressure Vice President Mike Pence to use powers he does not have to overturn the will of voters in a desperate and futile bid to undo President-elect Joe Biden's victory in the November election.

Shortly before the 1 p.m. start of the joint session and even as Trump continued his verbal haranguing, Pence made clear in a three-page letter that he would follow the Constitution, not the commander in chief. While Trump was speaking, Pence's motorcade carried him through a heavily-secured Washington toward the Capitol, where thousands of Trump supporters were marching.

Pence has no unilateral power under the Constitution and congressional rules that

govern the count. It is up to the House and Senate to voice objections, and states' electors were chosen in accordance with state law, not fraudulently.

Pence's role was to open the certificates of the electoral votes from each state and present them to the appointed "tellers" from the House and Senate in alphabetical order. At the end of the count, Pence, seated on the House of Representatives' rostrum, has the task of announcing who has won the majority of votes for both president and vice president.

"If Mike Pence does the right thing we win the election," Trump told thousands of supporters who rallied Wednesday on the Ellipse, just south of the White House, an hour before the count in Congress was to begin. Pence did not attend the event.

"All Vice President Pence has to do is send

it back to the states to recertify and we become president and you are the happiest people," Trump said, repeating a falsehood he has been promoting leading up to the congressional session.

Pence told Trump during their weekly lunch in the West Wing on Tuesday that he did not believe he had the power to unilaterally overturn electoral votes, according to a person briefed on the one-on-one conversation. This person was not authorized to publicly discuss the private discussion, which was first reported by The New York Times, and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Trump said he spoke with Pence on Wednesday morning to urge him to act once again.

"I said, 'Mike, that doesn't take courage,'" he said. "What takes courage is to do nothing."

No charges for Wisconsin officer who shot Black man

Associated Press

KENOSHA, Wis. — A Wisconsin prosecutor declined Tuesday to file charges against a white police officer who shot a Black man in the back in Kenosha, concluding he couldn't disprove the officer's contention that he acted in self-defense because he feared the man would stab him.

The decision, met with swift criticism from civil rights advocates and some public officials, threatened to reignite protests that rocked the city after the Aug. 23 shooting that left Jacob Blake paralyzed. Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, called the decision "further evidence that our work is not done" and called for people to work together for equity. Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, who is Black,

was more pointed on Twitter: "I wish I could say that I'm shocked. It's another instance in a string of misapplications of justice."

Kenosha County District Attorney Michael Graveley said investigators concluded Blake was carrying a knife when police responded to a report he was trying to steal a car. Officer Rusten Sheskey said he "feared Jacob Blake was going to stab him with the knife" as he tried to stop Blake from fleeing the scene.

"I do not believe the state ... would be able to prove that the privilege of self-defense is not available," Graveley said.

Blake family members expressed anger about the charging decision.

"This is going to impact this city and this

state and this nation for many years to come," Justin Blake, an uncle, said. "Unless the people rise up and do what they're supposed to do. This is a government for the people by the people, correct? We talk about this Constitution everybody's supposed to be so committed to, and yet we stand in the state that has the most convictions of African Americans in the United States. So they're weighing heavy on one side of justice, but they're allowing police officers to rain down terror on our communities. It's unjust."

Ben Crump, an attorney for Blake's family, said in a statement the decision "further destroys trust in our justice system" and said he would proceed with a lawsuit.

Kim admits failures as N. Korean congress opens

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un admitted that his economic development plans have failed as he opened the nation's first full ruling party congress in five years, state media reported Wednesday.

In an opening speech at the congress that began Tuesday, Kim said that "almost all sectors fell a long way short of the set objectives" under a previous five-year development plan established at the 2016 congress, according to the North's official

Korean Central News Agency.

"We should further promote and expand the victories and successes we have gained at the cost of sweat and blood, and prevent the painful lessons from being repeated," he was quoted as saying.

The Workers' Party Congress, one of the North's biggest propaganda spectacles, is meant to help Kim show a worried nation that he's firmly in control and to boost unity behind his leadership in the face of COVID-19 and other growing economic challenges.

But some observers are skeptical that the stage-managed congress will find any fundamental solutions to North Korea's difficulties, many of which stem from decades of economic mismanagement and Kim's headlong pursuit of expensive nuclear weapons meant to target the U.S. mainland.

Kim, 36, is holding the congress, which is expected to last a few days, amid what may be the toughest challenge of his nine-year rule and what he has called "multiple crises."

Governors work to speed vaccine effort

Associated Press

New York's governor is threatening to fine hospitals that don't use their allotment of COVID-19 vaccine fast enough. His South Carolina counterpart says health care workers have until Jan. 15 to get a shot or move to the back of the line. California's governor wants to use dentists to vaccinate people.

With frustration rising over the slow rollout of the vaccine, state leaders and other politicians around the United States are turning up the pressure, improvising and seeking to bend the rules to get shots in arms more quickly.

"Move it quickly. We're serious," New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo warned hospitals on Tuesday. "If you don't want to be fined, just don't participate in the program. It's not a mandatory program."

As of Wednesday morning, just 4.8 million people in the U.S. had gotten their first shot out of 17 million doses distributed, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. While that is believed to be an undercount because of a lag in reporting, health officials are still well behind where they wanted to be.

Meanwhile, the U.S. death toll has climbed past 357,000. COVID-19 deaths set another one-day record at 3,775 on Tuesday, though authorities have cautioned that the numbers around holidays can fluctuate dramatically because some health agencies fall behind in reporting cases, then rush to catch up.

Health care workers and nursing home residents are being given priority for the most part in the U.S., but some places are beginning to move on to the next stage, involving the elderly.

The slow rollout has been blamed on a multitude of problems, including a lack of funding and guidance from Washington, mismatches between supply and demand, a patchwork of approaches by state and local governments, distrust of the vaccine and disarray created by the holidays.

Politicians are getting aggressive in trying to accelerate the campaign. The governors of California, Maryland and North Carolina said they will use the National Guard to speed things up.

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan warned, too, that any facility that has not administered at

least 75% of its first doses may have future allocations reduced until they can speed up vaccinations.

While about 270,000 doses have been put directly in the hands of front-line vaccinators in the state over the last three weeks, Hogan said that only about 77,000 people had been vaccinated as of Tuesday, or about 1.3% of the state's population.

Gov. Henry McMaster of South Carolina warned that health care workers will lose their place in line if they don't move quickly to get their shots. As of Monday, the state had given out less than half its initial allotment of the Pfizer vaccine to about 43,000 people.

In California, where just 1% of the population has been vaccinated, Gov. Gavin Newsom said he wants to give providers the flexibility to dispense shots to people not on the priority list if doses are in danger of going to waste.

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said it is time to broaden eligibility to include people older than 75 and essential workers such as police officers and firefighters to get things moving.

Pandemic-era Mardi Gras: No big crowds, but plenty of cake

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — A subdued Carnival season began Wednesday after the coronavirus pandemic put an end to the crowd-heavy balls and street parades that draw thousands of people to the city every year.

The Mardi Gras season always starts on Jan. 6 and ends on Fat Tuesday, which this year falls on Feb. 16. The season is usually marked by extravagant balls and parades where costumed riders throw trinkets to the mobs of people packed along the parade routes.

The coronavirus has put an end to those large events. But that has not stopped notoriously creative New Orleanians from coming up with socially distant ways to celebrate.

The Krewe de Jeanne d'Arc is a club that annually pays homage to the fallen French hero with a parade through the French Quarter on the official start of the Carnival season. This year, the krewe is hosting a "Tableaux de Jeanne d'Arc," where onlookers will drive by various

"tableaux" — a French term for "living pictures" — that will include stations of costumed revelers sparring as knights, sharpening their swords and feasting at a grand fireplace with a pig roasting in the background.

"Life as usual is gone, so we had to look for different ways of doing things this year," said Antoinette de Alteriis, one of the club's captains.

The Phunny Phorty Phellows, a group that usually gathers Jan. 6 to mark the beginning of the season with a costumed party on a street car, is also altering its plans.

Usually throngs of people gather at the facility where the street car starts its journey to see the group off, but this year, people are asked to disperse along the street car route and watch from there instead.

But people can still eat cake — king cake that is.

The sweet cakes, which are decorated with the official Carnival colors of purple, green and gold, are only to be eaten starting on Jan. 6.

Second active-duty soldier dies from the coronavirus

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — An active-duty soldier in Virginia is the 15th service member to die from the coronavirus, the Pentagon announced Wednesday, almost a month after a soldier in Germany died from the disease.

Sgt. 1st Class Lisa Maria Soto, 38, died Saturday at John Randolph Medical Center in Hopewell, Va., from complications related to the virus, said Jefferson Wolfe, a spokesman for U.S. Army Garrison Fort Lee.

Originally from Florence, S.C., Soto served in the Army for more than 20 years, most recently at Fort Lee as a training instructor with Company A of the 244th Quartermaster Battalion, Wolfe said. During her career, Soto had also been assigned to Mannheim, Germany, Fort Jackson, S.C., and Fort Drum, N.Y.

Soto deployed to Iraq from 2004 to 2005 and then Afghanistan from 2011 to 2012. Her military awards include the Army Commendation Medal (three awards), Army Achievement Medal (five awards), Army Good Conduct Medal (six awards), the Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Ribbon (two awards) and the Combat Action Badge.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Veteran returns statue's bronze sword after 40 years

MA WESTFIELD — A veteran returned a sword he stole from a statue of a Revolutionary War general 40 years ago, telling the head of the Massachusetts town's historical commission that he regretted taking it.

Cindy P. Gaylord, the chair of Westfield's Historical Commission, said a man contacted city hall saying he had the sword stolen from the town's statue of Gen. William Shepard in 1980 when he was a student at Westfield State University, the Springfield Republican reported.

Gaylord agreed to give the man anonymity if he returned the bronze sword and arranged for him and his wife to drop it off at her home, she said.

"He is a veteran and told me the fact that he did this to another soldier troubled him," Gaylord told the newspaper.

The man, who Gaylord described as a "great big bear of a guy," told her he had worked at a bar in the town while he was enrolled as a student at Westfield State University. After a night of drinking, he and a group of friends went to steal the sword, which he said he wrenched loose with just his own strength. When they realized what they had done the next morning, they were not sure how to return the sword without facing consequences.

Police: Man charged with taking medical equipment from helo

NC ASHEVILLE — Police in North Carolina said that a man was accused of stealing medical equipment from a helicopter that was parked at a hospital.

The Raleigh News & Observer reported that the incident occurred on New Year's Day at Mission Hospital in Asheville.

Asheville police said that they arrested Jason Alan Roland, 34, and charged him with breaking and entering and damage to property.

Police said that at least two thermometers and other equipment was reported missing.

'Haunted house' burns days after body found on porch

SC NORWAY — The abandoned South Carolina home where a group of people found a body stuffed in a deep freezer burned down two days after the gruesome discovery, authorities said.

The early Tuesday blaze at the home in Norway is considered suspicious, but a cause has not been determined, Orangeburg County firefighters said.

Sunday, eight adults out riding four-wheelers decided to explore the abandoned home after hearing it was haunted, deputies have said.

The group spotted the freezer on the back porch of the home and when it was opened, an 18-year-old man told deputies he saw what appeared to be a body wearing blue jeans and socks and smelled a horrible odor, the Orangeburg County Sheriff's Office said in an incident report.

Airplane's cracked windshield forces emergency landing

WI MILWAUKEE — Authorities said a SkyWest flight from Milwaukee to Denver made an emergency landing in South Dakota over the weekend after the flight crew reported a cracked windshield.

The Federal Aviation Administration said the twin-engine aircraft was diverted to Joe Foss Field in Sioux Falls, S.D., and landed without incident.

The FAA is investigating the incident, according to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

Police: Driver pursued in NJ captured in Canada

NJ HOWELL — A driver who led police on a chase through a number of New Jersey communities rammed through the Canadian border and fled on foot into that country before he was captured, police in New Jersey said.

Howell Township police said a patrolman tried to stop an erratic driver, believing the motorist was intoxicated. A pursuit wound

through several cities to the Garden State Parkway, but was ended when the patrolman's siren failed.

Howell police said they were notified by Canadian and U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials that the driver had "rammed through the Canadian border and fled on foot into Canada." He was ultimately captured, police said.

2 in custody after wildlife officer run over by ATV

FL AVON PARK — Polk County authorities had two people in custody and were searching for a third person after a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission officer was run over by an ATV during a confrontation.

WTVT-TV of Tampa reported that the officer was patrolling the Avon Park Bombing Range when he spotted three people shining a spotlight into the Avon Park Bombing Range property.

When the officer approached the individuals, a scuffle broke out. The assailants ran over the officer as they fled the scene, according to the Polk County Sheriff's Office.

The officer was treated for injuries and released.

USPS reports spate of armed mail thefts since October

NM ALBUQUERQUE — A postal official said authorities in New Mexico are investigating a spate of unusual armed mail robberies in recent months in the Albuquerque and Santa Fe areas, an official said.

U.S. Postal Inspector Brook Robinson told KOB-TV in Albuquerque that officials usually investigate mail and parcel thefts during the holidays, and they aren't seeing a similar trend in other places.

"This is specific to Albuquerque right now, this isn't really a trend nationwide," Robinson said.

Robinson said agents were investigating eight cases since mid-October.

— From The Associated Press

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Alabama WR Smith grabs the Heisman

Associated Press

NEW YORK — On an Alabama team stacked with stars, DeVonta Smith emerged as the best player in college football while playing a position that rarely gets that kind of recognition.

Smith became the first wide receiver to win the Heisman Trophy in 29 seasons Tuesday night, breaking the monopoly quarterbacks have had on the award by beating out three of them.

“Just to be one of the very few that played receiver to win the Heisman, it means a lot to me,” Smith said.

Smith finished with 447 first-place votes and 1,856 points to easily outdistance Clemson’s Trevor Lawrence (222, 1,187), Alabama teammate Mac Jones (138, 1,130) and Florida’s Kyle Trask (61, 737).

Crimson Tide running back Najee Harris finished fifth in the voting, making No. 1 Alabama the second team in the 85-year history of the Heisman to have three of the top five vote-getters. Army did it in 1946 with Glenn Davis (first), Doc Blanchard (fourth) and Arnold Tucker (fifth).

“I want to thank my teammates,” Smith said during his acceptance speech. “With team success comes individual success so without you all, I wouldn’t be where I’m at today, winning this award.”

Smith is just the fourth receiver to win the Heisman, joining Michigan’s Desmond Howard in 1991, Notre Dame’s Tim Brown in 1987 and Nebraska’s Johnny Rodgers in 1972.

Quarterbacks had won 17 of the previous 20 Heisman trophies, including the last four.

Smith was presented the award in a virtual ceremony orchestrated by ESPN. The usual trip to New York for the finalists was

called off because of the pandemic and the winner was announced later than it had ever been before.

Smith accepted the trophy in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, decked out in a deep crimson jacket and shiny black bow tie.

He got a big hug from his quarterback, who told Smith that he loved and was proud of him. Then Smith held back tears during his speech, recalling how many thought he was too small to become a football star.

“To all the young kids out there that’s not the biggest, not the strongest, just keep pushing. Because I’m not the biggest. I’ve been doubted a lot because of my size and, really, it’s just comes down to you just put your mind to it, no job’s too big,” said the 6-foot-1, 175-pound Smith.

Meanwhile, his parents watched from a community center in his hometown of Amite, La., where a socially distanced watch party was held.

“We love him. Everybody here is supporting him, we’re so proud of him. Continue being humble. Let God lead him. And we are here to support him every step of the way,” Smith’s mother, Christina Smith-Sylve, said to ESPN.

Smith is the third Alabama player to win the Heisman, all since 2009. Like Tide running backs Mark Ingram (’09) and Derrick Henry (2015), Smith will play for the national championship as a Heisman winner.

Alabama faces No. 3 Ohio State on Jan. 11 in the College Football Playoff title game in Miami Gardens, Florida.

Smith said he returned for his senior season to earn his degree and win a national title.

“I checked one of those boxes. Just trying to check the other one now,” Smith said during his Zoom news conference.

The Heisman voting was complete on Dec. 21, so playoff performances were not a factor. But Smith made those who supported him feel good about it with a brilliant three-touchdown game against Notre Dame in the CFP semifinals last weekend.

Smith has 105 catches for 1,641 yards and 22 total touchdowns going into the final game of his college career — which will also be his third national championship game.

Smith carved out a place in Alabama’s storied history as a freshman, catching the winning touchdown pass from Tua Tagovailoa on second-and-26 in overtime against Georgia to give the Tide the 2017 national championship.

The story of the game was the guy who threw the walk-off TD pass. Tagovailoa became Alabama’s Heisman contender and most beloved player for the next two years.

Smith was the overlooked star in the Tide’s talented 2017 class of receivers that included All-American Jerry Jeudy and the blazingly fast Henry Ruggs. Both of those players decided to skip their senior seasons and enter the draft last year. Both were selected in the first round.

“I kind of like being out of the way and not in the mix,” Smith said. “I’m not the most vocal person. I don’t like talking that much. It was enjoyable while it lasted.”

He returned to school to form an explosive combination for the Tide with junior Jaylen Waddle. Then Waddle went down with a season-ending leg injury on Oct. 24.

As the Tide’s undisputed No. 1 receiver, Smith shined. The week after Waddle went out, Smith had 11 catches for 204 yards and four touchdowns against Mississippi State.

Smith’s soaring one-handed TD grab against LSU was not just his signature play, but one of the 2020 season’s best.

Smith goes to Washington, helps team find playoffs

Associated Press

If the Alex Smith story becomes a movie, Alex Smith doesn’t want to see it.

“Heck no,” he said, “I wouldn’t watch it.”

Smith is living it and already documented the long journey back from breaking his right leg and needing 17 surgeries to rehab. As inspiring as it is to teammates and coaches, his story on the field this season has little to do with the 2018 injury that looked career-threatening at the time and is more

about Smith leading Washington from 2-7 to NFC East champion as a veteran quarterback who has been there before.

“Once you are out there and the whistle blows, this is a result-oriented game and you really have to be accountable to your teammates, to the coaches, to everybody in this building that’s depending on you,” Smith said. “At the end of the day, once you step on that field, you better be able to hold up your end.”

Smith has done that and more, proving

coach Ron Rivera right that the offense worked better with an experienced hand at the wheel. Five touchdowns and five interceptions in six starts don’t stand out as glimmering numbers, but the 5-1 record has everything to do with the 36-year-old managing the offense in a way 2019 first-round pick Dwayne Haskins never could.

Haskins lost five of his six starts and has since been released, Kyle Allen won one of his before getting hurt and now this is Smith’s team.

No surprise: Peyton among Hall finalists

Associated Press

Peyton Manning, no surprise, is among 15 finalists for the Pro Football Hall of Fame's class of 2021.

The star quarterback, owner of a record five NFL Most Valuable Player awards and two Super Bowl titles, was the first finalist revealed by the hall on Tuesday night.

Manning, of course, was one of the most prolific passers in NFL history. In 18 pro seasons and 265 starts out of 266 games played since being the top overall draft choice by Indianapolis in 1998, he had 14 seasons with 4,000-plus yards passing.

When he retired following leading Denver to the 2015 league title, Manning held NFL records for career passing yards (71,940), career passing touchdowns (539) and consecutive seasons with at least 25 passing touchdowns (13).

He won 201 of those games, including playoffs, guiding the Colts to the 2006 NFL championship. He also made the Super Bowl for the 2009 and 2013 seasons, was a seven-time All-Pro, and a member of the NFL's All-Decade Team of the 2000s.

Joining Manning as a finalist was one of the players he threw to, wide receiver Reggie Wayne, a finalist for the second time.

First-year eligible Calvin Johnson and second-time finalist Torrey Holt also made the cut among receivers.

Wayne played in two Super Bowls with Manning.

Four defensive backs, including current 49ers general manager John Lynch, advanced.

This will be Lynch's eighth time as a finalist, while it's the first for Charles Woodson in his initial year of eligibility, and Ronde Barber, and the second appearance in the finals for Leroy Butler.

"I am just enjoying this moment, sitting here watching those highlights and what you immediately do is kind of reliving some of those moments," Woodson said. "To me it is not lost to be in this moment, to be a Hall of Fame finalist in the first year; it takes a lot to get to this point. You really have to make an impact on the game and I am excited to be in this moment."

Two of the NFL's most dependable defensive linemen got to the finals: sack master Jared Allen and versatile Richard Seymour. Allen, who had 136 sacks and forced four safeties, is another first-year eligible player, while Seymour has made the finals for three of his four eligible years.

Zach Thomas, who also excelled on spe-

cial teams, was one of three linebackers making the finals, joining Sam Mills — a star in the USFL and then the NFL — and Clay Matthews, who led some strong Cleveland defenses from 1978-1993 before playing three seasons in Atlanta.

Thomas and Mills became second-time finalists, and Matthews for the first time.

Two offensive linemen who have been frequent finalists round out the potential class of 2021: Alan Faneca and Tony Boselli. Faneca, who played guard and tackle and starred for three franchises (Steelers, Jets, Cardinals) made his sixth final in as many years of eligibility, while Boselli, a standout for Jacksonville, reached the finals for a fifth time.

Voting on the entrants to the Hall will be conducted later this month, with the inductees announced during Super Bowl week. A maximum of five modern-day players can be chosen, along with three previously announced candidates should they get the required votes: coach Tom Flores, contributor Bill Nunn, and senior Drew Pearson.

Inductions are scheduled for next August, when the 2020 class and a special centennial class also will be enshrined after the COVID-19 pandemic forced postponement of those ceremonies last summer.

16,000-yard rusher Gore says he's unsure if he'll play next season

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Frank Gore is in no rush to decide if he'll give it another run next season.

The New York Jets running back, who ranks third on the NFL's career rushing list with 16,000 yards, will be 38 in May and just completed his 16th season. He's scheduled to be a free agent this offseason.

"I'm going to get some down time with the fam and get to Miami and chill out with my kids," Gore said Tuesday. "And then, I'll see what's up. I still have fun, man, playing the game of football. But I didn't make a decision yet."

Gore knows whether he plays next season won't be entirely up to him. At his age, most NFL running backs have been long retired. He has played more games — 240 — than anyone at the position in league history. So, Gore knows teams likely won't

be lining up to sign him, despite his Pro Football Hall of Fame-type resume.

"Basically, whoever wants me, and if I want to play with a team that really wants me," Gore said of what will factor into his decision. "A team that's got a young guy who I can mentor, to help out to be a better pro. A team that has a chance to win. Things like that."

Gore became the third player in NFL history to run for 16,000 yards, finishing at exactly that milestone number when he had 48 yards on 16 carries against Cleveland on Dec. 27. He suffered a bruised lung during the game, though, and missed the season finale at New England.

"I'm good," Gore said. "I didn't even know I had it, really. When I came to the sideline, they were like, 'You're bleeding,' and I thought I was bleeding on my arms or something like that. I felt normal. I feel good. I'm OK."

Gailey resigns as Dolphins' OC

Associated Press

MIAMI — Miami Dolphins offensive coordinator Chan Gailey has resigned one season after coming out of retirement.

The announcement was made Wednesday, one day after Gailey's 69th birthday and one day after coach Brian Flores said he expected all of his assistant coaches would return in 2021.

With Gailey calling plays, the Dolphins scored 404 points, their highest total since 1986. He had a major role in the development of rookie quarterback Tua Tagovailoa, who struggled at times but went 6-3 as a starter.

The Dolphins finished 10-6 with one of the NFL's youngest teams. A blowout loss Sunday at Buffalo kept them out of the playoffs.

"I want to thank Chan for all of his hard work and dedication," Flores said. "He played an important role on the staff and in the development of our young roster."

Jokic lifts Nuggets past Timberwolves

Associated Press

DENVER — Nikola Jokic scored 13 of his 35 points in the fourth quarter after losing his cool earlier in the game, and the Denver Nuggets scrambled late to beat Minnesota 123-116 on Tuesday night for their 10th straight win over the Timberwolves.

Jokic shook off two second-quarter technical fouls — one for hanging on the rim and another for jawing at an official — to lead the Nuggets to the comeback victory. He also had 15 rebounds.

Will Barton added 20 points and reserve JaMychal Green had 17 for the Nuggets, who squandered an 18-point lead in the first half and fell behind by eight. Denver held Minnesota scoreless for more than five minutes during the decisive stretch.

D'Angelo Russell scored 33 points and Juancho Hernangomez added 25 against his former team. It was the fifth straight loss for the Timberwolves.

Lakers 94, Grizzlies 92: Anthony Davis and LeBron James each scored 26 points, rallying Los Angeles to a win at Memphis.

James added 11 rebounds and seven as-

sists, and Dennis Schroder finished with 12 points for the Lakers, who have won their fourth straight game.

Jonas Valanciunas, Dillon Brooks and Gorgui Dieng led the Grizzlies with 13 points apiece.

Spurs 116, Clippers 113: Patty Mills came off the bench to hit a career-high eight three-pointers and scored 27 points, and San Antonio won at Los Angeles to snap a four-game skid.

Dejounte Murray added 21 points, Rudy Gay had 16 points, LaMarcus Aldridge 14 points and Keldon Johnson a career-high 11 rebounds for the Spurs. They led by 24 in the first quarter and withstood an onslaught by Kawhi Leonard in the third before nearly blowing their lead in the fourth.

Leonard scored a game-high 30 points and had 10 assists. He had 11 points in the third, when Patrick Beverley made three three-pointers, and the Clippers closed within one. Nicolas Batum had 21 points and nine rebounds, and Beverley finished with 20 points.

Nets 130, Jazz 96: Kyrie Irving scored 20 of his 29 points in the first half to lead un-

dermanned Brooklyn past visiting Utah.

The Nets, who entered the game having lost two straight and four of five, never trailed.

As brilliant as he was individually, Irving had help from Jarrett Allen and Caris LeVert.

Allen recorded his third double-double of the season with 19 points and 18 rebounds, and LeVert had 24 points off the bench. Joe Harris chipped in with 10 points.

Donovan Mitchell led the Jazz with game-high 31 points. Jordan Clarkson added 12, and Rudy Gobert and Royce O'Neale had 10 each for Utah, which had its two-game winning streak snapped.

Bulls 111, Trail Blazers 108: Coby White had 21 points and 10 rebounds and short-handed Chicago won at Portland.

Otto Porter Jr. added 19 points and 13 rebounds for the Bulls, who have won four of their last five games.

CJ McCollum led the Blazers with 26 points, including six three-pointers. Damian Lillard had 24 points and nine assists.

McCormack leads Kansas' rebound win over TCU

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — David McCormack scored a season-high 20 points to lead five Kansas players in double figures as the No. 6 Jayhawks beat TCU 93-64 Tuesday and matched the Big 12 record by winning their 11th consecutive conference road game.

Kansas (9-2, 3-1 Big 12) matched the league mark it initially set 18 years ago. The win in Fort Worth came only three days after a 25-point loss at home to Texas.

Ochai Agbaji added 19 points, while Jalen Wilson had 16, Tristan Enaruna 12 and Christian Braun 10.

Chuck O'Bannon Jr. had a career-high 18 points to lead the Horned Frogs (9-3, 2-2). R.J. Nembhard had 14, ending his streak of four 20-point games in a row.

No. 4 Texas 78, Iowa State 72: Andrew Jones scored a career-high 23 points and the host Longhorns continued their torrid start to the season.

Texas (9-1, 3-0 Big 12) led by as much as 15 early in the second half but the Cyclones (2-6, 0-4) kept chipping away and made it

tough for the Longhorns to close out the game.

Jones' driving baseline layup with 2:40 to play gave Texas a 72-63 cushion. Iowa State got within 75-70 when Javan Johnson converted a three-point play with 28 seconds left. The Longhorns closed it out from the free-throw line.

Mississippi State 78, No. 13 Missouri 63: DJ Stewart scored 24 points and the host Bulldogs overcame a 12-point halftime deficit to roll past the Mizzou.

Iverson Molinar added 20 points for the Bulldogs (7-4, 2-1 Southeastern Conference). Tolu Smith had 15 points and nine rebounds.

No. 23 Michigan State 68, No. 15 Rutgers 45: Aaron Henry had 20 points, eight rebounds and four blocks, helping the host Spartans pull away.

Michigan State (8-3, 2-3 Big Ten) had a 17-point scoring edge in the second half to win a second straight game.

No. 18 Texas Tech 82, Kansas State 71: Terrence Shannon Jr. beat the first-half buzzer with a jumper on his way to 22 points, Mac McClung added 16 and the host

Red Raiders beat the Wildcats.

No. 19 Clemson 74, North Carolina State 70 (OT): Aamir Simms hit a go-ahead basket for a second straight game as the host Tigers rallied from nine points down in the second half to beat the Wolfpack in overtime. North Carolina State (6-2, 2-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) took its last lead on DJ Funderburk's three-pointer with 3:12 to go in OT. That's when Simms got the ball down low for a basket to put Clemson (9-1, 3-1) ahead for good.

Kentucky 77, Vanderbilt 74: Olivier Sarr scored 24 points, Davion Mintz made the game-winning three-pointer with 47 seconds left and the host Wildcats took their ninth-straight win against the Commodores. The Wildcats (3-6, 2-0 Southeastern Conference), who had lost six straight before beating Mississippi State 79-73 in double-overtime on Saturday, avoided the first three-game losing streak in the 45-year history of Rupp Arena.

North Carolina 67, Miami 65: Leaky Black scored 16 points, and Andrew Platek's running jumper with three seconds to go carried the Tar Heels to a road win.