

## Biden win certified after mob storms Capitol

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Congress confirmed Democrat Joe Biden as the presidential election winner early Thursday after a violent mob loyal to President Donald Trump stormed the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to overturn the election, undercut America's democracy and keep Trump in the White House.

Lawmakers were resolved to complete the Electoral College tally in a display to the country, and the world, of the nation's enduring commitment to uphold the will of the voters and the peaceful transfer of power. They pushed through the night with tensions high and the nation's capital on alert.

Before dawn Thursday, lawmakers finished their work, confirming Biden won the election.

Vice President Mike Pence, presiding over the joint session, announced the tally, 306-232.

Trump, who had repeatedly refused to concede the election, said in a statement immediately after the vote that there will be a smooth transition of power on Inauguration Day.

"Even though I totally disagree with the outcome of the election, and the facts bear me out, nevertheless there will be an orderly transition on January 20th," Trump said in a statement posted to Twitter by an aide.

On Thursday, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer called on Trump's Cabinet to remove him from office.

Schumer said the attack on the Capitol "was an insurrection against the United States, incited by the president." He added, "This president should not hold office one day longer."

Schumer said the vice president and the Cabinet should invoke the 25th Amendment and immediately remove Trump from office. He added, "If the vice president and the Cabinet refuse to stand up, Congress should reconvene to impeach the president."

Also Thursday, Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao said she is resigning effective Monday, becoming the highest ranking member of Trump's administration to resign in protest after the assault on Capitol.

Chao, who is married to Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell, said the incident "has

deeply troubled me in a way that I simply cannot set aside."

The Capitol was under siege Wednesday, as the nation's elected representatives scrambled to crouch under desks and don gas masks while police futilely tried to barricade the building, one of the most jarring scenes ever to unfold in a seat of American political power. A woman was shot and killed inside the Capitol, and Washington's mayor instituted an evening curfew in an attempt to contain the violence.

The rioters were egged on by Trump, who has spent weeks falsely attacking the integrity of the election and had urged his supporters to descend on Washington to protest Congress' formal approval of Biden's victory. Some Republican lawmakers were in the midst of raising objections to the results on his behalf when the proceedings were abruptly halted by the mob.

Together, the protests and the GOP election objections amounted to an almost unthinkable challenge to American democracy and exposed the depths of the divisions that have coursed through the country during Trump's four years in office. Though the efforts to block Biden from being sworn in on Jan. 20 were sure to fail, the support Trump has received for his efforts to overturn the election results have badly strained the nation's democratic guardrails.

Congress reconvened in the evening, with lawmakers decrying the protests that defaced the Capitol and vowing to finish confirming the Electoral College vote for Biden's election, even if it took all night.

Pence reopened the Senate and directly addressed the demonstrators: "You did not win."

McConnell said the "failed insurrection" underscored lawmakers' duty to finish the count. Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Congress would show the world "what America is made of" with the outcome.

The president gave his supporters a boost into action Wednesday morning at a rally outside the White House, where he urged them to march to the Capitol. He spent much of the afternoon in his private dining room off the Oval Office watching scenes of the violence on television. At the urging of his staff, he reluctantly issued a pair of

tweets and a taped video telling his supporters it was time to "go home in peace" — yet he still said he backed their cause.

Hours later, Twitter for the first time locked Trump's account, demanded that he remove tweets excusing violence and threatened "permanent suspension."

A somber President-elect Biden, two weeks away from being inaugurated, said American democracy was "under unprecedented assault," a sentiment echoed by many in Congress, including some Republicans.

Former President George W. Bush said he watched the events in "disbelief and dismay."

The domed Capitol building has for centuries been the scene of protests and occasional violence. But Wednesday's events were particularly astounding both because they unfolded at least initially with the implicit blessing of the president and because of the underlying goal of overturning the results of a free and fair presidential election.

Tensions were already running high when lawmakers gathered early Wednesday afternoon for the constitutionally mandated counting of the Electoral College results, in which Biden defeated Trump, 306-232. Despite pleas from McConnell, more than 150 GOP lawmakers planned to support objections to some of the results, though lacking evidence of fraud or wrongdoing in the election.

Trump spent the lead-up to the proceedings publicly hectoring Pence, who had a largely ceremonial role, to aid the effort to throw out the results. He tweeted, "Do it Mike, this is a time for extreme courage!"

But Pence, in a statement shortly before presiding, defied Trump, saying that he could not claim "unilateral authority" to reject the electoral votes that make Biden president.

The woman who was killed was part of a crowd that was breaking down the doors to a barricaded room where armed officers stood on the other side, police said. She was shot in the chest by Capitol Police and taken to a hospital where she was pronounced dead.

City police said three other people died from medical emergencies during the long protest on and around the Capitol grounds.

# Ossoff seals Democrats' Senate sweep in Georgia

*Associated Press*

ATLANTA — As a teenager, Jon Ossoff was inspired by the pivotal role John Lewis played in the fight for racial equality when the civil rights icon was in his early 20s.

He was in awe of Lewis' life, he told The Associated Press in December, particularly how someone "so young" had achieved such a prominent position as chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

At 33, the millennial Democrat will assume his own leadership mantle after being one of two candidates to help the party sweep Georgia's crucial U.S. Senate runoff elections, a victory that sealed Democrats' control of the chamber. Ossoff defeated Republican David Perdue in the runoff that was held Tuesday after neither he nor Perdue received 50% of the vote in November.

This is Ossoff's first election to public office, and he will be the youngest member of the Senate. But he has never let youth and inexperience be barriers to his aspirations.

In 2017, at age 29, he ran for Congress in Georgia in a race closely watched as an early referendum on President Donald Trump.

Though he lost, he shattered fundraising records and made the contest in a once reliably Republican district competitive. For

his Senate campaign, he took a sharper approach. His platform was unabashedly liberal, calling for a \$15 minimum wage, a "public option" government health plan, and a new voting rights act to restore federal oversight of state election laws.

He also launched a fierce attack on Perdue while shrugging off his opponent's exaggerated claim that he was pursuing a "radical socialist agenda." At a debate in October, he called the 71-year-old former corporate executive "a crook" who used the COVID-19 pandemic to protect his stock portfolio while downplaying the seriousness of the virus. Perdue insisted the allegations were false.

Ossoff is smart, has a "good heart" and will put in the work to be a good senator, said Sarah Riggs Amico, a fellow Democrat who ran for lieutenant governor in Georgia in 2018 and challenged Ossoff in the Senate primary.

"The reality is government functions better when there are people from a wide variety of backgrounds who come to the table," she said.

In a victory speech early Wednesday, Ossoff said he would follow the example set by Lewis. The Georgia Democratic congressman died last year.

# Woman fatally shot in Capitol identified as USAF veteran

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — When a group of pro-Trump rioters stormed the Capitol and smashed windows on Wednesday, a woman jumped onto a pane and started through.

Seconds later, a gunshot rang out and the woman, who had a Trump flag tied around her waist, tipped back and fell onto the marble floor as blood spilled from her shoulder.

"They shot a girl!" someone yelled as the crowd ran out of the southeast entrance.

She died later that day, police said. She was one of four fatalities from the violent rioting that wreaked havoc through the halls of Congress on Wednesday, halting the certification of President-elect Joe Biden's electoral victory. Three others died of unspecified medical emergencies during the chaos.

The woman was 35-year-old Ashli Babbitt, a California native and Air Force veteran, her former husband told The Washington Post. Before her death in the Capitol, she had used her social media to express fervent support for President Donald Trump and echo many of the president's conspiracy theories and false claims of mass voter fraud.

Police have not yet confirmed Babbitt's identity or confirmed details about how she was shot. The woman was shot by U.S. Capitol Police, Washington D.C. Police Chief Robert J. Contee III told reporters on Wednesday.

Babbitt, a native of San Diego, served in Afghanistan and Iraq in the Air Force before other deployments with the National Guard to Kuwait and Qatar, ex-husband Timothy McEntee told The Post. McEntee and Babbitt met in the Air Force and were married for 14 years, before splitting in May 2019.

McEntee, who did not know Babbitt had traveled to D.C. for the protests, was shocked by the news of her death and described her as smart and strong-willed.

"I feel absolutely terrible and sick to my stomach about it," he wrote in a text message.

# NATO chief decries Capitol clash

**BY JOHN VANDIVER**

*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — NATO's top official has condemned the scenes of mob violence at the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday with the kind of rebuke normally reserved for adversaries and failed states.

"Shocking scenes in Washington, D.C.," Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Twitter as hundreds of rioters, egged on by an incendiary speech by President Donald Trump, stormed the Capitol, where lawmakers were validating President-elect Joe Biden's win in the presidential vote.

"The outcome of this democratic election

must be respected," Stoltenberg said.

The brief comment on Twitter was out-of-character for the NATO leader, who has made a point of not weighing in on the domestic politics of alliance members during his six-year tenure.

Diplomats and high-ranking military, government and NATO officials also condemned the unrest, many using more forceful language than Stoltenberg.

German defense minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said that the unrest was the result of the "intellectual and political arson" that Trump had stoked during his presidency.

# US unemployment claims drop to 787K

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans seeking unemployment aid fell slightly to 787,000, further evidence of a job market stumbling in the face of the coronavirus pandemic and the damage that it has inflicted on the economy for nearly 10 months.

Thursday's figure from the Labor Department, a slight decline from the previous week, showed that many employers are still cutting jobs as the pandemic tightens business restrictions and leads anxious consumers to stay home.

At the same time, the number of people who are receiving regular state unemployment aid fell by 125,000 to 5.1 million. And fewer people were on extended unemployment benefit programs.

On Friday, the government will likely issue a gloomy jobs report for December. Economists expect it to show that hiring slowed for a sixth straight month—and possibly that employers shed positions for the first time since the job market collapsed in April just after the pandemic erupted.

Unemployed Americans gained some urgently needed help late last month when a \$900 billion rescue aid package was signed into law. That measure provided a \$300-a-week federal jobless benefit on top of an average state benefit of about \$320. As many as half the states are now distributing the federal benefit, according to an unofficial tally at UnemploymentPUA.com. In states that take longer to pay out the \$300 payments, any missed payments can be made

retroactively.

The federal extension of benefits was lengthened to 24 weeks by the congressional legislation. That program will remain in place until mid-March. A separate program that provides jobless aid to contractors and gig workers who previously weren't eligible was also extended for 11 weeks. Both benefits had briefly expired Dec. 26, temporarily cutting off all aid for 10 million jobless Americans.

The Labor Department said this week that despite President Donald Trump's delay in signing the relief package—he did so six days after Congress approved the bill—jobless benefits under the extended programs that initially lapsed Dec. 26 should continue to be paid out without interruption.

## Kim vows to bolster North Korea's military at meeting

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea leader Kim Jong Un vowed to strengthen the country's military defenses in a speech at a major ruling party meeting that provides insights into his priorities amid growing economic challenges and a U.S. presidential transition.

Kim made clear his "will to reliably protect the security of the country and people and the peaceful environment of the socialist construction by placing the state defense capabilities on a much higher level, and put forth goals for realizing it," the Korean Central News Agency said.

The state media report Thursday on Kim's speech to the Workers' Party con-

gress the previous day didn't elaborate. North Korea has previously underscored its need for nuclear weapons and missiles as a deterrent and a pre-emptive strike capability to cope with what it describes as American hostility.

Cheong Seong-Chang, a fellow at the Wilson Center's Asia Program, said Kim's speech likely contained "sensitive contents" that can provoke the United States and South Korea.

Kim halted his country's nuclear and long-range missile tests before engaging in high-stakes summitry with President Donald Trump in 2018. But with his advancing arsenal on the negotiating table, their diplomacy fell apart due to wrangling over the

weapons and U.S.-led sanctions on North Korea.

Kim since then has openly pledged to expand his nuclear capability that he says already put the American mainland within its striking range. However, he has not resumed high-profile weapons tests, which some analysts say could completely derail diplomacy with the United States and further diminish prospects for winning sanctions relief.

South Korea's spy agency told lawmakers in late November that Kim was worried about President-elect Joe Biden's expected new approach on North Korea. Biden has called Kim a "thug" and criticized his summit diplomacy with Trump.

## Iraq issues arrest warrant for Trump over drone strike

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — An arrest warrant was issued Thursday for outgoing President Donald Trump in connection with the killing of an Iranian general and a powerful Iraqi militia leader last year, Iraq's judiciary said.

The warrant was issued by a judge in Baghdad's investigative court tasked with probing the Washington-directed drone strike that killed Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the court's media office said. They were killed outside the capital's airport last January.

Al-Muhandis was the deputy leader of the state-sanctioned Popular Mobilization Forces, an umbrella group composed of an array of militias, including Iran-backed groups, formed to fight the Islamic State.

Soleimani headed the expeditionary Quds force of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The arrest warrant was for a charge of premeditated murder, which carries the death penalty on conviction. It is unlikely to be carried out but symbolic in the waning days of Trump's presidency.

The decision to issue the warrant "was made after the judge recorded the state-

ments of the claimants from the family of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis," according to a statement from the Supreme Judicial Council. The investigation into the killings is ongoing, the court said.

The killings sparked a diplomatic crisis and strained U.S.-Iraq ties, drawing the ire of Shiite political lawmakers who passed a non-binding resolution to pressure the government to oust foreign troops from the country.

Iran-backed groups have since stepped up attacks against the American presence in Iraq, leading to threats by Washington to shutter its Baghdad diplomatic mission.

# Ariz. governor defends anti-virus efforts

Associated Press

PHOENIX — As Arizona has experienced periodic spikes in coronavirus cases since last spring, Gov. Doug Ducey frequently resisted calls to take stronger measures. He has declined to institute a state-wide mask mandate, allowed school districts to mostly make their own choices and allowed businesses to stay open.

All of those choices by the Republican governor are now getting renewed scrutiny as the Grand Canyon state becomes what health officials call the latest “hot spot of the world” because of soaring caseloads.

C.J. Karamargin, the governor’s spokesman, said the current number of cases and deaths are “heartbreaking” but it’s a phenomenon happening in other states even with strict stay-at-home orders.

At the same time, the state is working to ramp up vaccination distribution efforts, Karamargin added. More than 119,000 people in Arizona have received the vaccine, state health officials said Wednesday. That is less than 2% of the state’s population. Nationally, as of Wednesday, more than three weeks into the U.S. vaccination campaign, 5.3 million people had gotten their first shot.

## Texas

AUSTIN — Rep. Kevin Brady said he has tested positive for the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

The Southeast Texas congressman and ranking Republican Ways and Means Committee member revealed his test results in a tweet late Tuesday, followed by a prepared statement Wednesday. The disclosure came as a record number of Texas COVID-19 deaths were reported Wednesday.

A record 326 COVID-19 deaths were reported Wednesday, shattering the previous record of 278 deaths reported on July 23, according to statistics compiled by the Texas Department of State Health Services. That brought the Texas death toll for the 8-month-old outbreak to 28,545.

The state reported 19,535 new confirmed coronavirus cases and 4,026 probable cases on Wednesday.

## North Dakota

FARGO — A man serving a life sentence for the murders of two U.S. marshals who were killed in a shootout near a small North Dakota town nearly four decades ago wants to be released from prison after testing positive for COVID-19.

Scott Faul, 67, has been in federal custody since 1983. Faul, along with Gordon Kahl

and Kahl’s son, Yorie, were involved in a shootout with law enforcement officers near Medina, about 120 miles west of Fargo. The incident gained national attention in part because Gordon Kahl was a leader of a group of tax protesters.

The shootout resulted in the deaths of U.S. Marshal Kenneth Muir and Deputy Marshal Robert Cheshire.

## North Carolina

RALEIGH — North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper on Wednesday announced a three-week extension of a 10 p.m. curfew aimed at helping slow the spread of the coronavirus as some counties experienced a bumpy rollout of vaccines for residents over age 75.

As the state moved beyond health care workers and those in nursing homes and shifted to the new phase of vaccine distribution for certain elderly members of the general public, some sites quickly ran out of supplies or experienced long lines or crowds.

Not all counties had begun the new phase because key health care workers who regularly come into contact with COVID-19 haven’t all had the opportunity to get their first dose of a Pfizer or Moderna vaccine.

## Florida

ST. PETERSBURG — Florida began converting one of its major testing locations into a vaccination site and Gov. Ron DeSantis said Wednesday that residents over 65 soon should be able to receive a shot at other large-scale venues, churches and even some grocery stores around the state.

DeSantis spoke at the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, and some first responders were vaccinated. He called Wednesday a “soft opening” that will last a few days until the site opens to the regular public.

More than 329,000 people have been vaccinated in Florida — or about 1.5% of the population — almost all of them either health care workers, residents in care homes, or people over the age of 65.

The state’s Department of Health on Wednesday said there were 17,783 new cases of COVID-19, bringing the state’s total to just over 1.4 million people. It’s the highest single-day total released since the pandemic began.

## South Dakota

SIoux FALLS — South Dakota health officials on Wednesday confirmed six new deaths due to complications from the coronavirus, which came after two straight days with no fatalities.

The deaths lifted the total to 1,519 since the start of the pandemic. That death count is the seventh-highest per capita in the country at about 171 deaths per 100,000 people, according to The COVID Tracking Project.

South Dakota ranks 34th in the country for new cases per capita in the last two weeks, Johns Hopkins University researchers said. One in every 302 people in South Dakota tested positive in the past week.

## Massachusetts

BOSTON — The coronavirus field hospital in Worcester has expanded to 75 beds and has treated 275 patients since reopening last month, officials said Wednesday.

The field hospital run by UMass Memorial Health Care first treated patients last spring.

All told, nearly 500 patients were treated at the field hospital in 2020, UMass Memorial President Dr. Eric Dickson said during a virtual town hall meeting, Masslive.com reported. The average age of patients is 66 years old and the average length of stay is four days, he said.

## Nebraska

LINCOLN — A new, more contagious strain of the coronavirus that has been discovered in five states is probably in Nebraska as well, but officials haven’t yet confirmed its presence, the state’s chief medical officer said Wednesday.

Dr. Gary Anthonie said the new strain is concerning because it could lead to an increase in hospitalizations in Nebraska. Anthonie said the state’s public health lab is purchasing its own equipment to test for the mutated virus. The new strain has led to a national lockdown in England, and the virus has been detected in California, Florida, New York, Georgia and neighboring Colorado.

“We can all say with some certainty that it’s most likely... here in Nebraska,” Anthonie said at a press conference with Gov. Pete Ricketts.

## New Jersey

TRENTON — Police officers and firefighters in New Jersey are eligible to get the COVID-19 vaccine beginning Thursday.

They follow health care workers as the second wave of professionals eligible to get the shot. Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy made the announcement Wednesday.

“We are able to open up vaccination to them based on the available supply,” Health Commissioner Judy Persichilli said.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Airline passenger throws punches after kids kick her seat**

**OR** PORTLAND — A woman is facing charges after attacking another woman on a Spirit Airlines flight at Portland International Airport on Sunday because the woman's kids had kicked the back of her seat.

Daydrena Jaslin Walker-Williams pulled her luggage from an overhead bin and then punched passenger Nataly Hernandez several times, leaving Hernandez with a bleeding lip and lumps on her head, a probable-cause affidavit states.

Walker-Williams said she hit Hernandez "2 to 3 times in the face with her fist," according to the complaint. She told police she was upset Hernandez's children kicked the back of her seat, and said she told Hernandez "to tell her kids to stop it," The Oregonian/OregonLive reported. She said Hernandez ignored her and later "hit her on the shoulder."

**Man accused of setting fire outside hospital**

**ND** FARGO — A man accused of setting a fire outside a Fargo hospital early Wednesday has been arrested, according to police.

Officers and firefighters responded to Escentia Hospital about 2:30 a.m. where smoke had filled the lobby. According to authorities, the fire was burning in a garbage container near the entrance to the emergency department. Firefighters quickly extinguished the fire and ventilated the lobby.

Police said they arrested a 39-year-old man who witnesses saw starting the fire.

**Police: Man used racial slur, threatened fast-food worker**

**NC** HICKORY — A North Carolina man used a racial slur and threatened to shoot a juvenile employee at a fast-food restaurant, police said Tuesday.

The Hickory Police Department says in a news release on Tuesday that Jimmy Mott, 53, of Newton, called the management at the

local Zaxby's to complain after leaving the drive-through, using the slur and threatening to shoot the worker he had dealt with as he ordered food on Sunday. The news release didn't reveal the juvenile worker's identity or his age.

Mott turned himself into police, who charged him with ethnic intimidation.

**Lemur theft suspect told to stay away from zoo**

**CA** SAN FRANCISCO — A 31-year-old man accused of stealing a lemur from the San Francisco Zoo last year has been ordered released from custody, but told to stay away from the zoo.

Cory McGilloway made his first court appearance Tuesday after he was arrested last October for the theft of Maki the lemur, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

The 21-year-old male lemur was discovered missing in October. Investigators found evidence of a forced entry to the lemur enclosure. A day later Maki was spotted in Daly City, a few miles south of San Francisco. The animal was in good health and transported back to the zoo.

**Lawmaker wants public to help pick an official state dinosaur**

**MA** BOSTON — A Massachusetts state lawmaker is asking for the public's help to select an official state dinosaur.

State Rep. Jack Lewis tweeted Monday that he plans on filing the legislation on Jan. 15, adding that the effort is a good way for children to learn about the legislative process. But first, the Framingham Democrat is asking residents to select from one of two dinosaur species discovered in Massachusetts.

Podokesaurus holyokensis, which means "swift-footed lizard of Holyoke," was first discovered near Mount Holyoke in 1910 by Mignon Talbot, the first woman to name and describe a dinosaur, according to Lewis. The species was 3 to 6 feet in length, weighed approximately 90 pounds, and was estimated to run 9 to 12 mph.

Anchisaurus polyzelus, which means

"much sought after near lizard" was discovered in 1855 in Springfield. They were more than 6 feet long and about 60 to 75 pounds.

**2 rescued from crashed vehicle after 2 days stuck in a ditch**

**IN** SOUTH BEND — Two people were rescued Tuesday morning after being trapped inside a crashed motor vehicle in a northern Indiana ditch for two days, authorities said.

Hunters discovered the crash around 8:30 a.m. Tuesday, the St. Joseph County Sheriff's Department said in a news release. The vehicle was found along a farm lane, and the occupants said they had been there for two days, the release said.

The female driver suffered from several injuries, including a possible broken foot, it said. The male passenger suffered from multiple unknown injuries. Both were hospitalized. The two were found conscious and alert, responders at the scene said.

**2 police officers arrested over apparent hotel room tryst**

**CT** NORWALK — Two Connecticut police officers are facing criminal charges after they were found together in a hotel room while they were supposed to be on patrol.

Norwalk officers Michael Dimeglio and Sara Laudano turned themselves in at police headquarters on Tuesday and were arrested on charges stemming from the Oct. 10 hotel incident, the department announced on Facebook. The two officers were found at the Even Hotel shortly before 1 a.m. after Laudano did not respond to calls over the police radio or her cellphone, police officials said.

They were arrested Tuesday after an investigation determined that criminal charges were warranted, the officials said.

Laudano, 31, was charged with second-degree larceny, second-degree reckless endangerment and risk of injury to a child. Dimeglio, 38, was charged with second-degree larceny and second-degree reckless endangerment. Police officials did not explain the charges.

— From wire reports

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# Home-field edge disappeared in NFL

*Associated Press*

For the eight NFL teams guaranteed to host at least one game in the playoffs this month, the comfort of familiar surroundings sure can't hurt their quest to reach the Super Bowl.

Staying in the same time zone and avoiding airplanes and hotels ought to help players stay fresh. For the far-north teams, namely Green Bay and Buffalo, the cold, wind and potential snow could provide a timely boost against an opponent from a warmer-weather city.

Make no mistake, though: The home-field advantage that has long been part of the story of professional football all but vanished during the year of the virus. Largely empty stadiums cut off crowd noise as an energy source and strategic asset.

"It doesn't feel any different playing at home or playing away right now," said Seattle coach Pete Carroll, whose team normally has a leg up as much as any host with the partial roof cantilevered over the seats that helps amplify the noise at what is now called Lumen Field. "It's just evened everything out."

With the win on Sunday night over a Philadelphia team offering little resistance, Washington took the NFC East title. The victory was dually decisive, giving visitors a collective 128-127-1 record for the 2020 reg-

ular season — the first winning mark since the AFL-NFL merger in 1970. Road teams were narrowly outscored 6,353-6,339, a mere two-touchdown gap.

In 2019, though the visitors managed an anomaly of a plus-36 scoring margin, home teams still went 132-123-1 for a .518 winning percentage. In 2018, according to Sportradar, the advantage for the hosts was far more clear: a .602 winning percentage and a 564-point edge.

Over the previous 10 years, home teams collected 342 more wins than the visitors and scored an average of an additional 2.19 points per game. Over the 50 seasons prior to this unprecedented 2020 scene of largely empty stadiums, the home team winning percentage was .575.

The difference was immediately noticeable. Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers was able to lure Vikings linebacker Anthony Barr offside on third-and-5 late in the third quarter of the opener at Minnesota, which had enjoyed one of the NFL's most daunting environments for visiting teams.

The no-risk throw by Rodgers after the yellow flag flew went for a 39-yard completion to Marquez Valdes-Scantling to set up a score and put the game away. The Vikings, after matching the best home record in the NFC over their first four years at U.S. Bank Stadium, went 3-5 there in 2020. Their

young and struggling defense had no help from a crowd on those critical third downs, making Sunday afternoons that much easier for the opposing offense.

Even in road games, the defense was more exposed in the highest-scoring regular season in NFL history. In Pittsburgh on Dec. 27, Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger heard the Indianapolis Colts shouting, "Slant, slant, slant!" before a first-down snap in the third quarter to warn the defensive backs of the route he might deliver the ball to.

"We should've run a slant. I almost changed the play, but I didn't because they were yelling it," Roethlisberger said.

Instead, he threw deep to Diontae Johnson for a 39-yard touchdown that cut the lead to 10 points and ignited the comeback for a 28-24 victory.

"There are absolutely times in games where you hear a defender say, 'Hey, watch this,' and you're like, 'Man, that's what we called.' Some of that is dumb luck. Some of that is maybe tendencies. We can hear stuff that they talk about," Roethlisberger said. "It is one of the most unique years when it comes to strategy, when it comes to trying to trick people. Sometimes you even are trying to do dummy signals and saying dummy things just to make things happen or to trick other teams."

## Bills' wealth of depth at receiver makes foes pay

*Associated Press*

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — The Bills have such a wealth of depth at receiver, Stefon Diggs found himself playing the role of traffic controller for quarterback Josh Allen last weekend.

With Diggs double-covered running a route to the left of the end zone, he pointed to the other side, where Isaiah McKenzie was wide-open for a 14-yard touchdown catch in Buffalo's season-ending 56-26 romp over the Miami Dolphins.

"It's not like Josh needs me to point at him to tell him where to throw the ball. I'm pretty sure he saw it," Diggs said with a chuckle on Wednesday. "But it's just a natural reaction when you see a guy open like, 'Hey, hey.'"

It's been that way for a pass-happy offense for much of the season in which the Bills set a single-season franchise record

with 501 points and matched the NFL single-season record with 13 players scoring a TD receiving, including one by Allen.

That depth could come in handy Saturday when the AFC East champions (13-3) host their first playoff game in 24 years by facing the seventh-seeded Indianapolis Colts (11-5).

Injuries are suddenly catching up to Buffalo, with slot receiver Cole Beasley in jeopardy of missing his second consecutive game with a knee injury, while Diggs (oblique) and McKenzie (ankle) are also nicked up.

Diggs, who did not practice Wednesday, said he's fine. Coach Sean McDermott did not provide updates on McKenzie or Beasley, who has not practiced since getting hurt in a 38-9 win at New England on Dec. 28.

Though missing Beasley would be a concern, after he finished second on the team with 82 catches and 967 yards, both career

highs, it's somewhat mitigated by how Allen has spread the ball to whomever is on the field.

In a season Diggs became the team's first player to lead the NFL in catches (127) and yards receiving (1,535), the Bills had others making significant contributions.

Rookie Gabriel Davis ranked second on the team with seven touchdowns, followed by McKenzie, who scored five times on just 30 catches.

And don't forget John Brown. A year after leading Buffalo with 72 catches for 1,060 yards, the outside speedster has been limited to just nine games because of ankle and knee injuries and a stint on the reserve-COVID-19 list.

On Sunday, Brown returned after missing five games to show he's ready to reestablish his presence with four catches for 72 yards and a touchdown in just one half of work.

# Smith has sent 3 teams to the 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.

Even if the limitations from a strained right calf in his surgically repaired leg force Rivera to rotate backup Taylor Heinicke in at times Saturday night against the Tampa

Bay Buccaneers. Rivera said, "It's something we most certainly have to look at," but the Buccaneers are zeroing in on Smith.

"When Alex Smith plays quarterback, they're a heck of a football team," Tampa Bay coach Bruce Arians said. "They're an extremely well-coached team, a ton of talent on that defensive front, but Alex Smith is really the key to everything."

How is that possible? Arians gives Smith credit for throwing the ball so quickly he avoids sacks. Philadelphia coach Doug Pederson, who was Kansas City's offensive coordinator for three years with Smith, points to decision-making. Cincinnati's Zac Taylor praises Smith's efficiency.

"He finds a way to move the team down the field," Taylor said. "He's always been a quarterback that has a really high football IQ."

## No. 21 Duke beats Boston College without Coach K

Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — Wendell Moore Jr. scored a season-high 25 points to help No. 21 Duke hold off Boston College 83-82 on Wednesday night while Hall of Fame coach Mike Krzyzewski was sidelined due to COVID-19 protocols.

The sophomore had been off to a rough start to the season but had a huge performance for the Blue Devils (4-2, 2-0 Atlantic Coast Conference), who had to rally from 16 down before halftime in their first game in three weeks.

Krzyzewski has said he and his wife are following quarantine protocols after a family member tested positive for COVID-19. Krzyzewski said both tested negative as recently as Monday.

That left associate head coach Jon Scheyer to lead the program Wednesday.

CJ Felder finished with 24 points for the Eagles (2-8, 0-4), while Quinnipiac graduate transfer Rich Kelly had a season-high 16 points.

**No. 2 Baylor 76, Oklahoma 61:** MaCio Teague scored 17 points, Matthew Mayer had 16 and the host Bears improved to 10-0 for only the fifth time in team history.

The team's season-opening, 10-game winning streak, all by at least 11 points, includes its first three Big 12 games. It is its third 10-0 start in 10 seasons (2011-12, 2016-17) after the previous two came in 1911-12 and 2000-01.

Baylor coach Scott Drew got his 372nd ca-

reer victory, one more win than his father, former Valparaiso coach Homer Drew had in his 22 seasons as a head coach.

Austin Reaves had 19 points and Alondes Williams 11 for the Sooners (6-3, 2-2 Big 12).

**No. 7 Creighton 89, Seton Hall 53:** Damien Jefferson scored 16 of his season-high 19 points in the first half and the host Bluejays used a fast start to beat the Pirates.

Creighton (9-2, 5-1 Big East) won its fifth straight game, with its biggest conference victory since beating St. John's 100-59 in February 2016.

The loss ended a three-game win streak for Seton Hall (8-5, 5-2) and was coach Kevin Willard's most lopsided defeat in his 11 seasons.

Denzel Mahoney had 14 points and Marcus Zegarowski added 11 for the Bluejays, who moved into second place in the Big East behind Villanova.

Sandro Mamukelashvili led the Pirates with 14 points and Jared Rhoden had 10.

**No. 9 Tennessee 79, Arkansas 74:** Josiah-Jordan James and Victor Bailey scored 17 points apiece and the host Vols hit eight free throws in the final minute to defeat the Razorbacks.

John Fulkerson scored 12 of his 16 points in the second half and freshman Keon Johnson added 14 for Tennessee (2-1, 8-1).

Jamie Notae had just five points in the first half, and finished with 19. Jalen Tate had 15 points, Vance Jackson scored 14 and Conner Vanover added 12 for Arkansas (1-2,

9-2).

**No. 10 Michigan 82, No. 16 Minnesota 57:** Freshman Hunter Dickinson scored a season-high 28 points as the host Wolverines remained unbeaten. Michigan (10-0, 5-0 Big Ten) had a 19-point edge in the second half.

The Golden Gophers (10-3, 3-3) made just 32% of their shots, and only Marcus Carr scored in double figures. Carr, though, was 5-for-16 from the field and was held to 14 points after entering the game averaging 22-plus points.

Isaiah Livers scored 14 points and Franz Wagner had 12 points for the Wolverines.

**No. 11 Houston 70, Wichita State 63:** Quentin Grimes scored 20 of his 22 points in the second half as the host Cougars rallied for a win.

**Louisville 73, No. 19 Virginia Tech 71:** David Johnson scored 17 points, including a crucial free throw with five seconds left, and the host Cardinals withstood a missed three-point try at the buzzer in a matchup of unbeaten Atlantic Coast Conference teams.

**No. 22 Virginia 70, Wake Forest 61:** Sam Hauser scored 11 of his 16 points during a 28-10 run to open the second half and the host Cavaliers returned from a coronavirus pause to beat the Demon Deacons.

**Boise State 78, Air Force 59:** Derrick Alston Jr. had 16 points and seven rebounds as the host Broncos extended their win streak to nine games. A.J. Walker had 16 points for the Falcons (3-6, 1-4).

# Wizards' Beal scores 60 in loss to 76ers

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Joel Embiid scored 38 points and the NBA-leading Philadelphia 76ers overcame a Washington record-tying 60-point performance by Bradley Beal in a 141-136 win over the Wizards on Wednesday night.

The Sixers are an NBA-best 7-1 in coach Doc Rivers' first season in Philadelphia.

Beal was stuffed on a layup and missed a three-pointer inside the final minute. But the dynamic guard, who once scored 53 and 55 points in consecutive games, sank a free throw with 4.4 seconds left to reach 60. He went 20-for-25 from the floor, 7-for-10 on three-pointers and was 13-for-15 from the line to match Gilbert Arenas for the franchise mark.

Beal hit seven threes and reached 57 points through three quarters, but the Wizards gave up 82 points and trailed by as many as 21 in the first half.

**Magic 105, Cavaliers 94:** Former top overall draft pick Markelle Fultz suffered a season-ending tear of the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee during the first quarter of Orlando's win over visiting Cleveland.

Fultz, off to the best start of his career, was driving to the basket less than five minutes into the game when he was cut off by Isaac Okoro and his left knee buckled without contact. The Magic point guard writhed in pain on the floor for several minutes before he was helped into a wheelchair.

Fultz signed a three-year, \$50 million extension last month and was finally showing the promise that made him the No. 1 pick in the 2017 draft as he led Orlando to a quick start this season. He came in averaging a career-best 14.3 points in seven games.

Fultz was drafted by the Philadelphia 76ers as part of their lengthy rebuild but struggled for years with a tough-to-diagnose shoulder injury that ruined his jump shot. He was traded to the Magic in February 2019.

Terrence Ross scored 20 points and hit five three-pointers to lead Orlando, which beat the Cavaliers for a second time in three nights.

Collin Sexton scored 21 for Cleveland, his eighth straight game with at least 20 to start the season. That broke LeBron James' franchise record from 2004-05.

**Celtics 107, Heat 105:** Rookie guard Payton Pritchard's putback with 0.2 seconds left capped a wild finish, and Boston won at Miami in their first matchup since last year's Eastern Conference finals.

Jayson Tatum scored 27 points and Jaylen Brown had 21 for the Celtics, who wasted an early 17-point lead and a 10-point lead in the final minute before winning.

Jimmy Butler had 26 points for Miami.

The Celtics went on a late 13-0 run to go up 10 with 1:17 left — only to see the Heat score 10 points in 55 seconds to tie the game on a pair of three-pointers by Duncan Robinson, one while getting fouled, and another from Goran Dragic.

**Knicks 112, Jazz 100:** Austin Rivers scored 23 points, including 14 straight for host New York down the stretch, and Julius Randle had 30 points, 16 rebounds and seven assists in a defeat of Utah.

The Knicks trailed by 18 in the first half but outplayed the Jazz in the second and won for the fifth time in six games. It was tied at 96 with under five minutes to play before Rivers made four three-pointers in the final 4:17.

Elfrid Payton scored 22 points for New York.

Jordan Clarkson had 19 points and Donovan Mitchell added 18 for Utah, which was swept in a back-to-back set of games in New York. The Brooklyn Nets routed them 130-96 on Tuesday.

**Thunder 111, Pelicans 110:** Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 21 points, George Hill hit the go-ahead free throws with 12 seconds left, and Oklahoma City won at New Orleans.

The Pelicans had the final possession of the game, and top scorers Brandon Ingram and Zion Williamson both touched the ball. But it was second-year reserve guard Nickail Alexander-Walker who took the last shot from three-point range and it rimmed out.

Darius Bazley had 20 points and 12 rebounds for the Thunder, who avenged a home loss to New Orleans last week while winning for just the second time in six games.

Williamson scored 29 points and Ingram 24. Steven Adams had 10 points, 10 assists and 11 rebounds for his first career triple-double.

**Pacers 114, Rockets 107:** Malcolm Brogdon scored a career-high 35 points and made the go-ahead three-pointer with 2:22 to go, leading host Indiana past Houston.

Justin Holiday added a season-best 20 points for the Pacers.

**Suns 123, Raptors 115:** Devin Booker scored 24 points, Jae Crowder added 21 and host Phoenix made 21 three-pointers against Toronto.

The Suns hit at least 20 threes for the

fourth time in franchise history. Crowder led the way with six and Cameron Johnson added four as the Suns finished 21 of 40 (52.5%) from three-point range.

**Bucks 130, Pistons 115:** Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 25 points and Khris Middleton added 23 as host Milwaukee rolled past Detroit for its third straight victory.

The Bucks (5-3) also beat the Pistons (1-7) on Monday night in Milwaukee and have won their last nine regular-season meetings with Detroit. The Bucks were ahead 82-56 at halftime and led by 34 in the third quarter.

Jerami Grant had 31 points for the Pistons.

**Hornets 102, Hawks 94:** Gordon Hayward scored a career-high 44 points and Charlotte recovered to win at Atlanta after trailing for the first time in the fourth quarter.

The Hornets led by double figures most of the game before the Hawks claimed their first lead, 86-85, on John Collins' three-point play with 5:22 remaining. Hayward answered with a jumper and his own three-point play, and Charlotte never trailed again.

Collins led Atlanta with 23 points and 11 rebounds.

**Clippers 108, Warriors 101:** Kawhi Leonard had 21 points, including the tying and go-ahead baskets midway through the fourth quarter, and Los Angeles won at Golden State in the first of two consecutive matchups between the Pacific Division rivals.

Paul George returned from a one-game absence with a sore right ankle to add 21 points and 12 rebounds in the Clippers' fourth straight win against Golden State, which got just 13 points from Stephen Curry on a cold shooting night for the two-time MVP.

Curry had scored 92 points in the previous two games, including his career-high 62 against Portland on Sunday night.

**Kings 128, Bulls 124:** Buddy Hield converted a four-point play with 38 seconds left to make up for a horrible shooting night, and Sacramento held off visiting Chicago.

Hield missed 12 of his first 14 shots and was 1-for-8 on three-pointers before hitting one from the top of the arc and getting fouled by former Kings teammate Garrett Temple. Hield sank the free throw and finished with 10 points.

First-round draft pick Tyrese Haliburton scored 15 of his season-high 17 points in the fourth quarter.