

US braces for potentially violent week

Associated Press

The threat of extremist groups descending on statehouses across the country in demonstrations Sunday prompted some governors to roll out a massive show of force and ramp up security, less than two weeks after a mob overran the nation's Capitol.

Fencing, boarded-up windows and lines of police and National Guard troops have transformed statehouse grounds ahead of expected demonstrations leading up to President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration on Wednesday.

The stepped-up security measures were intended to safeguard seats of government from the type of violence that occurred at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, when a supporters of President Donald Trump swarmed the building while Congress was certifying the Electoral College vote.

The FBI has warned of the potential for armed protests at the nation's Capitol and all 50 state capitol buildings beginning this weekend. Some social media messages had targeted Sunday for demonstrations, though it remained unclear how many people might show up.

As dawn broke Sunday, state police and

National Guard troops stood sentry around a number of statehouses, including those in Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania. But there were no signs yet of protestors.

In Columbus, Ohio, nearly every business around the downtown capital square was boarded up. In Lansing, Mich., police with dogs patrolled on foot, and a helicopter hovered overhead. In Atlanta, armored vehicles were stationed on Capitol grounds.

Security in Washington, D.C., has also intensified ahead of the inauguration. Tall fencing surrounds the U.S. Capitol, the National Mall is closed to the general public and the District of Columbia's mayor asked people not to visit. Some 25,000 National Guard troops from around the country were due in the city by early in the week. On Sunday, National Guard troops who have already arrived were stationed outside the Capitol with officers from the Customs and Border Protection, as well as other federal police.

In the states, some authorities said that they had no specific indication that demonstrations would occur, much less turn violent. Yet many state officials vowed to be prepared, just in case. They said that they

did not want a repeat of the mob's assault on the Capitol, which left a Capitol Police officer and four others dead. Dozens of other officers were injured in the riot.

More than a third of governors had called out the National Guard to help protect their state capitols and aid local law enforcement officers. Several governors issued states of emergency, and others closed their capitols to the public until after Biden's inauguration day.

Even before the violence at the U.S. Capitol, some statehouses had been the target of vandals and angry protesters during the past year.

Last spring, armed protesters entered the Michigan Capitol to object to coronavirus-related lockdowns and were confronted by police. People angered over the death of George Floyd, who died after a Minneapolis police officer pressed a knee into his neck for several minutes, vandalized capitols in several states, including Colorado, Ohio, Texas and Wisconsin.

And just last month, crowds in Oregon forced their way into the state Capitol in Salem to protest its closure to the public during a special legislative session on coronavirus measures.

Milley source of military continuity under Biden

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In taking charge of a Pentagon battered by leadership churn, the Biden administration will look to one holdover as a source of military continuity: Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

President-elect Joe Biden will inherit Milley as his senior military adviser, and although Biden could replace Milley, he likely won't.

A Princeton-educated history buff with the gift of gab, Milley has been a staunch defender of the military's apolitical tradition even as President Donald Trump packed the Pentagon with political loyalists. Milley reassured Congress that the military would stay out of the elections

and, in no uncertain terms, told troops that the Capitol riot was an act of sedition. Last summer, he put his own job on the line by apologizing for being part of the entourage that accompanied Trump to a photo-op outside a church near the White House after peaceful protesters were forcibly removed from the area.

Military leaders always have critical roles in ensuring stability from one administration to the next. But Milley will be especially important for continuity after a delayed, rocky postelection transition and uncertainty about when the Senate will confirm top Pentagon nominees.

Milley, 62, is early in the second year of a four-year term as the military's top officer. His predecessor, Marine Gen. Joseph

Dunford, now retired, was a similarly transitional figure, appointed by President Barack Obama and continuing for nearly three years with Trump.

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs does not command troops but advises a president and a secretary of defense on approaches to major military problems.

Biden will have many problems on his plate from the get-go, including Iran and North Korea. In addition to dealing with potential military crises, Biden would look to Milley, along with his prospective secretary of defense, Lloyd Austin, for advice on broader strategic goals, including pursuing arms control with Russia, countering terrorism in the Mideast and competing with China.

Gunmen kill two women judges in Afghan capital

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Gunmen fired on a car in northern Kabul on Sunday, killing two women judges who worked for Afghanistan's high court and wounding the driver, a court official said. It was the latest attack in the Afghan capital during peace talks between Taliban and Afghan government officials in Qatar.

Supreme Court of Afghanistan spokesman Ahmad Fahim Qawim said the women were judges who worked for the high court, but he did not identify them by name.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack and Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the insurgent group wasn't responsible.

The Afghan government has repeatedly

blamed the Taliban for targeted killings in recent months, and the insurgent group has accused the government of staging the killings to spoil the peace process.

The Islamic State has claimed responsibility for multiple attacks in the capital in recent months, including on educational institutions that killed 50 people, most of them students. ISIS has also claimed responsibility for rocket attacks in December targeting the major U.S. base in Afghanistan. There were no casualties.

The Taliban and the Afghan government earlier this month resumed peace talks in Qatar. Negotiations were off to a slow start as the insurgent group continues attacks on Afghan government forces while keeping their promise not to attack U.S. and NATO troops.

Expert: N. Korea to renew nuclear, missile activity

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — North Korea will likely restart nuclear weapon and missile activity, spurring Japan and South Korea to cooperate on security, a Japanese foreign policy expert told journalists Thursday.

The prediction was part of an analysis of Japanese foreign policy provided by Keio University professor Ken Jimbo, a security and foreign affairs expert, hosted by the Japan Foreign Press Center via video conference.

It came just hours before a North Korean military parade unveiled an apparent new short-range ballistic missile that likely runs on solid fuel and what appeared to be a new submarine-launched ballistic missile.

And it followed a speech Monday by South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who promised a stronger alliance with the United States under the incoming administration of President-elect Joe Biden.

"The Biden administration will give us more expectation and hope that the U.S. will go back to the policy of utilizing alliances and ... giving importance to multilateralism," Jimbo said.

The United States has made efforts to coax its strongest allies in the Far East to cooperate. U.S. officials, for example, successfully urged Seoul not to follow through on a threat to pull out of an intelligence sharing pact with Japan in 2019.

But relations have been strained. Last week, a South Korean court ordered Japan to compensate "comfort women" forced to work in military brothels during World War II. A previous court decision awarded damages to South Koreans forced into labor by the Japanese during the war.

There are no signs that these issues will be resolved any time soon, but shared concern about North Korea will spur Japan and South Korea to work together, Jimbo said.

"North Korea will likely resume its missile and nuclear activities and the environment on the Korean Peninsula will become more tense, which means cooperation between Japan and South Korea will become inevitable," he said.

Pentagon chief orders NSA director to install lawyer

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Acting defense secretary Christopher Miller ordered the director of the National Security Agency to install on Saturday a former GOP political operative as the NSA's top lawyer, according to four individuals familiar with the matter.

It is unclear what the NSA will do. The agency and the Pentagon declined to comment.

In November, Pentagon General Counsel Paul Ney Jr. named Michael Ellis, then a White House official, to the position of general counsel at the NSA, a career civilian post at the government's largest and most technologically advanced spy agency, *The Post* reported. He was selected after a competitive civil service competition. He has not taken up the job, however, as he needed to complete administrative procedures, including taking a polygraph test.

Miller gave NSA Director Paul Nakasone until 6 p.m. Saturday to install Ellis in

the job, according to several people who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the matter's sensitivity. The 6 p.m. deadline passed without Nakasone taking action. It was unclear Saturday evening what the Pentagon's next move would be.

Nakasone was not in favor of Ellis' selection and has sought to delay his installation, according to several people.

Ellis' naming, made under pressure from the White House, drew criticism from national security legal experts. It "appears to be an attempt to improperly politicize an important career position," wrote Susan Hennessey, a former lawyer in the NSA Office of General Counsel, on *Lawfare*, where she is the executive editor.

The move is troubling, coming as it does four days before President Donald Trump leaves office and the Biden administration takes over, former U.S. officials said. The move makes it more difficult for the Biden administration to immediately replace him, the former officials said.

Biden intends quick actions for agenda

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — On the first day of his presidency, Joe Biden plans to roll back some of President Donald Trump's most controversial policies and take steps to address the coronavirus pandemic, his incoming chief of staff said.

The opening salvo on Wednesday, after his inauguration, would herald a 10-day blitz of executive actions as Biden acts quickly to redirect the country without waiting for Congress.

After taking the oath of office, Biden will end Trump's restriction on immigration to the United States from some Muslim-majority countries, move to rejoin the Paris climate accord and mandate mask-wearing on federal property and during interstate travel. Those are among roughly a dozen actions Biden will take on his first day in the White House, incoming chief of staff Ron

Klain said Saturday in a memo to senior staff.

Other actions include extending the pause on student loan payments and actions meant to prevent evictions and foreclosures for those struggling during the pandemic.

"These executive actions will deliver relief to the millions of Americans that are struggling in the face of these crises," Klain said in the memo. "President-elect Biden will take action — not just to reverse the gravest damages of the Trump administration — but also to start moving our country forward."

"Full achievement" of Biden's goals will require Congress to act, Klain wrote, including the \$1.9 trillion virus relief bill he outlined last Thursday. Klain said that Biden would also propose a comprehensive immigration bill to lawmakers on his first day in office.

Providing a path to citizenship for millions of immigrants in the U.S. illegally will be part of Biden's agenda, according to people briefed on his plans.

Ali Noorani, president of the National Immigration Forum and among those briefed, said immigrants would be put on an eight-year path. There would be a faster track for those in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which shields people from deportation who came to the U.S. as children, and for those from strife-torn countries with temporary status.

On Thursday, the new president's second day in office, Biden would sign orders related to the COVID-19 outbreak aimed at reopening schools and businesses, as well as expanding virus testing, Klain said. The following day, Friday, will see action on providing economic relief to those suffering the economic costs of the pandemic.

MLK is especially relevant after racism in DC

The News & Observer

RALEIGH, N.C. — In what is sure to become an iconic documentary photo, rioters climbing the west wall of the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 in their jeans and winter coats are starkly silhouetted against the building's pale gray stone.

As the siege played out for hours on laptops and TVs, many Americans who watched couldn't help but see another glaring contrast: the relative ease with which hundreds of mostly white supporters of President Donald Trump were able to illegally occupy the building that serves as the heart of American democracy on the day Congress planned to affirm the victors of the 2020 presidential election.

Similar numbers of protesters who gathered in Washington last June to demonstrate against the killing of George Floyd were met by federal officers who sprayed them with chemical agents and rubber

bullets. But the pro-Trump crowd, displaying white nationalist and evangelical Christian symbols, was able to overpower police and hold the Capitol for hours while members of Congress hid in darkened rooms and texted grim messages to their families.

Slain Civil Rights leader Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., whose birth and life will be honored on the annual federal holiday on Monday, would not have condoned any violent protest. In his lifetime, King came to believe that non-violent protest — refusing to cooperate with an evil system — could be the most effective tool in bringing about social change.

The Rev. Dr. Anthony T. Spearman, president of the N.C. NAACP, recognized the zip ties that one of the insurrectionists at the Capitol had in his possession when approached by police.

"Plastic handcuffs," Spearman said in

an interview with The News & Observer. "I know them all too well from the Moral Monday Movement, from having them placed on my wrists at least three times."

Spearman has heard the comparisons to protests held by followers of the Black Lives Matter movement last summer. According to the U.S. Crisis Monitor, there were more than 7,750 demonstrations across the U.S. linked to the BLM movement, which rose up against police brutality and racism. Violent or destructive behavior was associated with 220 of those protests, the research group found.

"How dare you?" Spearman asked. "How dare you frame what was happening (at the Capitol) as protest? That's trying to understand it as something that was allowable or permissible. To me, to even say the words 'armed protest' is a dichotomy. What do you mean, 'armed protest'? If people are armed, it's terrorism."

Opposition leader, facing arrest, arrives in Russia

Associated Press

MOSCOW — The plane carrying Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny landed Sunday in Moscow, where he faces the threat of arrest.

But the flight landed at a different airport than had been scheduled, a possible attempt to

outwit journalists and supporters who wanted to witness the return.

Navalny, who is President Vladimir Putin's most prominent and determined foe, was returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from poisoning by a nerve agent, which he blames on the Kremlin.

Russia's prison service last week issued a warrant for his arrest, saying he had violated the terms of a suspended sentence he received on a 2014 conviction for embezzlement. The prison service has asked a Moscow court to turn Navalny's 3½-year suspended sentence into a real one.

Calif. congressman tests positive for virus

Associated Press

SANTA ANA — A California congressman contracted the coronavirus before he could get a second dose of vaccine that would have improved his immunity.

Democratic Rep. Lou Correa announced Saturday that he tested positive upon returning home from Washington, D.C., prompting him to self-quarantine away from his family.

His office said he received the first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on Dec. 19 and has not received the second shot that would have boosted his immunity to about 95%.

"While this diagnosis will prevent me from attending the much-anticipated inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, I look forward to working with the new administration to unite our country and help the millions of people devastated by the pandemic," Correa said in a statement.

Arkansas

LITTLE ROCK — Data from Johns Hopkins University on Saturday showed that Arkansas ranked eighth in the United States in the per capita number of new coronavirus cases.

Arkansas on Saturday had 1,267.26 new cases per 100,000 population and the seven-day rolling average of new cases increased from 2,310.7 per day to 2,682.1 from Jan. 1 through Friday.

The rolling average of deaths due to COVID-19 rose from 39 per day to 42.4 during the same time period while the average positivity rate in the state declined from 23.38% to 17.73%.

The state health department on Saturday reported 270,178 total cases and 4,293 deaths due to COVID-19 since the pandemic began in March, increases of 2,543 cases and 30 more deaths from Friday. The department reported 1,292 people hospitalized with the illness, a decline of 22.

Kentucky

FRANKFORT — Kentucky reported nearly 3,100 new coronavirus cases and 32 more virus-related deaths Saturday, Gov. Andy Beshear said.

More than 1,600 virus patients are hospitalized in Kentucky, including 408 in intensive-care units, he said. The statewide rate for positive tests was 11.74%, down from Friday.

Beshear also reported progress in the state's vaccination program. He tweeted

that the state is on track to meet its goal of administering 90% of all COVID-19 vaccine doses within seven days of arrival.

In his update Friday, the governor said Kentucky had received 325,625 vaccine doses and 190,547 doses had been administered.

Minnesota

MINNEAPOLIS — An additional 37 people have died due to coronavirus complications in Minnesota and there have been 1,529 new positive cases, state health officials said Saturday.

Long-term care and assisted-living residents accounted for 22 of the new deaths, and 3,756 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

The statewide tally for people who have received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose increased by 12,070 in the latest data release, for a total of 174,110 people so far, or approximately 3% of the state's population, according to the Minnesota Department of Health. The figures don't include vaccinations at federal facilities that have their own supplies.

New Mexico

SANTA FE — New Mexico on Saturday reported 1,092 additional known COVID-19 cases and 36 additional deaths, increasing the state's pandemic totals to 162,893 cases and 2,910 deaths.

Counties with triple-digit numbers of new cases included Bernalillo and Dona Ana, while McKinley, San Juan and Sandoval counties each had at least 70 cases.

Most of the deaths involved people in their 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s, but some were in their 30s, 40s and 50s.

North Carolina

WAYNESVILLE — Six workers at a North Carolina police department have tested positive for COVID-19 days after a vaccination event, according to local officials.

Haywood County officials said Friday that six people in the Waynesville Police Department received positive test results two days after several police department workers received their first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

The health department didn't say whether those who participated in the clinic were among those who tested positive.

The News & Observer of Raleigh reported that officials said the police department

has taken the necessary steps to identify those affected and exposed.

Oregon

UMATILLA — Two inmates at Two Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla and another at Deer Ridge Correctional Institution in Madras have died in the past week after testing positive for COVID-19.

That makes it at least five Oregon prisoners who have died since the new year in the latest surge of cases.

Two Rivers had 268 active cases among inmates as of Jan. 14, accounting for about half of all active cases among inmates statewide, according to Department of Corrections data.

The Deer Ridge prisoner died Saturday at a local hospital and was between 55 and 65 years old, the department said in a news release. In all, 28 inmates have died statewide after testing positive for COVID.

Texas

DALLAS — A third confirmed case of a variant of the coronavirus was reported Saturday in Texas by Dallas County Health and Human Services.

The agency reported that a Dallas man in his 20s with no history of travel outside the United States tested positive for the variant first identified in the United Kingdom and known as B.1.1.7.

The state health department on Saturday reported more than 240,000 new cases and 381 additional deaths, and has reported more than 2 million cases and more than 31,000 deaths since the pandemic began.

Wisconsin

MADISON — The number of deaths on a single day due to the coronavirus has reached a new record in Wisconsin, state health officials said Saturday.

The Department of Health Services reported an additional 128 deaths. The previous record for a single day of COVID-19 deaths was 120 on Dec. 22. A total of 5,450 people in Wisconsin have died from COVID-19.

DHS reported 1,937 new cases of the disease on Saturday, bringing the total of positive cases in Wisconsin to 520,188 since the pandemic began.

According to health officials, 607,650 doses of the vaccine have been allocated across Wisconsin as of Tuesday, the day of the week the state updates that data. Of the number of vaccine allocated, 163,371 doses have been administered.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Pilot makes emergency landing on highway's median

IL MARION — The pilot of a more than 60-year-old plane successfully landed the vintage aircraft onto a southern Illinois highway's median after it lost engine power, state police said.

The pilot was not injured when he landed the single-engine plane onto Interstate 57's median in Williamson County, about six miles south of Marion.

Illinois State Police said the pilot was the only occupant of the aircraft, which sustained minor damage in the landing. Northbound lanes of I-57 were closed while the plane was removed from the highway.

Pilot Kent Cook said he was flying the 1958 Cessna 175 Skylark from Union City, Tenn., to Lincoln, Ill., when he made the emergency landing.

Man charged in gunpoint attacks on cab drivers

NY NEW YORK — A man was indicted on charges alleging he attacked several cab drivers at gunpoint last summer in New York City.

The indictment was returned in Manhattan federal court against Kymahli Lysius.

Acting U.S. Attorney Audrey Strauss said cab drivers feared for their lives in Brooklyn and Manhattan when Lysius, 28, of Brooklyn, put a gun to the back of their heads before demanding money and fleeing.

Authorities said eight robberies and an attempted ninth robbery occurred between July 28 and Aug. 7.

Dog rescued after owner sees smoke on security cam

CA ESCONDIDO — A pet dog was saved from an apartment fire in San Diego County when the resident, who was away, remotely checked a security camera and saw smoke.

The resident reported the fire to 911 and told dispatchers there was a dog inside.

Crews didn't see fire or smoke coming

from the apartment when they arrived, but then observed smoke on the inside of a sliding glass door.

"We were able to get in there and rescue the dog," Sargis said.

Police find large stash of stolen property

KS SHAWNEE — Law enforcement officials in Kansas and Missouri expect to spend a week sorting through hundreds of thousands of dollars in stolen equipment that was recovered.

A tip led Lenexa and Shawnee police to a property in Shawnee, where officers found stolen items including trailers, heavy construction equipment, tools and firearms, KCTV reported.

Kyle Davey 35, of Shawnee was charged with two counts of felony theft and two counts of unlawful possession of controlled substances.

Police dog and suspect shot after car chase

WA OLYMPIA — A Thurston County Sheriff's Office police dog was shot twice after an armed driver led several police agencies on a chase.

At one point, gunfire erupted and K-9 officer Arlo was shot twice, while the 25-year-old driver was wounded at least once, KOMO-TV reported.

The police dog was rushed to an emergency veterinary hospital, and was expected to survive, according to a Facebook post from the Thurston County Sheriff's Office.

The wounded driver was taken to a hospital with serious injuries.

Park ranger rescues man from submerged truck

UT SALT LAKE CITY — A park ranger saved the life of an 80-year-old man who was drowning in a submerged vehicle by smashing through the truck's window and pulling the fisherman out to safety.

Utah State Parks spokesperson Devan

Chavez said Dylan Urban was called to the lake when witnesses reported the fisherman drove backward into the lake after loading his boat onto the trailer behind his truck, KUTV-TV reported.

Urban used a hatchet to break the rear window and grab the fisherman out of the vehicle. He then performed CPR, got a pulse and kept the man stable until other emergency personnel arrived, authorities said.

Police: Woman who shot kid was aiming at a dog

MS COLUMBIA — A 10-year-old girl in Columbia was airlifted to a hospital after being accidentally shot by a woman who said she was trying to shoot a dog.

WLOX-TV reported that the young girl is now in critical condition.

Kimberly Renee Luter, 34, and her boyfriend, Rkeen Antwuan Daniels, 29, were both arrested.

Luter told police she was attempting to shoot a dog when bullets entered a home where the young girl was inside, the television station reported.

When searching Luter's home, investigators found marijuana and weighing and packaging materials.

Police: Arsonist torched 'Halloween House'

NY POUGHKEEPSIE — Police in Poughkeepsie said a fire that destroyed the historic "Halloween House" was deliberately set.

Surveillance footage showed a man walking up to the house with two gas cans, splashing liquid on the front porch and then igniting it, the Poughkeepsie Journal reported.

The fire gutted the home, displacing 10 people. Two people escaped the house unharmed, authorities said.

The home's nickname stems from decorations that could be seen inside and outside the residence and a hearse that sat in the driveway.

— From The Associated Press

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Bills advance to AFC championship

Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — In what was supposed to be a quarterback showdown between Buffalo's Josh Allen and Baltimore's Lamar Jackson, Taron Johnson literally stole the show.

If not for the wall separating the field from the stands in the back of the east end zone, the Bills cornerback might still be running after returning an interception 101 yards for a touchdown that propelled Buffalo to its first AFC championship game appearance in 27 years.

Johnson's pick-6 of Jackson's pass with 41 seconds remaining in the third quarter helped secure a 17-3 win over the Ravens in a divisional-round playoff game Saturday night.

"We're excited. It's not done yet, we're not done yet," Johnson exclaimed. "It's just a blessing. Our defense stepped up to the challenge."

Johnson's return matched the longest in NFL history and punctuated a stellar defensive outing in which Buffalo (15-3) limited the NFL's top running offense to 150 yards on 32 carries.

Jackson, last season's NFL MVP, was sacked three times and did not return after sustaining a concussion following the final play of the third quarter, and two plays after Johnson scored. He finished 14-for-24 for 162 yards passing, while being limited to 42

yards rushing on nine carries.

Allen, an MVP candidate this year, finished 23-for-37 for 206 yards and a touchdown.

In a season in which the Bills relied mostly on their dynamic Allen-led offense to outscore opponents, the third-year quarterback was gratified to see Buffalo's defense make a difference in a game the pass-happy attack was kept mostly in check.

"I can't say enough words for what that game was for our defense," Allen said. "Taron Johnson's is a play that people are going to remember for a long time here in Buffalo, potentially a franchise-altering play."

Buffalo advanced to the AFC championship game for the first time since 1994 on their way to making — and losing — four consecutive Super Bowl appearance. The team also extended a season in which it has broken numerous droughts by claiming its first AFC East division title in 25 years and, with last week's victory over Indianapolis, winning its first postseason game since the same year.

The Bills have won eight straight to match their best streak since 1990 and will play the winner of the AFC's other divisional playoff between Cleveland and Kansas City on Sunday.

The fifth-seeded Ravens (12-6) had their season come to an end after leading the NFL in yards rushing for a second consecutive

year.

Baltimore clinched its third playoff berth in three years by winning its final five regular-season games. The winning streak came after a 1-4 skid capped by a 19-14 loss at Pittsburgh on Dec. 2 in a game rescheduled three times due to COVID-19 issues.

"It's a sad moment, but this team has been through a lot," tight end Mark Andrew said. "It's tough right now, but teammates and coaches and camaraderie, it was a group of special guys that worked hard, came to work every day and didn't take anything for granted. We're going to hold our heads high and come back and work."

Johnson, who also returned an interception for a score in a 26-15 win over Pittsburgh on Dec. 13, said he initially thought about going down after catching the ball, before seeing no one in front of him.

"I caught the ball and kind of looked down, but then I looked up and saw a whole bunch of green grass to that side of me," he said. "At that point, there's one person I have to beat. And that's No. 8 (Jackson)."

Johnson's interception return matched Packers defensive back George Teague's INT return in Green Bay's 28-24 win over Detroit in a wild-card playoff on Jan. 8, 1994.

Things turned worse for the Ravens two snaps later, when Jackson was forced out of the game.

Rodgers leads Packers past Rams, into NFC title game

Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Don't tell Aaron Rodgers the lack of capacity crowds in a pandemic will limit the Green Bay Packers' home-field advantage in the NFC championship game.

He's been waiting too long for this moment to have any such negative thoughts.

Rodgers threw two touchdown passes and also ran for a score as the top-seeded Packers beat the Los Angeles Rams 32-18 in an NFC divisional playoff game Saturday. He will play a conference championship game at home for the first time since taking over as Green Bay's starting quarterback in 2008.

"I'm definitely a little emo-

tional, just thinking about what we've been through," said Rodgers, who went 23-for-36 for 296 yards. "It got me emotional with the crowd out there today."

Rodgers threw a 1-yard touchdown pass to Davante Adams and a game-clinching 58-yarder to Allen Lazard with 6:52 left. Rodgers also had a 1-yard touchdown run, the first by a Packers quarterback in a playoff game at Lambeau Field since Bart Starr's winning sneak in the Ice Bowl against Dallas on Dec. 31, 1967.

Green Bay (14-3) reached the NFC championship game for the fourth time in seven seasons as it is chasing its first Super Bowl berth in a decade. It will be

their first NFC title contest at Lambeau Field since hosting for the 2007 season, when they fell to the New York Giants 23-20 in overtime. Rodgers was on the Packers' roster during that 2007 season backing up Brett Favre.

Green Bay won the Super Bowl for the 2010 season as the NFC's No. 6 seed, and has lost at Seattle, Atlanta and San Francisco in its last three conference championship game appearances.

Saturday's game showed what a home-field edge can mean. Green Bay played in front of 8,456 fans — a crowd that included paying spectators for the first time all season — but that small crowd made plen-

ty of noise as the Packers built an early lead amid snow flurries.

Rodgers said it felt like there were 50,000 fans. Running back Aaron Jones said it seemed more like 80,000, while Lazard added that "it felt like 90,000 honestly."

That crowd chanted "M! V! P!" during the closing minutes to salute Rodgers.

"It's hard to really put into words how special that feeling is, but you can feel it," Rodgers said. "It's so palpable. You can feel the energy in the stadium. It's just different. It's different playing in front of a crowd. It's a little more special and obviously more sweet."

NHL ROUNDUP

Kessel's 2 goals help Coyotes split

Associated Press

GLENDAL, Ariz. — Phil Kessel scored two goals, Antti Raanta stopped 31 shots and the Arizona Coyotes bounced back from an opening loss to beat the San Jose Sharks 5-3 on Saturday.

Arizona got off to a slow start before coming to life late in a shootout loss to San Jose on Thursday night. The Coyotes pressured the Sharks from the start Saturday, scoring four goals in the opening two periods.

Kessel scored the tying goal in the closing seconds of the opener and had goals in each of the first two periods Saturday.

"It's good to get off to a good start after last season," Kessel said. "It couldn't have gone worse for me personally, so it's nice to start good and hopefully I can continue."

Clayton Keller scored for the second straight game, and Oliver Ekman-Larsson had three assists for Arizona. Jakob Chyrrun and Barrett Hayton also scored.

Timo Meier had a goal and an assist, and Martin Jones allowed five goals on 24 shots for San Jose. Ryan Donato and Tomas Hertl also scored.

The Coyotes pulled off the biggest move of the 2019 season by acquiring Kessel from Pittsburgh. The Coyotes have regularly been among the NHL's lowest-scoring teams and Kessel had been one of the league's most productive players, scoring at least 60 points eight times during his career.

Kessel never lived up to expectations, in large part due to injuries, finishing with 14 goals and 24 assists in 70 games.

The 33-year-old worked hard during the short time off since the NHL bubble and it has paid off. He scored the tying goal in the closing seconds of the opener and had goals in each of the first two periods Saturday.

"When you're in a little bit of a slump, it's tough," Coyotes coach Rick Tocchet said. "When those type of guys get goals early, they start to feel it. You get hot. I've seen him get hot for two, three weeks at a time and hopefully this is one of those times."

Devils 2, Bruins 1 (OT): Egor Sharangovich scored his first NHL goal in the final seconds of overtime to lift host New Jersey past Boston for coach Lindy Ruff's first victory with the Devils.

Damon Severson made a backhand pass at the edge of the offensive zone to set up the 22-year-old Sharangovich with 1.7 seconds remaining in overtime.

Miles Wood scored for the second consecutive game, and MacKenzie Blackwood made 27 saves for his first victory of the season.

Patrice Bergeron scored for the Bruins and Jaroslav Halak made 29 saves.

Rangers 5, Islanders 0: Pavel Buchnevich and Artemi Panarin each scored twice and Alexandar Georgiev stopped 23 shots for his fifth career shutout, leading the host Rangers past the Islanders.

Kaapo Kakko also scored as the Rangers bounced back for their first victory two nights after being blanked 4-0 by the Islanders in the opener.

Rookie Ilya Sorokin had 27 saves in his NHL debut for the Islanders, getting the start after Semyon Varlamov was hit near the throat by a shot from Cal Clutterbuck in warmups.

Maple Leafs 3, Senators 2: Joe Thornton scored his first goal for visiting Toronto and linemates Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner also connected for the first time this season in a defeat of Ottawa.

Marner had two assists, Thornton and Matthews each had one and Jack Campbell made 17 saves to help the Maple Leafs rebound from a 5-3 loss to the Senators on Friday night at Canadian Tire Centre.

The 41-year-old Thornton signed a one-year deal with Toronto in the offseason.

Tim Stutzle scored his first NHL goal and Nick Paul also scored for Ottawa. The 19-year-old Stutzle, from Germany, was the third overall pick in last year.

Wild 4, Kings 3 (OT): Marcus Johansson scored with 11 seconds left in overtime and visiting Minnesota beat Los Angeles for the second straight game after trailing by two goals after two periods.

Johansson's wrist shot went near the top of the net and beat Jonathan Quick on his stick side. Ryan Suter sent it to overtime with 2 seconds remaining with a snap shot near the blue line that Quick was unable to get his glove on.

Matt Roy could have put the Kings up by two goals with 36 seconds remaining, but his shot hit the right post of an empty net.

Matt Dumba and Joel Eriksson Ek also scored for Minnesota, and Cam Talbot made 30 saves.

Gabriel Vilardi, Blake Lizotte and Alex Athanasiou scored for Los Angeles.

Golden Knights 2, Ducks 1 (OT): Max Pa-

cioretty scored 7 seconds into overtime to lift host Vegas past Anaheim.

The Golden Knights rallied for the win after William Karlsson tied it with 1:22 left in regulation.

Pacioretty's goal was the fastest to start a period in franchise history.

Marc-Andre Fleury, who came into the game 15-4-0 with a .927 save percentage and 1.95 goals-against average against the Ducks, stopped 21 shots.

Max Comtois scored for Anaheim and John Gibson had 31 saves to fall to 2-10-2 in his career against Vegas.

Red Wings 4, Hurricanes 2: Robby Fabbri broke a tie with 2:42 left, Dylan Larkin got his second goal into an empty net and host Detroit beat Carolina.

Fabbri fluttered the puck past Petr Mrazek from the front of the crease off a pass from Filip Zadina behind the net. Zadina also set up Bobby Ryan to score in his Red Wings debut, breaking a scoreless tie early in the second period, after the veteran forward missed the opener with an injury.

Red Wings goalie Jonathan Bernier finished with 29 saves in his season debut.

Vincent Trocheck and Andrei Svechnikov scored for the Hurricanes.

Flames 3, Canucks 0: Sean Monahan, Dillon Dube and Matthew Tkachuk scored power-play goals to help Calgary beat Vancouver.

Jacob Markstrom made 32 saves and shut out his former team to win the Flames' home opener. It was the first NHL game at Scotiabank Saddledome since March 8, 2020, a span of 10 months and eight days.

Braden Holtby stopped 32 shots for the Canucks.

Predators 5, Blue Jackets 2: Brad Richardson scored the go-ahead goal midway through the third period and host Nashville beat Columbus to sweep the season-opening series.

Colton Sissons, Luke Kunin and Filip Forsberg also scored in the third period, and Rocco Grimaldi also had a goal for the Predators. Juuse Saros made 42 saves.

Canadiens 5, Oilers 1: Jeff Petry and Tomas Tatar each scored twice, Carey Price made 34 saves and visiting Montreal beat Edmonton in the first of a two-game set.

Jake Evans also scored, and Phillip Daulton and Brendan Gallagher each had two assists to help the Canadiens.

NBA ROUNDUP

Big debut: Harden has triple-double, leads Nets to win

Associated Press

NEW YORK — James Harden delivered 32 points and a triple-double in his Brooklyn debut, Kevin Durant scored a season-high 42 points in his first game back with his former teammate, and the Nets showed off their potent potential in a 122-115 victory over the Orlando Magic on Saturday night.

Harden had 14 assists and 12 rebounds after being cleared to play earlier in the afternoon after all the players in the blockbuster trade that brought him from Houston had completed their physicals. Harden also had nine turnovers.

He had no practice time with Brooklyn and sure didn't need it, becoming the first player in franchise history to have a triple-double in his debut.

Durant made five three-pointers in his 10th game back following an 18-month layoff after rupturing his Achilles tendon in the 2019 NBA Finals. He hiked his average to 30.7 points, which would be his highest since he scored a league-leading 32 per game and won NBA MVP honors for Oklahoma City in 2014.

Trail Blazers 112, Hawks 106: Damian Lillard scored 36 points and Portland rebounded from a first-half deficit to beat visiting Atlanta for its fifth win in six games.

Enes Kanter added 12 points and 15 rebounds for the Blazers. Portland got some bad news when guard CJ McCollum left the game at halftime because of a left foot sprain.

Spurs 103, Rockets 91: DeMar DeRozan scored 24 points, Dejounte Murray had 18 points and 10 rebounds and San Antonio beat undermanned Houston to snap a four-game home losing streak.

Coming off a victory Thursday night in San Antonio, the Rockets were on the brink of not having eight players available as required by the league, but met the minimum in the final hour. Houston had seven healthy players after Sterling Brown was ruled out due to a lower leg injury, but Rodions Kurucs became eligible prior to game time when the NBA approved the blockbuster trade involving James Harden.

Grizzlies 106, 76ers 104: Ja Morant scored 17 points in his return after missing eight games because of a left ankle injury, helping host Memphis beat Philadelphia.

The 76ers' Tyrese Maxey missed a three-pointer at the buzzer.

Pistons 120, Heat 100: Jerami Grant scored 24 points, Derrick Rose had 23 off the bench and Detroit handed host Miami its third consecutive loss.

Blake Griffin scored 15 points for the Pistons, who outscored the Heat 38-19 in the third quarter.

Raptors 116, Hornets 113: Chris Boucher, Kyle Lowry and Fred Van Fleet converted eight straight free throws in the final two minutes, helping Toronto beat visiting Charlotte. Norman Powell led the Raptors with 24 points, and Boucher added 20 points.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL ROUNDUP

Top-ranked Gonzaga downs rival St. Mary's for its 18th straight win

Associated Press

MORAGA, Calif. — Corey Kispert had 17 points and five rebounds and No. 1 Gonzaga overcame a slow start with a surge to end the first half, pulling away late to beat rival Saint Mary's 73-59 on Saturday night for its 18th straight victory spanning the past two seasons.

A 4.5-magnitude earthquake in the South Bay shook the gym early in the second half. Play continued with no disruption at what typically would be an imposing visiting arena at McKee Pavilion but had a far different feel devoid of fans.

Joel Ayayi scored 16 points for the Bulldogs (14-0, 5-0 West Coast Conference). They used a 21-5 run over the final 11:17 of the first half to build a 32-25 advantage — and the Gaels made just one of their last 16 shots to close the half.

Saint Mary's pulled to 56-48 on Dan Fotu's layup with 9:01 to play before another decisive Gonzaga burst, this time 8-0. The Zags shot 53.8%.

Fotu scored 15 points and Logan Johnson added 12 for the cold-shooting Gaels (9-5, 0-3). They shot 34.9%.

No. 2 Baylor 68, No. 15 Texas Tech 60: Davion Mitchell had 17 points and Jared Butler finally scored late and the Bears overcame the host Red Raiders to stay undefeated after their closest game this season.

No. 4 Texas 82, Kansas State 67: Kamaka Hepa scored 15 points in a rare appearance as the host Longhorns rebounded from their first Big 12 loss of the season.

Butler 70, No. 8 Creighton 66: Aaron Thompson scored 17 points and found Bryce Nze for the go-ahead layup with 1:08

left in overtime to complete the host Bulldogs' remarkable second-half comeback over the Bluejays.

No. 23 Minnesota 75, No. 7 Michigan 57: Liam Robbins had 22 points and eight rebounds in 22 minutes for the host Golden Gophers to hand the Wolverines their first loss.

No. 10 Tennessee 81, Vanderbilt 61: Keon Johnson scored 10 of his 16 points in the second half, leading the host Volunteers.

No. 18 Virginia 85, No. 12 Clemson 50: Sam Hauser and Tomas Woldetensae had 14 points and four three-pointers each as the visiting Cavaliers won their 11th straight over the Tigers to stay perfect in Atlantic Coast Conference.

Miami 78, No. 16 Louisville 72: Isaiah Wong had 30 points, seven rebounds and six assists, and the host Hurricanes ended an 18-game skid against ranked opponents.

No. 21 Ohio State 87, No. 14 Illinois 81: E.J. Liddell scored 26 points and the visiting Buckeyes won a brutal Big Ten matchup.

No. 17 Missouri 68, Texas A&M 52: Dru Smith scored 15 points and the Tigers shook off rust from an 11-day layoff due to COVID-19 protocols to beat the host Aggies.

Army 79, Boston University 59: Alex King had 20 points to lead the Black Knights to a road win.

Navy 87, American 86 (OT): Cam Davis had a career-high 34 points to outduel Stacy Beckton Jr. and carry the host Midshipmen over the Eagles for their seventh consecutive win.

Air Force 72, Wyoming 69: Chris Joyce had 21 points as the host Falcons ended a four-game losing streak.