

Russia notices as Navy deploys to Black Sea

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Navy has three warships operating in the Black Sea, stepping up its presence in the region after a drop in overall NATO maritime activity there last year.

The destroyer USS Porter began its transit into the sea Thursday in support of NATO efforts, joining two other Navy vessels conducting operations in the strategic waterway, the Naples, Italy-based 6th Fleet said.

On Sunday, the replenishment oiler USNS Laramie entered the Black Sea to refuel the USS Donald Cook, enabling the destroyer to continue operations without pulling into port, the Navy said.

“Presence matters most when it is persist-

ent, and refueling at sea makes that reality,” Capt. Joseph Gagliano, commander of Task Force 65, which has operational control of ships in Europe, said in a statement.

For the past couple of years, NATO has said it wants a robust military presence in the Black Sea region, which includes the Crimean Peninsula, annexed by force by Russia in 2014. But in 2020, the number of days key allies operated there declined.

The U.S. Navy spent 82 days in the Black Sea, down 19 days from the previous year, Luke Coffey, an expert on NATO activities and security analyst with the Washington-based Heritage Foundation, said in a recent Twitter post.

Retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, who led the

Army in Europe until 2018, said more allies should step up to help the United States in the region.

“We clearly have to increase the priority of the Black Sea,” said Hodges, who is now the Pershing chair of strategic studies at the Center for European Policy Analysis, in reply to Coffey’s tweet. “US Navy has too many (requirements) and not enough resources. President Biden will expect Allies to do more.”

Russia has taken note of the recent push into the Black Sea. On Thursday, Russian state media reported that a mobile coastal defense anti-ship system was activated in Crimea for drills to coincide with the USS Donald Cook’s visit.

Marines looking to add better fire security to combat utility uniform

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps wants an improved combat uniform that has fire protection and better dampening of infrared signatures, but it doesn’t want to pay a lot more for it.

Marine Corps Systems Command is looking for a uniform that would combine the benefits of the flame-resistant organizational gear, known as FROG, with the durability and comfort of the existing digital-pattern combat utility uniform, and at a price point closer to the latter.

A FROG set costs \$184, more than twice the \$89 for a combat utility top and trousers, Military.com reported. The Corps wants the new uniform to cost less than \$106.

Both existing uniforms, worn in nontropical environments, shield Marines from visual detection and dampen their signatures in the near infrared portion of the light spectrum that’s invisible to the human eye. But only FROG also offers flame protection.

“A single-issued uniform with these protection properties will allow the Marine Corps to focus on optimizing funds and streamline the acquisition process while providing maximum protection and comfort to its servicemembers,” Marine Corps Systems

Command said in a solicitation updated this month.

The new uniform would reduce the “logistical burden” of having a separate fire-resistant uniform, the command’s Kelly Flynn told Military.com. “The Marine Corps expects a cost saving of a few million dollars due to not having to buy replacement FROGs.”

The service has “active but separate research and development efforts” for treating nylon/cotton blend textiles used in standard uniforms to reduce signatures and improve flame resistance, the solicitation stated. It’s seeking to reduce the fabric’s visibility to sensors that detect more of the infrared spectrum.

The Marine Corps could evaluate somewhere between 100 to 200 uniform sets from contractors who respond to the solicitation, the documents show. They’re expected to be identical in design to the existing utilities, but with a reinforced crotch and bigger belt loops.

The project is still in the research and development phase, and no companies have been selected to provide uniform samples, Flynn said. The service hasn’t set a date for wear tests or said which units would perform them.

US jobless claims drop; still at 847K

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits fell but remained at a historically high 847,000 last week, a sign that layoffs keep coming as the coronavirus pandemic continues to rage.

Last week’s claims dropped by 67,000, from 914,000 the week before, the Labor Department said Thursday. Before the virus hit the United States hard last March, weekly applications for jobless aid had never topped 700,000.

In addition, the government reported Thursday that the U.S. economy grew at a 4% annual rate in the final three months of 2020 and shrank last year by the largest amount in 74 years.

For 2020 as a whole, a year when the coronavirus inflicted the worst economic freeze since the end of World War II, the economy contracted 3.5% and clouded the outlook for the coming year.

The reports followed the launch of the Biden administration’s new level-with-America health briefings Wednesday with a projection that as many as 90,000 more in the U.S. will die from the coronavirus in the next four weeks — a sobering warning as the government strains to improve delivery and injection of vaccines.

Biden seen as likely to keep Space Force

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — To the last moments of his presidency, Donald Trump trumpeted Space Force as a creation for the ages. And while President Joe Biden has quickly undone other Trump initiatives, the space-faring service seems likely to survive, even if the new administration pushes it lower on the list of defense priorities.

The reason Space Force is unlikely to go away is largely this: Elimination would require an act of Congress, where a bipartisan consensus holds that America's increasing reliance on space is a worrying vulnerability that is best addressed by a branch of the military focused exclusively on this problem.

The new service is also linked to an increasing U.S. wariness of China, which is developing capabilities to threaten U.S. satellites in space and which has become, in the minds of some, the singular national security challenge. Russia, too, stands accused by Washington of seeking to challenge American dominance in space.

"They're building capabilities to use space against us. We have to be able to respond to that," Gen. John Hyten, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the National Security Space Association, an advocacy group, last week, referring to Russia and China.

As a career space officer, Hyten says he often gets asked what will become of Space

Force under Biden. And while he offered no prediction, he clearly believes Space Force should remain.

Biden has not publicly commented on his intentions with Space Force. His defense secretary, Lloyd Austin, has been noncommittal while stressing the strategic importance of space. The White House did not respond to a request for comment on Biden's view.

Although some see it as a Trump vanity project, Space Force is not the farcical force of the public imagination. In the military, it's seen soberly as an affirmation of the need to more effectively organize for the defense of U.S. interests in space — especially satellites used for civilian and military navigation, intelligence and communication.

While far smaller than any other branch of the military, Space Force is acquiring the standard trappings of a service, including an official flag, logo, seal and doctrine. It has launched commercials to attract recruits. After lengthy debate, it was decided last month that Space Force members would be called guardians, although they don't yet have an official dress uniform. The force is planning to expand its ranks from 2,400 active-duty members to 6,400 by the end of this year.

Kaitlyn Johnson, an expert on space policy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, says bipartisan congressional support for Space Force makes it likely that Bi-

den will not push for its undoing.

"I think this is a good thing, as the Space Force has had barely a year to set itself up and get to work," she said. Adds her think-tank colleague, Todd Harrison, "The odds of it being repealed are close to zero."

Space Force was launched in December 2019 as the first new military service since establishment of the Air Force as an independent entity in 1947.

Its leader, Gen. John W. "Jay" Raymond, has a seat at the table with the other Joint Chiefs, although Space Force operates as part of the Department of the Air Force, much like the Marine Corps is a separate service but is overseen by the Department of the Navy.

The push for more emphasis on space has gone beyond Space Force. A separate but related move in 2019 reestablished U.S. Space Command, a central command for military-wide space operations. Space Command had been dissolved in 2005 and absorbed by U.S. Strategic Command, a post-9/11 move aimed at freeing up resources to strengthen homeland defenses.

The push to create a military space service began well before Trump entered the White House. But his relentless advocacy dulled what remained of opposition inside the Pentagon.

Austin: Germany is 'highly valued' as location for US troops

Staff and wire reports

BERLIN — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that Germany is "highly valued" as a location for American soldiers, Germany's Defense Ministry said Thursday in a statement that didn't address whether the new administration will reverse plans to remove 12,000 U.S. troops from the country.

Austin made the comments in his first call with Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer on Wednesday.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Austin "expressed his gratitude to Germany for continuing to serve as a great host for U.S. forces, and expressed his desire for a continued dialogue on U.S. force posture in Germany."

Last year, former President Donald Trump ordered the reduction of the U.S. military contingent stationed in Germany by more than 25% and the Pentagon has been

studying how that could be done.

German officials have hoped that order will be rescinded, but the Biden administration has not yet laid out its plans for U.S. forces in Germany.

The administration planned to review all decisions made by Trump, including the Germany troop reduction, newly confirmed Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Reuters prior to the election.

"It certainly begins with the way it was done," Blinken told Reuters in July, referring to Trump's decision not to consult Germany before making the move. "But we have a profound problem with the substance of it as well."

About 34,500 U.S. troops are stationed in Germany, which includes military facilities like Ramstein Air Base and the headquarters for U.S. European Command and U.S. Africa Command.

Initial planning by the Trump administration had called for the 2nd Cavalry Regiment in Vilseck, Germany, to return to the United States, while U.S. European Command in Stuttgart and other smaller units would relocate to Belgium, among other moves.

Congress, however, tried to put the brakes on the plan. The final version of the National Defense Authorization Act released by Congress said that the defense secretary cannot reduce force levels in Germany below their current number until 120 days after a detailed analysis that examines a wide range of possible security implications.

Austin and Kramp-Karrenbauer also discussed NATO cooperation, and the security situations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Defense Department said Austin wanted to "reinforce the value the United States places on the bilateral defense relationship with one of our closest NATO allies."

Democrat floats Trump censure resolution

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine said Wednesday that he's discussing with colleagues whether a censure resolution to condemn former President Donald Trump for his role in the deadly Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol could be an alternative to impeachment, even as the Senate proceeds with a trial.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has said the impeachment trial will move forward. But Kaine's proposal is an acknowledgement that the Senate is unlikely to convict Trump of inciting the riot, a troubling prospect for many lawmakers who believe Trump must be held accountable in some way for the Capitol attack. If he were convicted, the Senate could then hold a second vote to ban him from office.

A censure would not hold the power of a conviction, but it would put the Senate on record as disapproving of Trump's role in the insurrection, which came as Congress was counting electoral votes to confirm Democrat Joe Biden's victory. Just before Trump's supporters broke through windows and busted through the Capitol's doors, he gave a fiery speech outside the White House urging them to "fight like hell" to overturn his defeat.

Talk of finding a punishment that more senators could rally around flared a day after just five Republicans joined Democrats in a Senate test vote over the legitimacy of Trump's trial. It was unclear, though, whether other Democrats, or any Republicans, would sign on to Kaine's proposal. House Democrats are busy preparing their

formal case against the former president for inciting an insurrection, with arguments starting the week of Feb. 8.

"Make no mistake — there will be a trial, and the evidence against the former president will be presented, in living color, for the nation and every one of us to see," Schumer said Wednesday.

An angry mob of Trump supporters wanting to stop Congress' confirmation of Biden's victory invaded the Capitol, ransacking hallways and offices and attempting to break into the House chamber with lawmakers hiding inside. They rifled through desks on the empty Senate floor and hunted for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and then-Vice President Mike Pence, who was in the Capitol overseeing the certification of Biden's election victory.

Ga. congresswoman's Facebook activity tests GOP

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans have a Marjorie Taylor Greene problem. Again.

Before she joined the House this month, Greene supported Facebook posts that advocated violence against Democrats and the FBI. One suggested shooting House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in the head. In response to a post raising the prospect of hanging former President Barack Obama, Greene responded that the "stage is being set."

While some Republicans condemned the activity, it was hardly a surprise. The Georgia Republican has expressed support for QAnon conspiracy theories, which focus on the debunked belief that top Democrats are

involved in child sex trafficking, Satan worship and cannibalism. Facebook videos surfaced last year showing she'd expressed racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim views. Top Republicans denounced her at the time, hoping to block her from capturing the GOP nomination for her reliably red congressional district in northwest Georgia.

The opposition faded, however, when Greene won the primary and was essentially guaranteed a seat in Congress. By the time she was sworn into office, Greene had ridden with President Donald Trump on Air Force One during his final days in office. Republican leaders are now confronting a conundrum of their own making. The party

largely embraced Greene after she won the primary, making it harder for them to distance themselves from her, especially when many of her views were already well known.

The dynamic raises questions about the GOP's ability — or interest — in moving past Trump-style politics after the former president spent years advancing conspiracy theories of his own.

"Trump didn't hijack the party, the party became Donald Trump," said Stuart Stevens, co-founder a conservative group that staunchly opposes Trump. "They're radicals."

CNN reported on Greene's Facebook posts, which have since been deleted.

SF schools to remove Washington and Lincoln names

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The names of Abraham Lincoln, George Washington and other prominent figures including California Sen. Dianne Feinstein will be removed from 44 San Francisco public schools, a move that stirred debate Wednesday on whether the famously liberal city has taken the national reckoning on America's racist past too far.

The decision by the San Francisco Board of Education in a 6-1 vote Tuesday night affects one-third of the city's schools and came nearly three years after the board started considering the idea. The approved resolution calls for removing names that

honored historical figures with direct or broad ties to slavery, oppression, racism or the "subjugation" of human beings.

In addition to Washington and Thomas Jefferson — former presidents who owned slaves — the list includes naturalist John Muir, Spanish priest Junipero Serra, American Revolution patriot Paul Revere and Francis Scott Key, composer of the "Star-Spangled Banner."

Changing the name of Dianne Feinstein Elementary school, named for the Democratic senator and former mayor of San Francisco, has raised eyebrows. The trailblazing 87-year-old's star has dimmed in re-

cent years with dismayed liberals joining calls for her retirement last year after she embraced Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham at the end of heated confirmation hearings for U.S. Supreme Court Judge Amy Coney Barrett.

Feinstein's spokesman Tom Mentzer said the senator had no comment.

The committee that selected the names included Feinstein on the list because as mayor in 1984 she replaced a vandalized Confederate flag that was part of a long-standing flag display in front of City Hall. When the flag was pulled down a second time, she did not replace it.

Biden moves to address climate change concerns

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In the most ambitious U.S. effort to stave off the worst of climate change, President Joe Biden signed executive orders to transform the nation's heavily fossil-fuel powered economy into a clean-burning one, pausing oil and gas leasing on federal land and targeting subsidies for those industries.

The directives aim to conserve 30% of the country's lands and waters in the next 10 years, double the nation's offshore wind energy and move to an all-electric federal vehicle fleet, among other changes. Biden's sweeping plan is aimed at staving off the worst of global warming caused by burning fossil fuels.

But his effort also carries political risk for the president and Democrats as oil- and coal-producing states face job losses from moves to sharply increase U.S. reliance on clean energy such as wind and solar power.

"We can't wait any longer" to address the climate crisis, Biden said Wednesday at the White House. "We see with our own eyes. We know it in our bones. It is time to act."

He said his orders will "supercharge our

administration's ambitious plan to confront the existential threat of climate change."

Biden has set a goal of eliminating pollution from fossil fuel in the power sector by 2035 and from the U.S. economy overall by 2050, speeding what is already a market-driven growth of solar and wind energy and lessening the country's dependence on oil and gas. The aggressive plan is aimed at slowing human-caused global warming that is magnifying extreme weather events such as deadly wildfires in the West, and drenching rains and hurricanes in the East.

Biden acknowledged the political risk, repeatedly stating his approach would create jobs in the renewable energy and automotive sectors to offset any losses in oil, coal or natural gas.

"When I think of climate change and the answers to it, I think of jobs," Biden said. "These aren't pie-in-the-sky dreams. These are concrete actionable solutions. And we know how to do this."

Biden pledged to create "millions of good-paying, union jobs" building electric cars, installing solar panels and wind turbines.

Terrorism alert warns of violence driven by politics

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Department of Homeland Security issued a national terrorism bulletin Wednesday warning of the lingering potential for violence from people motivated by antigovernment sentiment after President Joe Biden's election, suggesting the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol may embolden extremists and set the stage for additional attacks.

The department did not cite any specific plots, but pointed to "a heightened threat environment across the United States" that it believes "will persist" for weeks after Biden's Jan. 20 inauguration.

It is not uncommon for the federal government to warn local law enforcement through bulletins about the prospect for violence tied to a particular event or date, such as July 4. But this particular bulletin, issued through the department's National Terrorism Advisory System, is notable because it effectively places the Biden administration into the politically charged debate over how to describe or characterize acts motivated by political ideology, and suggests it regards violence like the kind that overwhelmed the Capitol as akin to terrorism.

The bulletin is an indication that national security officials see a connective thread between different episodes of violence in the last year motivated by anti-government grievances, including over COVID-19 restrictions, the 2020 election results and police use of force. The document singles out crimes motivated by racial or ethnic hatred, such as the 2019 rampage targeting Hispanics in El Paso, Texas, as well as the threat posed by extremists motivated by foreign terror groups.

A DHS statement that accompanied the bulletin noted the potential for violence from "a broad range of ideologically-motivated actors."

"Information suggests that some ideologically-motivated violent extremists with objections to the exercise of governmental authority and the presidential transition, as well as other perceived grievances fueled by false narratives, could continue to mobilize to incite or commit violence," the bulletin said.

The alert comes at a tense time following the riot at the Capitol by supporters of then-President Donald Trump seeking to overturn the presidential election.

Russian court rejects appeal of opposition leader Alexei Navalny

Associated Press

MOSCOW — A Russian court on Thursday rejected opposition leader Alexei Navalny's appeal of his arrest while authorities detained several of his allies and issued warnings to social media companies after tens of thousands swarmed the streets in over 100 Russian cities last weekend demanding his release.

Appearing in court by video link from jail, Navalny denounced criminal proceedings against him as part of the government's efforts to intimidate the opposition.

"You won't succeed in scaring tens of millions of people who have been robbed by that government," he said. "Yes, you have the power now to put me in handcuffs, but it's not going to last forever."

The 44-year-old Navalny, the most well-known critic of President Vladimir Putin's government, was arrested Jan. 17 upon re-

turning from Germany, where he spent five months healing from nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian authorities have rejected the accusations.

Navalny was arrested and jailed for 30 days at the request of Russia's penitentiary service, which charged that he had violated the probation terms of his suspended sentence from a 2014 money-laundering conviction that rejected as politically driven. He is also currently facing accusations in two separate criminal probes.

Before the Moscow Region Court rejected the appeal of his recent arrest, defense lawyers argued that while undergoing rehabilitation in Germany, Navalny could not register with authorities as required by the probation terms. His lawyers also charged that Navalny's due process rights were repeatedly violated during his arrest.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man hits 2 deer with new car, hits \$2M lottery later in same day

NC LELAND — An unlucky start to a North Carolina man's day turned upside down when he discovered he won a \$2 million lottery prize hours after hitting two deer with his new car.

Anthony Dowe, of Leland, had an accident on his way to work, the North Carolina Education Lottery said in a statement Tuesday. It ruined his day, so he went back home, got into bed and went to sleep.

"Then I woke up and checked my tickets. I checked the fourth ticket and I saw the '4' and then the next number and the next number and the next number," he said. "I'm like, 'Wow!' It was just crazy."

His winning Mega Millions ticket matched all five white balls. The odds? 1 out of 12.6 million.

On Monday, he claimed his prize at the lottery headquarters in Raleigh and took home about \$1.4 million after taxes.

Children's Hospital receives \$25M gift from anonymous donor

CA LOS ANGELES — Children's Hospital Los Angeles said Tuesday it has received a \$25 million gift from an anonymous donor.

CEO Paul Viviano said the donation would be "transformational" for CHLA. The money will support the "cognitive, emotional and behavioral health needs" of its patients, the hospital said in a statement.

"And it comes at an especially crucial time when the COVID-19 pandemic is directly affecting the mental health of nearly every child in the United States and throughout the world," said Chief Development Officer Alexandra Carter.

Kentucky Derby festival events set to return, but without fans

KY LOUISVILLE — Louisville's city-wide celebration leading into the Kentucky Derby will return this year, but its top events will look very different without spectators.

Kentucky Derby Festival organizers announced that the annual fireworks bonanza

Thunder Over Louisville and the accompanying air show will not take place at the city's Waterfront Park. Instead, the events will be presented with a mix of taped and live segments, in order to keep people from gathering in large groups.

The fireworks annually draw hundreds of thousands to the Louisville and southern Indiana river fronts.

The annual festival, which begins two weeks before the running of the Kentucky Derby, was canceled last year as the race was postponed to September due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Man faces bias crime charges in attack at convenience store

OR PORTLAND — A man is facing several charges in connection with an attack on a convenience store worker in Portland.

Police say that, on Jan. 22, Brian Christopher Miller yelled anti-Muslim slurs and threatened to kill the 68-year-old gas station worker, who is Muslim and emigrated from Afghanistan, KGW-TV reported.

The employee recorded the attack on his cellphone as he called 911, police said. In the video released by police, Miller can be seen yelling at the worker for several minutes. Miller shoved a food case at the victim, threw things and stole items, police said.

Portland police arrested Miller for criminal mischief and robbery. On Monday afternoon, Multnomah County District Attorney Mike Schmidt announced his office is also pursuing multiple hate crime charges and other additional charges against Miller.

Worker at nonprofit big cat sanctuary is bitten, hospitalized

TN KINGSTON — A worker at a big cat sanctuary in Tennessee was hospitalized Monday after being bitten by an animal, officials said.

Roane County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Tim Phillips confirmed a female employee at Tiger Haven, in Kingston, was bitten, news outlets reported. She was taken to the University of Tennessee Medical Center to be treated, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency said in a statement. Her condition wasn't immediately released.

The wildlife agency said it was investigating, but declined to comment further.

The nonprofit Tiger Haven currently houses more than 265 big cats on 75 acres, according to its website.

2 charged in 'Easter egg hunt' for inmates involving drugs, phones

OH LEBANON — Two men allegedly used a drone to drop drugs and cellphones into the yard at an Ohio prison last summer in what authorities described as an "Easter egg hunt" for inmates.

Michael Eugene Russell Williford Jr., 28, of East Cleveland, and Bryan Douglas Shepherd, 27, of Richmond Heights, were indicated by a Warren County grand jury this week on 23 counts, including aggravated trafficking and possession of drugs and possessing criminal tools.

The two men used glue to cover the small drug packages with turf, according to the indictment. They then used a drone to transport the packages onto the grounds of the Warren Correctional Institution in Lebanon in July and August.

"I would characterize it as a prison Easter egg hunt," Warren County Prosecutor David Fornshell said. He declined to say whether any inmates had obtained any of the packages before law enforcement intervened.

Man sentenced for keeping money he said would go to troops

WV MARTINSBURG — A West Virginia man has been sentenced to more than three years for taking money that donors believed would be used to send care packages to deployed service members, a prosecutor said.

Christopher T. Engle, 30, of Bunker Hill, was sentenced to 41 months Monday for wire fraud, U.S. Attorney Bill Powell said. Engle's company, Hearts2Heros, solicited contributions and misrepresented that the organization was a charity, Powell's office said in a news release.

Engle pleaded guilty in February. The total loss was more than \$286,000, and Engle was ordered to pay that amount in restitution, the release said.

— From wire reports

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Vandy's Pippen Jr. has Hall of Fame tutor

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Scotty Pippen Jr. gets a personalized critique after each game from people who know him and basketball very well.

Yes, Vanderbilt coach Jerry Stackhouse and his assistants detail the sophomore guard's performance.

Then there's the postgame calls from dad, six-time NBA champ Scottie Pippen who was voted one of the league's 50 greatest players.

"Coach Stack tells me what the team needs, making sure everyone gets the ball," Pippen Jr. said. "But my dad, he tells me little things like, 'Running up and down the court you don't look like you're in shape.' ... So I get critique on both ends. I'm used to it now."

All the advice is working.

Pippen Jr. ranks second in the Southeastern Conference in scoring, averaging 21.6 points and 5.3 assists per game. He's one of only four players in the country averaging more than 20 points and five assists a game, and Minnesota's Marcus Carr is the only other player doing that in a Power Five league.

Not bad for a guard whose recruiting list was mid-majors near his Los Angeles home. Washington State was the only Power Five school interested until Vanderbilt came looking for a point guard.

Pippen Jr. liked the academics at the SEC's only private university, so much that not even the firing of coach Bryce Drew and assistant Jake Diebler changed his mind.

The hiring of Stackhouse and his father's opinion of the 18-year NBA veteran helped too.

"My dad and coach Stack were cool, so he just thought it'd be a great fit," Pippen Jr. said. "He thought coach Stack would get me right. And just based off the phone calls with Coach, he just told me if I wanted to get better, this was the spot to be. He's going to be on me and push me, and I just trusted him."

Stackhouse threw the freshman guard onto the court at a program that didn't win a single SEC game the season before.

Pippen Jr. started 31 games and averaged 12 points and 3.6 assists playing 29.8 minutes a game. He finished Vanderbilt's 11-21 season scoring in double figures the final six games and was named to the SEC's All-Freshman team.

"He gave me time to make mistakes," Pippen Jr. said. "He gave me time to learn and grow on the court so coming back this year I had a lot of confidence, I had a lot more experience than I did my freshman year. So I feel like that all played a part."

Tennessee coach Rick Barnes said Pippen's improvement is impressive.

"He's responsible for about half of their points in production offensively," Barnes said. "And I love his demeanor that he plays with. And he is a guy that went in last year and had to learn on the job. He had to stay out there, they needed him on the court."

Pippen Jr. and Vanderbilt played the final game of the SEC Tournament last March before the league shut it down. Scottie Pippen was a very present dad last sea-

son, watching as many games as possible in person, including being behind the team bench that final game.

Once the pandemic hit, Pippen Jr. went home, where he rested and worked with his father. Pippen had his son lifting weights building up his legs and upper-body strength. They also worked on everything basketball from his shot and ball-handling along with watching film.

Dad, who won his NBA titles with the Chicago Bulls, had a willing pupil.

"I'm mature enough to know that my dad had some success," Pippen Jr. said. "I know he wants the best for me. I know he knows a lot about the game. He's been there, he's done what I want to do. ... So you know I trust him."

Now he's at the top of every scouting report, the focus of every team's best defender not to let Pippen Jr. beat them.

He now is 3 inches taller and 10 pounds heavier — 6-foot-3, 170 — than his last year in high school. The added muscle helps as he repeatedly drives to the basket for buckets, trips to the free-throw line or passes to teammates over double-teams. He's the only Commodore not to miss a game this season and is constantly talking to teammates during breaks.

The challenge has been getting Vanderbilt (4-8, 0-6) to play up to Pippen Jr.'s level, which hasn't been easy in a season of stops and starts due to COVID-19 issues and contact tracing. Two of the Commodores' last four games have been postponed, and they lost at Florida on Wednesday night.

No. 13 Ohio State rallies, holds off Penn State

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — E.J. Liddell scored 22 points, including the tiebreaking free throws with 59.7 seconds left, and No. 13 Ohio State held off Penn State 83-79 on Wednesday night.

The Buckeyes (13-4, 7-4 Big Ten) squandered a 12-point first-half lead but rallied from a seven-point deficit in the second for their second consecutive victory and fourth in five games.

Liddell hit four clutch free throws in the final minute, sealing it with two from the line with a second to play. Zed Key went 5-for-5 from the field and con-

verted his only free throw to finish with 11 points for Ohio State.

Kyle Young also had a perfect shooting night for the Buckeyes, scoring 10 points on 3-for-3 from the field and the free-throw line before fouling out with 5:01 left.

Seth Lundy paced the Nittany Lions (5-7, 2-6) with 26 points.

No. 2 Baylor 107, Kansas State 59: Davion Mitchell made seven three-pointers while scoring a career-high 31 points, MaCio Teague added 18 points and the Bears got another lopsided victory over the visiting Wildcats.

No. 14 Wisconsin 61, Mary-

land 55: Micah Potter had 23 points and 12 rebounds and the 14th-ranked Badgers slipped past the host Terrapins after blowing most of an 18-point halftime lead.

No. 16 Florida State 81, Miami 59: Malik Osborne had 11 points and 10 rebounds, Raiquan Gray added 10 points and 11 rebounds and the Seminoles routed the short-handed Hurricanes for their fifth straight win.

No. 17 Creighton 85, Seton Hall 81: At Newark, N.J., Mitch Ballock hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 41 seconds to play to cap a season-high 29-point

performance as the visiting Bluejays overcame a 16-point second-half deficit.

No. 20 Virginia Tech 62, Notre Dame 51: Nahiem Alleyne led three teammates in double figures with 15 points and the Hokies rebounded from a previous road loss to control the cold-shooting Irish in South Bend, Ind.

Clemson 54, No. 25 Louisville 50: Aamir Simms had 16 points, Al-Amir Dawes added 15 and the host Tigers turned up the defense to beat the Cardinals and break a three-game losing streak.

Harris lifts 76ers, ends Lakers' streak

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Tobias Harris made a jumper with 3 seconds left, ending the Los Angeles Lakers' 13-0 run and sending the Philadelphia 76ers to a 107-106 victory Wednesday night.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope hit a three-pointer with 1:05 left that pulled the Lakers to 105-104. LeBron James hit Anthony Davis for the go-ahead basket with 11.2 seconds to go for a 106-105 lead and cap that run.

Harris scored 24 points. Joel Embiid had 28 and Ben Simmons had 17 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists.

James scored 34 points, and Davis had 23.

Jazz 116, Mavericks 104: Rudy Gobert had seasons high of 29 points and 20 rebounds, Jordan Clarkson added a season-high 31 points, and host Utah beat Dallas for its 10th straight victory.

Gobert also had three blocks and three steals to help the Jazz pass the Lakers for the NBA's best record at 14-4.

Nuggets 109, Heat 82: Nikola Jokic had 21 points and 11 rebounds and Denver won its fifth straight, building a 25-point half-time lead and winning at Miami.

Michael Porter Jr. scored 17 points, Jamal Murray added 15 and Jamal Murray had 14 for the Nuggets, who are 4-0 on a five-game trip — the first time they have won four games on a trip of any length since December 2013.

Cavaliers 122, Pistons 107: Collin Sexton scored 29 points and Andre Drummond had 23 points, 16 rebounds and five steals against his former team, powering host Cle-

veland past Detroit,

Taurean Prince added 16 points and rookie Isaac Okoro had 10 points and a season-high six assists to help the Cavaliers snap a two-game losing streak and improve to 9-9.

Bucks 115, Raptors 108: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 24 points, 18 rebounds and nine assists, and Donte DiVincenzo sparked a five-point sequence in the fourth quarter that helped visiting Milwaukee beat Toronto.

The Bucks (11-6) were leading by just three points after a dunk by DiVincenzo, who followed with a steal and drew a flagrant foul on Kyle Lowry. After DiVincenzo made the two free throws, Milwaukee took the ball out of bounds and Bryn Forbes made a three-pointer for a 92-84 lead with 9:54 left.

Nets 132, Hawks 128 (OT): Kevin Durant scored 32 points and James Harden had 31 to lead a productive night for Brooklyn's big three scorers in an overtime win at Atlanta.

Harden added 15 assists and eight rebounds. Kyrie Irving scored 26 points.

Pelicans 124, Wizards 106: Zion Williamson and Brandon Ingram each scored a season-high 32 points and host New Orleans beat depleted Washington.

Bradley Beal almost single-handedly kept the reeling Wizards in striking distance with 47 points.

Pacers 116, Hornets 106: Doug McDermott scored 28 points, Damontas Sabonis had 22 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists and Indiana won at Charlotte.

Questionable coming into the game with a bruised knee, Sabonis started and finished 9-for-10 from the field. Malcolm Brogdon had 25 points, and Justin Holiday added 19.

Spurs 110, Celtics 106: DeMar DeRozan scored 21 points, Keldon Johnson had 18 points and 10 rebounds, and host San Antonio held on to beat Boston.

LaMarcus Aldridge added 20 points, and Dejounte Murray had 11 points and 11 rebounds.

Warriors 123, Timberwolves 111: Rookie center James Wiseman came off the Golden State bench to score a career-high 25 points, dazzling opposite No. 1 pick Anthony Edwards in a matchup of last year's top two draft selections.

Edwards, who like Wiseman is just 19, also scored 25 points for his second-highest total with visiting Minnesota.

Kelly Oubre Jr. had 20 points while playing through foul trouble for the Warriors. Stephen Curry added 16 points, eight assists and six rebounds.

Kings 121, Magic 107: Buddy Hield scored a season-best 29 points, hitting hit seven three-pointers, and well-rested Sacramento won at Orlando.

The Kings were playing for the first time since Friday after two games were canceled because of COVID-19 protocols with the Memphis Grizzlies. Richaun Holmes added 20 points and 12 rebounds.

Thunder 102, Suns 97: Al Horford had 21 points and 11 rebounds, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander also scored 21 points and Oklahoma City won at Phoenix.

NBA adjusts schedules for virus-affected teams

Associated Press

Washington's second-half schedule might not be as jam-packed as first thought, after the NBA said Wednesday it was rescheduling some Wizards games after a half-dozen of their contests were postponed in recent weeks for virus-related reasons.

Portland will now visit Washington on Tuesday, a game that was originally set for the second half. Washington will play at Charlotte on Feb. 7, a game that was rescheduled from Jan. 20. And that means the Blazers, who were scheduled to visit the

Hornets that day, will now go to Charlotte in the second half of the schedule.

The league has postponed 22 games so far this season, 21 of them since Jan. 10. The original intent was to push all those postponed games into the second half, when possible; now, the league said it would move some games into the first-half schedules, "with a specific focus on the teams with the most postponed games to date."

That would certainly include Washington and Memphis, both of which have had a league-high

six games postponed. The Wizards went 13 days without games after six players tested positive for COVID-19. The Grizzlies will have gone 12 days without games if they play, as planned, in San Antonio on Saturday.

Some good news for the league on Wednesday: The Grizzlies said they were returning to practice.

And even better news: The NBA and the National Basketball Players Association said Wednesday that only one player in the league tested positive for

COVID-19 in the past seven days, down from 16 two weeks ago and 11 last week. It remains possible that some of the stronger protocols put in place earlier this month, such as not allowing players to leave hotels on road trips for almost any reason other than games or practices, may be somewhat loosened soon as well.

Without the schedule changes by the NBA, the Wizards and Grizzlies might have been looking at playing 41 times in 67 days during the second half of the season.

Predators get by Blackhawks in shootout

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — For Matt Duchene, confidence was the difference.

Duchene scored the only goal of the shootout to give the Nashville Predators a 2-1 victory over the Chicago Blackhawks on Wednesday night.

Nick Cousins had the regulation goal for Nashville.

Ryan Carpenter had the Chicago goal. The Blackhawks have dropped two in a row, but have earned at least one standings point in their last five games.

It was the second straight night the teams needed extra time to decide the game. Nash-

ville won Tuesday night's first game of the back-to-back set on an overtime goal by captain Roman Josi.

In the tiebreaker, Duchene skated down the center of the ice, froze Chicago goaltender Kevin Lankinen with a forehand move before lifting a backhand under the crossbar of the fallen goaltender.

"Coming in there, I think in a shootout, it starts upstairs in your head," Duchene said. "For me, it starts upstairs and just having that confidence. When you pick that puck up, you've got to know that you're going to score and I had that feeling tonight."

Cousins scored the game's first goal at 5:24 of the third period.

After Chicago turned the puck over just inside the Nashville blue line, Duchene chipped the puck off of the glass and Cousins outmaneuvered Chicago defenseman Calvin de Haan to take control of the puck. Cousins skated down the right side on a 2-on-1 and snapped a quick wrist shot between the pads of Lankinen from the right circle.

Lankinen finished with 41 saves in regulation and overtime, including 20 in the third period.

Canucks 5, Senators 1: J.T. Miller had two goals and an as-

sist, Tyler Motte scored twice and host Vancouver handed Ottawa its sixth straight loss.

"I think we need to push ourselves," Miller said. "I know it looks pretty for you guys because I got some points today but at the same time there's not much difference in the game."

Elias Pettersson also had a goal and an assist, and Thatcher Demko made 42 saves for Vancouver.

Ottawa's lone goal came from Josh Norris on a power play in the first period. Marcus Hogberg stopped 30 shots. The Senators haven't won since beating Toronto 5-3 in its season opener on Jan. 15.

Source: Texans' Watson asks team to trade him

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Star quarterback Deshaun Watson has requested a trade from the Houston Texans, a person familiar with the move told The Associated Press.

The person was not authorized to speak publicly about the request and spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity Thursday.

Watson has a no-trade clause in his four-year, \$156 million contract, so he could have some control over where he might be dealt.

A source told The Associated Press on Wednesday night that the Texans had hired David Culley as their new coach to replace Bill O'Brien, who was fired after an 0-4 start and replaced by interim head coach Romeo Crennel.

The same source who told The AP about the trade request said Watson made the request before Culley's hire. He has been unhappy with the direction of the team for some time and Sports Illustrated reported weeks ago that Watson was up-

set the team didn't initially request to interview Kansas City offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy for its coaching vacancy.

The Texans eventually interviewed Bieniemy, as well as Indianapolis defensive coordinator Matt Eberflus, Buffalo assistant head coach/defensive coordinator Leslie Frazier, Detroit coach Jim Caldwell, former Cincinnati coach Marvin Lewis and Carolina offensive coordinator Joe Brady before landing on Culley — the only African American among the seven head coaches hired this offseason.

It will be the first head coaching job for the 65-year-old Culley, who has worked as an assistant for the Baltimore Ravens since 2019.

He becomes the fourth coach in Texans history.

Culley has worked as an NFL assistant since 1994, also spending time with Tampa Bay, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Kansas City and Buffalo. He began his career as a college assistant and spent 1991-93 at Texas A&M.

Watson, a three-time Pro Bowler, wasn't just disgruntled

about the way Houston went about its coaching search. He was also upset that owner Cal McNair did not take his opinion into account when hiring general manager Nick Caserio, according to reports from ESPN and the NFL Network.

The Texans, who had years of woes at quarterback before drafting Watson, don't want to part with the talented 25-year-old who led the NFL in yards passing this season. But so far they have been unable to change his mind about his desire to leave.

Seahawks cut ties with Wheeler after his arrest

SEATTLE — Former Seattle Seahawks offensive lineman Chad Wheeler was charged with first-degree domestic violence assault on Wednesday following his arrest last weekend.

Wheeler was additionally charged with domestic violence, unlawful imprisonment and resisting arrest by King County Prosecutors. Wheeler is scheduled to be arraigned on Feb. 9. The first-degree domes-

tic violence assault charge is a Class A felony in Washington. The domestic violence unlawful imprisonment charge is a Class C felony.

Prosecutors also asked a judge to require Wheeler be placed on electronic home detention, and wear an ankle monitoring device equipped with GPS monitoring.

The charging decision by prosecutors ended a whirlwind day that included Wheeler being waived by the Seahawks, according to the NFL's official transactions wire after details emerged of the alleged assault and his arrest.

"The Seahawks are saddened by the details emerging against Chad Wheeler and strongly condemn this act of domestic violence. Our thoughts and support are with the victim. Chad is a free agent and no longer with the team," the Seahawks said in a statement.

Wheeler joined the Seahawks in 2019 and appeared in five games this season. His contract with the team was set to expire with the start of the new league year in March.