

US troops to stay on base in Japan

Associated Press

The United States and Japan on Sunday agreed to keep American troops within their bases as worries grew about a rise in coronavirus cases in the country.

The restrictions starting Monday will last 14 days, confining U.S. military personnel to base facilities except for “essential activities,” a statement from the U.S. Forces in Japan said. The Japanese Foreign Ministry released the same statement.

The allies will share information and cooperate on coronavirus measures, “given the extraordinary virulence of the omicron variant spreading throughout Japan,” the statement said.

U.S. military members will wear masks, both on and off base, when outside their homes, and will continue to carry out strict testing before leaving for and after arrival in Japan, it said.

New COVID-19 cases have surged in Japan, jumping above 8,000 on Saturday, a four-month record. The spike has been most pronounced in areas near U.S. bases. Last week, Japan asked the U.S. for cooperation in keeping its military personnel on base.

Okinawa, a southwestern group of islands that houses most of the 55,000 U.S. troops in Japan, is among the three prefectures where separate government restrictions kicked in Sunday. The measures, which last through the end of the month, include the early closing hours for restaurants, at 8 p.m. or 9 p.m. Some restaurants also must stop serving alcohol.

The restrictions also went into effect in Yamaguchi prefecture, where Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni is located, and nearby Hiroshima. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, which documents the

U.S. atomic bombing of Japan at the end of World War II, and Hiroshima Castle are both closed to visitors.

Other regions may see similar restrictions be put in place if cases keep rising.

People have been warned to stay home and avoid travel. Until recently, bars, shrines and shopping districts have been jam-packed with year-end shoppers and New Year’s holiday travelers.

In Tokyo, confirmed daily cases have exceeded 1,200 for the past two days, 14 times the previous week.

Throughout the pandemic, Japan has never imposed a lockdown but has implemented varying levels of restrictions, including school closures and event cancellations.

Japan has set up stringent border controls, barring most incoming travel except for returning residents and citizens.

US plans to discuss missile deployments with Russia

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Negotiators for the United States are planning to show up to talks with their Russian counterparts Monday with proposals to discuss the placement of missiles and scope of military exercises in Europe, according to a senior administration official and others familiar with the plans.

The White House is looking to test whether Moscow is serious about ending the Ukraine crisis through diplomacy or is making unworkable demands as a delay tactic or pretext for a new invasion.

The bilateral talks in Geneva — with Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman leading the U.S. delegation and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov serving as lead representative for the Russians

— come as Moscow continues to mass forces and materiel on the border with Ukraine, threatening to take military measures if Washington and its allies fail to address the Kremlin’s security concerns.

The Geneva talks will be followed by a special meeting of the NATO-Russia Council in Brussels on Wednesday and a session of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna on Thursday — chances for the United States to engage Russia together with its allies and partners.

“Our intention is to have an open, sincere and serious dialogue about European security with the Russians at the table. We want to be inclusive. We don’t want to go over anybody’s head,” U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE Michael Carpenter said in an interview.

The multicountry engagements at NATO and the OSCE are a priority for the White House, which has regularly reassured European allies and partners, including Ukraine, that it won’t negotiate “about them, without them.” But the Geneva talks are likely to be the most substantive and closely watched indicator of whether there is a diplomatic deal to be struck that will avert a renewed war in Europe.

“The way the Russians think, there’s only one venue that matters to them and it’s the bilateral one,” said a U.S. government official specializing in Russian affairs who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the issue’s sensitivity. “The rest, from their point of view, is decoration.”

In Geneva, U.S. officials will be looking to see whether their

Russian counterparts emphasize demands the Kremlin knows are nonstarters — such as providing a legally binding guarantee that NATO will not expand eastward to include Ukraine — or instead focus on areas such as missiles, where there is room for negotiation.

“If the Russians come on Monday and they only want to talk about NATO expansion, then we are going to be at an impasse. I think the administration is prepared to push back — that this is not up for discussion,” said Andrea Kendall-Taylor, a Russia expert at the Center for a New American Security. “But if the Russians want to talk about conventional arms control issues, then there is a discussion to be had — and it would raise the prospect that there could be a diplomatic solution to the crisis.”

USAF rejects preferential treatment claim

By **CHAD GARLAND**
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force is pushing back on claims that the service gave preferential treatment to a woman who was vying to become the first female elite special tactics airman after a member of Congress raised concerns.

Lt. Gen. Jim Slife, head of Air Force Special Operations Command, responded Thursday to accusations of lowered standards, saying they had come from an anonymous email.

Screenshots of the anonymous email had been shared in an Instagram post by Rep. Dan Crenshaw, a Texas Republican and Navy SEAL veteran, who demanded answers.

"We cannot sacrifice training standards. Ever. Full stop," Crenshaw wrote. "If this ac-

count is true, our military needs to address it now."

Slife took to his official Facebook page to rebut the accusations. The command's Instagram page also shared part of his reply.

"We can unequivocally say the standards — which are tied to mission accomplishment — have not changed," Slife said. "However, there is a difference between standards and norms."

According to the accuser, a female captain was given more favorable treatment than is typical under "societal norms" for airmen undergoing special tactics selection and training.

The accuser said the trainee was allowed to repeatedly quit then rejoin the pipeline and was offered an "unheard of" special assignment in one of the mili-

tary's most elite units to encourage her to keep going.

Slife said the "norms" of the training pipeline have changed over the past 15 years based on efforts to get airmen to meet standards. Although the standards are unchanged now, he said, they could be altered in the future.

Special tactics airmen, under 24th Special Operations Wing, make up the service's ground combat forces, who embed with SEALs, Army Rangers and Marine Raiders to help call in airstrikes, provide medical care and recover wounded and slain personnel.

The anonymous account naming the trainee and others involved, including Slife, was shared on Twitter by Air Force special operations veteran and

military podcaster Brian Kimber. Crenshaw then shared screenshots of that post.

Crenshaw, who was wounded in Afghanistan in 2012, said "lots of females ... contribute enormously" to special operations missions, but they follow strict standards. Subverting them "will cost lives," he said.

Slife declined to discuss specifics about the trainee's experiences to avoid added attention and pressure on her. He said singling her out publicly as the accuser did is bullying and harassment, which are contrary to standards, norms and values.

"Furthermore, most of what the author asserted" about her experience was factually wrong or "missing important context which would completely change the perception," Slife said.

Soldier of 'Baby Shark' fame launches comic book series

By **J.P. LAWRENCE**
Stars and Stripes

The Army drill sergeant who went viral for singing "Baby Shark" as a marching cadence has a new plan for what he will do, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo.

Sgt. 1st Class Lincoln Crisler released the first in a planned series of horror-inspired comic books on Amazon on Wednesday. The 21-page issue of "Incarnations" features "badass bikers with very specific wizard powers," Crisler told Stars and Stripes on the day of the release. The bikers are from rival factions and may clash over the course of the story, he said.

Crisler, now a telecommunications soldier stationed in Baumholder, Germany, said he worked on the story as he prepares to retire later this year after more than 20 years in the military.

A native of Rochester, N.Y., Crisler, 39, said he's often writing

when not working. He recounted crafting stories on his laptop in a hut in Afghanistan's Pech Valley.

"When I go home at the end of the day, I still feel like I want to do stuff, and I still have time during the day to do those things," he said.

The self-published work goes for \$2.99. The story will go for at least six issues, Crisler said, but he has more planned if enough people are interested.

As a drill sergeant, he was already known for idiosyncratic marching cadences prior to the "Baby Shark" rendition, recruits said in 2019. That's when a YouTube video of Crisler singing the hit children's song at Fort Gordon, Ga., racked up millions of views. The call-and-response performance was not planned, Crisler told local news outlets at the time, adding that it was a way to handle repetition at work.

Soldier appeals conviction in cadet death on jury issue

By **JOHN VANDIVER**
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. soldier who is serving prison time for her role in the death of a West Point cadet is appealing her negligent homicide conviction on the grounds that a military panel's nonunanimous guilty verdict violated her constitutional rights.

The Army Court of Criminal Appeals on Wednesday granted a request by attorneys for Ladonies P. Strong, a staff sergeant who was demoted to private after her 2020 conviction. The case will be heard starting Feb. 10. The hearing could be the first chance for a military court to weigh in on a debate in the legal community over the military's long-standing practice of allowing guilty verdicts with just three-fourths of a panel voting to convict.

In July 2020, Strong was sentenced to three years of confine-

ment over a crash in New York that killed Christopher J. Morgan and injured more than 20 others. She was driving a military truck en route to a training exercise when her vehicle overturned. Morgan died at the scene.

Attorneys for Strong contend that an April 2020 Supreme Court ruling that deemed split jury verdicts unconstitutional should be grounds for overturning her court-martial conviction.

Strong's appeal comes after a separate ruling Monday by a military judge, Col. Charles Pritchard, in Kaiserslautern, Germany, who said prosecutors will need a unanimous guilty verdict to convict an officer standing trial on sexual assault charges. He made waves in the legal community with his ruling, which held that allowing split verdicts encroaches on service members' Fifth Amendment due process rights.

Omicron spurs services breakdown in US

Associated Press

Ambulances in Kansas speed toward hospitals then suddenly change direction because hospitals are full. Employee shortages in New York City cause delays in trash and subway services and diminish the ranks of firefighters and emergency workers. Airport officials shut down security checkpoints at the biggest terminal in Phoenix and schools across the nation struggle to find teachers for their classrooms.

The current explosion of omicron-fueled coronavirus infections in the United States is causing a breakdown in basic functions and services — the latest il-

lustration of how COVID-19 keeps upending life more than two years into the pandemic.

In Kansas' Johnson County, paramedics are working 80 hours a week. Ambulances have frequently been forced to alter their course when the hospitals they're heading to say they're too overwhelmed to help, confusing the patients' already anxious family members driving behind them.

Medical facilities have been hit by a "double whammy," he said. The number of COVID-19 patients at the University of Kansas Hospital rose from 40 on Dec. 1 to 139 on Friday. At the same time, more than 900 employees have

been sickened with COVID-19 or are awaiting test results — 7% of the hospital's 13,500-person workforce.

In Los Angeles, over 800 police and fire personnel were sidelined because of the virus as of Thursday, causing slightly longer ambulance and fire response times.

In New York City, officials have had to delay or scale back trash and subway services because of a virus-fueled staffing hemorrhage. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority said about one-fifth of subway operators and conductors — 1,300 people — have been absent in recent days.

At Phoenix Sky Harbor Inter-

national Airport, two checkpoints at the airport's busiest terminal were shut down because not enough Transportation Security Administration agents showed up for work, according to statements from airport and TSA officials.

Meanwhile, schools from coast to coast tried to maintain in-person instruction despite massive teacher absences. In Chicago, a tense standoff between the school district and teachers union over remote learning and COVID-19 safety protocols led to classes being canceled over the past three days. In San Francisco, nearly 900 educators and aides called in sick Thursday.

Unfounded theory used to dismiss COVID-19 measures

Associated Press

An unfounded theory taking root online suggests millions of people have been "hypnotized" into believing mainstream ideas about COVID-19, including steps to combat it such as testing and vaccination.

In widely shared social media posts last week, efforts to combat the disease have been dismissed with just three words: "mass formation psychosis."

"I'm not a scientist but I'm pretty sure healthy people spending hours in line to get a virus test is mass formation psychosis in action," reads one tweet that was liked more than 22,000 times.

The term gained attention after it was floated by Dr. Robert Malone on "The Joe Rogan Experience" Dec. 31 podcast. Malone is a scientist who once researched mRNA technology but is now a vocal skeptic of the COVID-19 vaccines that use it.

But psychology experts have said the concept described by Malone is not supported by evidence, and is similar to theories that have long been discredited. Here's a look at the facts.

CLAIM: The concept of "mass

formation psychosis" explains why millions of people believe in a mainstream COVID-19 "narrative" and trust the safety and efficacy of the vaccines.

THE FACTS: Malone highlighted the unfounded theory on a podcast hosted by comedian and commentator Joe Rogan. During the episode, Malone cast doubt on COVID-19 vaccine safety and claimed the mass psychosis has resulted in a "third of the population basically being hypnotized" into believing what Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, and mainstream news outlets say.

Psychology experts have said there is no support for the "psychosis" theory described by Malone.

"To my knowledge, there's no evidence whatsoever for this concept," said Jay Van Bavel, an assistant professor of psychology and neural science at New York University who recently co-authored a book on group identities. Van Bavel said he had never encountered the phrase "mass formation psychosis" in his years of research, nor could he find it in any peer-reviewed literature.

Guam commands tell troops to mask up amid COVID-19 surge

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

Masks are required once again for military personnel on Guam as new cases of the coronavirus respiratory disease continue to surge on the U.S. island territory.

Face coverings must now be worn in any "congregate settings," indoors and out, when social distancing is not possible, according to a statement Thursday from region commander Rear Adm. Benjamin Nicholson. Masks are not required during physical training.

"After two months of a downward trend we are now experiencing a rapid increase in COVID-19 cases, and we want to make sure we get ahead of the spread and slow it back down to protect our families and our island," Nicholson wrote.

The policy does not apply to Andersen Air Force Base and Naval Base Guam because each installation has its own commander with the "authority and responsibility" to manage their own unique public health emergencies in accordance with DOD guidance, Joint Region Marianas spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Katie

Koenig told Stars and Stripes by email Friday.

Naval Base Guam spokeswoman Theresa Cepeda, however, in an email to Stars and Stripes on Thursday, said the base had also reimplemented its mask mandate. Air Force Brig. Gen. Jeremy Sloane ordered the 36th Wing to follow suit on Friday.

The U.S. military in Japan on Thursday reinforced an existing mask mandate for all personnel heading off base and those quarantining on base prior to a negative COVID-19 test, U.S. Forces Japan said in a statement.

The mission of Joint Region Marianas is to provide installation management to all DOD organizations and tenants on Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands and to support training in the region, according to the command's website. Each unit in the region complies with local guidelines where they are operating, whether that is on Guam or Saipan, for example, Koenig said.

On Friday, there were 272 active COVID-19 cases among service members and Defense Department employees on Guam, up 129 since Wednesday, Koenig said.

Over 160 people killed in Kazakhstan protests

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Kazakhstan's health ministry said Sunday that 164 people have been killed in protests that have rocked the country over the past week.

The figures reported on the state news channel Khabar-24 are a significant increase from previous tallies. It is not clear if the report referred only to civilians or if law enforcement deaths are included. Kazakh authorities said earlier Sunday that 16 members of the police or national guard had been killed. Authorities previously gave the civilian death toll as 26.

Most of the deaths — 103 — were in Almaty, the country's largest city, where demonstrators seized government buildings and set some afire, according to the ministry. Kazakhstan's ombudswoman for children's rights said three of those killed were minors, including a 4-year-old girl.

The ministry earlier reported more than 2,200 people sought treatment for injuries from the protests, and the Interior Ministry said about 1,300 security officers were injured.

The office of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said that about 5,800 people were detained by police during the protests that developed into violence last week and prompted a Russia-led military alliance to send troops to the country.

His office said order has stabilized in the country and that authorities regained con-

trol of administrative buildings that were occupied by protesters. Some of the buildings were set on fire.

The Russian TV station Mir-24 said sporadic gunfire was heard Sunday in Almaty, but it was unclear whether they were warning shots by law enforcement. Tokayev said Friday that he had authorized police and the military to shoot to kill to restore order.

Almaty's airport, which had been taken by protesters last week, remained closed but was expected to resume operations Monday.

Protests over a sharp rise in fuel prices began in the country's west on Jan. 2 and spread throughout the country, apparently reflecting wider discontent.

The same party has ruled Kazakhstan since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Any figures aspiring to oppose the government have either been repressed, sidelined or co-opted, and financial hardship is widespread despite Kazakhstan's enormous reserves of oil, natural gas, uranium and minerals.

Tokayev contended that the demonstrations were ignited by "terrorists" with foreign backing, although the protests have shown no obvious leaders or organization. The statement from his office on Sunday said the detentions included "a sizable number of foreign nationals," but gave no details.

It was unclear how many of those detained remained in custody on Sunday.

Intel reports all failed to predict riot at Capitol

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Intelligence reports compiled by the U.S. Capitol Police in the days before last year's insurrection envisioned only an improbable or remote risk of violence, even as other assessments warned that crowds of potentially thousands of pro-Trump demonstrators could converge in Washington and create a dangerous situation.

The documents, obtained by The Associated Press, underscore the uneven and muddled intelligence that circulated to Capitol Police officers ahead of the Jan. 6 riot, when thousands of Donald Trump loyalists swarmed the Capitol complex and clashed violently with law enforcement officers in their effort to disrupt the certification of the results of the 2020 presidential election. The intelligence reports, in particular, show how the police agency, up to the day of the riot itself, grievously underestimated the prospect of chaotic violence and disruptions.

The contradictory intelligence produced by law enforcement leading up to the riot has been at the forefront of congressional scrutiny about the Jan. 6 preparations and response, with officials struggling to explain how they failed to anticipate and plan for the deadly riot at the Capitol that day. The shortcomings led to upheaval at the top ranks of the department, including the ouster of the chief, though the assistant chief in charge of protective and intelligence operations at the time remains in her position.

There was, according to a harshly critical Senate report issued in June, "a lack of consensus about the gravity of the threat posed on January 6, 2021."

"Months following the attack on the U.S. Capitol, there is still no consensus among USCP officials about the intelligence reports' threat analysis ahead of January 6, 2021," the report stated.

The documents, known as a "daily intelligence report" and marked "For Official Use Only," have been described over the last year in congressional testimony and in the Senate report. The AP on Friday evening obtained full versions of the documents for Jan. 4, 5 and 6 of last year. The New York Times highlighted the Jan. 4 report in a story last year on intelligence shortcomings.

Space telescope's 'golden eye' opens

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — NASA's new space telescope opened its huge, gold-plated, flower-shaped mirror Saturday, the final step in the observatory's dramatic unfurling.

The last portion of the 21-foot mirror swung into place at flight controllers' command, completing the unfolding of the James Webb Space Telescope.

"I'm emotional about it. What an amazing milestone. We see that beautiful pattern out there in the sky now," said Thomas Zurbuchen, chief of NASA's science missions.

More powerful than the Hubble Space Telescope, the \$10 billion Webb will scan

the cosmos for light streaming from the first stars and galaxies formed 13.7 billion years ago. To accomplish this, NASA had to outfit Webb with the largest and most sensitive mirror ever launched — its "golden eye," as scientists call it.

Webb is so big that it had to be folded origami-style to fit in the rocket that soared from South America two weeks ago. The riskiest operation occurred earlier in the week, when the tennis court-size sunshield unfurled, providing subzero shade for the mirror and infrared detectors.

Flight controllers in Baltimore began opening the primary mirror Friday, unfolding the left side like a drop-leaf table.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Mother charged after son found isolating in trunk

TX HOUSTON — A Houston mother was charged after authorities allege she placed her 13-year-old son in the trunk of her car in an attempt to isolate him after he had tested positive for COVID-19 and then took him to a drive-thru testing site.

The 41-year-old woman is charged with endangering a child. Authorities allege her son was found in her car's trunk at a testing site for the Cypress-Fairbanks school district in northwest Houston. The woman is a teacher with the district, which said in a statement that the child was not harmed.

The Cypress-Fairbanks school district said she is on administrative leave.

Man pleads guilty in \$50M internet scheme

NJ NEWARK — A California man pleaded guilty to running a \$50 million fraud scheme using fake websites that advertised high returns on certificates of deposit.

Allen Giltman, 56, pleaded guilty to wire fraud conspiracy and securities conspiracy.

The multistate scheme was prosecuted by the U.S. attorney's office in New Jersey because some of the more than 70 victims are from the state.

Investigators said that over the span of eight years, Giltman, of Irvine, Calif., and others used fake websites offering high returns on certificates of deposit to lure investors. Some of the websites were set up to resemble legitimate financial institutions.

To hide their involvement,

the co-conspirators purchased the website domains with prepaid gift cards and used virtual private networks, or VPNs, to disguise their digital footprint, according to prosecutors. Investigators identified at least 150 of the websites and more than 70 victims in New Jersey and elsewhere.

Man arrested in case of kidnapping 35 years ago

NC WAKE — A North Carolina man has been arrested on charges stemming from the kidnapping of a 4-year-old South Carolina girl in 1986, police said.

The town of Wake Forest said in a news release that police assisted the Lexington County, S.C., Sheriff's Office in arresting Thomas Eric McDowell, 61, at his home.

Authorities filed multiple charges against McDowell, including murder, kidnapping and burglary.

WRAL-TV reported deputies said McDowell lived in Lexington County in 1986 when Jessica Gutierrez was murdered. The child disappeared from her home on June 6, 1986, and was never seen again, according to a release from the FBI.

Man held in severed head case loses bid for bail

NV LAS VEGAS — A 57-year-old ex-felon who was found in Las Vegas with a severed head and body parts in his allegedly stolen vehicle has lost his bid to get out of jail while facing a murder charge.

Eric Holland's public defender, David Westbrook, argued in court that his client might have been "a hapless car thief who

just picked the wrong car" and the prosecution had to prove that not only was there a body in the car "but that he knew it was there and that he actually caused the death."

Justice of the Peace Harmony Letizia responded with a terse order keeping Holland behind bars at least until a preliminary hearing of more evidence in the case, scheduled for Jan. 27.

"Proof is evident and the presumption is great that Mr. Holland committed murder," the judge said.

Fraternity at university sued to stop parties

MI YPSILANTI — A prosecutor filed a lawsuit to try to temporarily stop parties hosted by a fraternity at Eastern Michigan University, citing sexual assaults and excessive alcohol consumption.

Delta Tau Delta in Ypsilanti has created a public nuisance, according to a lawsuit.

"We detailed 15 reported sexual assaults since 2014 that either occurred at parties or following parties at the Delta Tau Delta fraternity house as well as other sexual assault-adjacent incidents," Washtenaw County Prosecutor Eli Savit said.

EMU said it shares Savit's concerns about the fraternity, though it also noted that Delta Tau Delta is managed independently and is located off campus.

Alleged racist taunts at school game investigated

WA CAMAS — A school district in southwestern Washington is investigating reports of racist taunting

that allegedly happened at a high school girls basketball game in December.

The investigation launched by the Camas School District follows a complaint by Portland, Ore., Benson High School girls basketball coach Eric Knox, The Columbian reported.

He said his players, most of whom are Black, were subjected to taunts and racist slurs on Dec. 10 from the Camas student section during a game.

Knox eventually told referees he would pull his team if the behavior didn't stop and Benson finished the game, winning 60-52. He said the Camas players were "great" and none engaged in any objectionable conduct.

Wounded veterans bike in annual cycling event

FL MARATHON — War-wounded military men and women pedaled their way across the Seven Mile Bridge and other parts of the Florida Keys Overseas Highway as a facet of the annual Florida Keys Soldier Ride.

Almost 40 injured soldiers and their supporters are participating in the cycling event organized by the Wounded Warrior Project.

The organization's cross-country and Keys bicycle trips provide inspiration and rehabilitative opportunities for injured soldiers, while raising money for others recovering in American military hospitals.

Funds generated help foster veterans' independence, develop peer-mentoring programs and arrange transport between home and hospital when needed.

— From wire reports



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Alabama, Georgia ready to run it back

Associated Press

The last time No. 1 Alabama and No. 3 Georgia played, things could not have gone much better for the Crimson Tide.

Alabama dropped 41 points on the Bulldogs, more than double the next-highest total they have allowed this season, in the Southeastern Conference title game on Dec. 4. Bryce Young shredded Georgia's otherwise dominant defense for 421 yards passing, essentially locking up the Heisman Trophy.

So it's back to the drawing board for the 'Dawgs and run it back for the Tide, right?

"I don't think you do everything the same, but I also don't think you can make a lot of changes that the players are not going to go out and be able to play and execute with confidence," Alabama coach Nick Saban said earlier this week.

Both teams are expecting a few new wrinkles — within reason.

"They're not going to change up and go all Arkansas on us," Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett said. "They're not going

to do that. They're going to be Alabama. And we're going to be Georgia. And we're going to see who executes better."

Arkansas was one of four SEC teams that lost to both this season.

Razorbanks coach Sam Pittman, along with ESPN analysts Greg McElroy and Cole Cubelic, help break down the matchups that could determine Bulldogs-Crimson Tide II.

What to do about Will?

Tide outside linebacker Will Anderson Jr. is the best defensive player in the country. The sophomore has 17.5 sacks among 33.5 tackles for loss. Both totals lead major college football.

Georgia should feel good about its offensive tackles, especially left tackle Jamarcee Salyer, who was key in shutting down Michigan pass rusher Aidan Hutchinson in the semifinals.

But Anderson presents a different kind of challenge.

"The thing I like about Alabama is all the different things they do with him," Pittman said.

Defensive coordinator Pete Golding likes to use Anderson on stunts and slants to get him attacking different parts of the line of scrimmage.

"I think he's best when he's on the move," Cubelic said.

Anderson is a game-wrecker on a Crimson tide defense that's a little underrated, and it will take a team effort by Georgia to neutralize him.

Attacking Alabama's corners

Alabama has shown some vulnerabilities in its secondary all season, and then senior cornerback Josh Jobe was lost for the playoff with a foot injury.

Jalyn Armour-Davis, who had been dealing with a hip problem, returned to start against Cincinnati in the Cotton Bowl but was in and out of the game.

Without them, freshman Kool-Aid McKinstry and Khyree Jackson are the Tide's main cornerbacks.

If the Bulldogs can hold off Anderson and the Alabama rush, it should find some holes in pass coverage, but can Bennett and his receivers take advantage?

Bolton's fumble return lifts Chiefs

Associated Press

DENVER — Nearly stumbling heading into the playoffs, Nick Bolton and the Kansas City Chiefs gathered themselves just in time to thunder into the postseason with an AFC-best 12 wins.

They'll learn Sunday if that's enough to get them a first-round bye.

"We're ready to go wherever and against whomever," Patrick Mahomes said after the Chiefs rallied for a 28-24 win Saturday over the Denver Broncos, a victory powered by Bolton's 86-yard fumble return midway through the fourth quarter.

To secure the pole position in the AFC playoffs, Kansas City (12-5) needs Houston to upset Tennessee on Sunday. If not, the Chiefs host a wild-card game next weekend in their quest to reach a third consecutive Super Bowl.

The Broncos were ahead 21-20 and driving for another score when Melvin Ingram III blitzed, speeding past tight end Noah Fant untouched and blowing up the play just as Drew Lock handed the ball to Melvin Gordon on second-and-2 from the 9.

Bolton, a rookie linebacker who checks in at 237 pounds, scooped up the loose ball and rumbled down Kansas City's euphoric side-

line, nearly falling down at midfield before regaining his balance and outracing Lock, whom he played with at Missouri, to the end zone.

"I was hoping that he wouldn't stumble," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said after his 250th NFL coaching victory. "Those guys don't get much of a chance to run that far that fast very often and he ran like a stallion. He took off and looked like a running back there."

Like many of the other victories in Kansas City's 13-game winning streak against Denver, this one was no cakewalk. The Broncos (7-10) led for much of the afternoon despite having nothing to play for but pride.

"My main emotion is really proud of our payers," Denver coach Vic Fangio said. "That's a team that may win it all. They've obviously won a lot of games the last four or five years since Mahomes has taken over. We had a chance to win that game. But not winning it is the bottom line and we didn't get it done."

The Chiefs, however, chewed up the final 4:37 and lined up in victory formation after the 2-minute warning as the crowd of 61,441 streamed for the exits, a fifth straight losing season in the books and the Broncos' playoff drought now stretched to six years.

Prescott has 5 TD passes in Cowboys' romp

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Dak Prescott ran into Dallas' locker room with a message for any NFC team he'll play next week in the playoffs.

"The real (stuff) starts," he said.

It starts with finding out the Cowboys' wild-card opponent, and Prescott will be like millions of fans Sunday and watch the scoreboard with their playoff fate at stake.

Prescott threw a career-high five touchdown passes against Philadelphia Eagles backups, Cedrick Wilson and Dalton Schultz each had two scoring catches and Dallas kept its slim hopes for a No. 2 seed in the NFC playoffs alive with a 51-26 victory Saturday night.

The Cowboys still had seeding to play for against an Eagles team that rested Jalen Hurts and other key starters ahead of an NFC wild-card game next week.

NFC East champion Dallas (12-5) needs losses Sunday by reigning Super Bowl champion Tampa Bay against last-place Carolina and also for the Los Angeles Rams and Arizona Cardinals to lose to earn the No. 2 seed.

McGusty helps Miami stun No. 2 Duke

Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — Kameron McGusty watched No. 2 Duke's last shot bounce off the rim as the horn sounded, then turned toward the Miami bench — now an oncoming rush of celebrating orange-clad players — with a huge fist pump.

Moments later, he was emphatically talking and trading high-fives with Hurricanes fans on his way off the court.

"We're the real deal," McGusty said. "And I think everybody saw that tonight."

McGusty hit a hanging layup in traffic with 22.8 seconds left and Miami survived that final-play shot for the win to stun the Blue Devils 76-74, earning their first win against a top-5 opponent in nearly six years while remaining unbeaten in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Charlie Moore had 18 points and a career-high seven steals for the Hurricanes (13-3, 5-0 ACC), who won their ninth straight game. This time, days after rallying from 18 down to beat Syracuse, Miami won at Duke's famously rowdy Cameron Indoor Stadium with a fearless performance that had the Hurricanes repeatedly beating defenders off the dribble or on backcuts while answering every push by the Blue Devils (12-2, 2-1).

Missouri 92, Alabama 86: Kobe Brown scored a career-high 30 points and added 13 rebounds as the host Tigers upset the No. 15 Crimson Tide for their first win in three weeks.

Missouri (7-7, 1-1 Southeastern Conference) had been 0-2 with another game postponed because of COVID-19 issues since its last victory on Dec. 18. It hadn't played since Dec. 29.

Jarron Coleman scored 18 points and Dajuan Gordon and Javon Pickett each had 15 for the Tigers. Brown, a junior, had his sev-

enth career double-double.

The Crimson Tide (11-4, 2-2) got within four points with 12 seconds left, but the Tigers held off Alabama despite only making one basket in the final five minutes.

Jahvon Quinerly led the Tide with 19 points, Jaden Shackelford added 17, JD Davison scored 13 and Keon Ellis had 12.

San Diego State 79, No. 20 Colorado State 49: Matt Bradley scored 26 points and the host Aztecs handed the Rams their first loss of the season in a game that wasn't supposed to be played until March 1.

Chad Baker-Mazara added 14 points for SDSU, (10-3, 2-0 Mountain West), which outscored Colorado State 43-17 in the second half for its largest victory margin against a ranked team.

No. 1 Baylor 76, TCU 64: At Fort Worth, Texas, Adam Flagler rallied the Bears with 18 of his 22 points in the second half, and the Bears extended their national-best winning streak to 21 games by beating the Horned Frogs.

No. 3 Purdue 74, Penn State 67: At University Park, Pa., Trevion Williams scored 21 points, including the final go-ahead basket, as the Boilermakers held on for the win.

No. 4 Gonzaga 117, Pepperdine 83: Anton Watson scored 19 points and Drew Timme and Chet Holmgren scored 18 each as the Bulldogs routed the Waves. The win extended the nation's longest home winning streak to 60 games.

No. 5 UCLA 60, California 52: At Berkeley, Calif., Tyger Campbell scored 17 points, Johnny Juzang made a clutch three-pointer late despite his worst shooting performance of the season, and the Bruins beat the Bears.

No. 25 Texas Tech 75, No. 6 Kansas 67: Bryson Williams scored 22 points, Clarence Nadolny had a career-high 17 and the short-handed Red Raiders upended the Jay-

hawks.

No. 9 Auburn 85, Florida 73: K.D. Johnson scored 23 points and the host Tigers extended their winning streak to 11 by beating the Gators.

Oklahoma 79, No. 11 Iowa State 66: Umoja Gibson scored 20 points, and the Sooners rallied in the second half to defeat the visiting Cyclones.

No. 12 Houston 76, Wichita State 66: Josh Carlton had 22 points and 12 rebounds as the host Cougars won their sixth straight.

Carlton was eight of 12 from the field and also blocked four shots.

Oklahoma State 64, No. 14 Texas 51: At Stillwater, Okla., Keylan Boone came off the bench and scored 17 points, shooting 5-for-7 on three-pointers and sending the Cowboys past the Longhorns.

No. 16 Kentucky 92, Georgia 77: Oscar Tshiebwe had a career-high 29 points and 17 rebounds, TyTy Washington Jr. added a school-record 17 assists with 17 points, and the Wildcats shot 63% after halftime to pull away from the visiting Bulldogs for the win.

No. 16 Providence 83, St. John's 73: Nate Watson had 22 points and 11 rebounds to help the host Friars rally in the second half and beat the Red Storm.

No. 21 LSU 79, No. 18 Tennessee 67: Tari Eason capped a 24-point, 12-rebound performance with a pivotal dunk in transition with 1:21 left, and the Tigers held on to beat the visiting Vols for their second-straight triumph over a ranked opponent.

No. 19 Villanova 79, DePaul 64: At Chicago, Collin Gillespie scored a season-high 28 points, and the Wildcats beat the Blue Demons.

No. 24 Seton Hall 90, Connecticut 87 (OT): Kadary Richmond scored 27 points, including 17 straight, as the host Pirates beat the Huskies in overtime.

North Dakota State wins its 9th FCS title in 11 years

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — North Dakota State began practice more than a year ago for an unprecedented spring season that ended without a championship. Things felt much more normal for the Bison this time.

Hunter Luepke ran for three touchdowns in the first half, plowing over a defender going

into the end zone on the first one, and North Dakota State won its ninth FCS national title in 11 seasons with a 38-10 win over Montana State on Saturday.

"Everything went our way," Luepke said. "Everything we drew up happened."

The Bison (14-1), who also got a 76-yard TD run from Kobe Johnson, have never lost when

making the trip from Fargo to Frisco for the final Football Championship Subdivision game. They are 9-0 since the 2011 season at the MLS soccer stadium north of downtown Dallas.

The Bobcats (12-3) struggled after losing standout freshman quarterback Tommy Mellott to an ankle injury on the game's

opening drive.

"It definitely changed us," said first-year Montana State coach Brent Vigen, a former NDSU player and longtime assistant coach.

Luepke, a 236-pound junior fullback who finished with 82 yards rushing, took a direct snap for a 6-yard TD just before halftime that put NDSU up 28-0.

Stars end Penguins' win streak at 10

Associated Press

DALLAS — Roope Hintz and Joe Pavelski scored 75 seconds apart late in the third period, and the Dallas Stars stopped Pittsburgh's 10-game win streak with a 3-2 victory over the Penguins on Saturday.

Hintz scored on a backhand at 16:14 after Pavelski converted a rebound at 14:59, sending the Stars to their fourth straight win.

Denis Gurianov also scored and Jake Oettinger stopped 27 shots for Dallas. Jason Robertson assisted on all three goals.

Panthers 4, Hurricanes 3 (OT): Anthony Duclair scored at 2:53 of overtime and Florida won at Carolina.

Carter Verhaeghe had two goals and Jonathan Huberdeau had a goal and an assist as the Panthers extended their point streak to six games (5-0-1). Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 24 shots.

Bruins 5, Lightning 2: David Pastrnak and Brad Marchand each scored twice, Linus Ullmark made 27 saves and Boston won at Tampa Bay.

Anton Blidh had the other Bruins goal, and Taylor Hall picked up two assists. Boston has won four of five in January.

Avalanche 5, Maple Leafs 4 (OT): Devon Toews scored 1:12 into overtime and host Colorado rallied from a three-goal deficit to beat Toronto for its franchise-record 11th straight home victory.

After Jack Campbell robbed Toews with a diving glove save in the third period, he beat the goaltender between the legs from the left side for his sixth goal of the season. The Avalanche haven't lost at home since Nov. 3 against Columbus and surpassed the previous team record of 10 consecutive home wins set three times before.

Wild 3, Capitals 2 (SO): Kevin Fiala and Frederick Gaudreau scored in the shootout as short-handed Minnesota took advantage of an own-goal by visiting Washington.

Kaapo Kahkonen made 29 saves and stopped two attempts in the tiebreaker for the Wild, who sent the game to overtime on a goal by Mats Zuccarello with 34.7 seconds left in regulation.

Blackhawks 2, Golden Knights 1: Marc-Andre Fleury made 31 saves against his former team and Chicago won at Vegas to snap a six-game losing streak.

Juhar Khaira and Riley Stillman scored for the Blackhawks, who were 0-3-3 in their previous six games.

Sharks 3, Flyers 2 (OT): Tomas Hertl completed his hat trick 24 seconds into overtime to lift San Jose to a win at Philadelphia.

Brent Burns assisted on all three goals and Timo Meier had two assists for the Sharks, who finished a 2-2 road trip. Adin Hill stopped 29 shots.

Blue Jackets 4, Devils 3: Oliver Bjork-

strand scored twice to lead host Columbus over New Jersey, halting a three-game skid.

Boone Jenner and Igor Chinakhov also scored for the Blue Jackets, who rebounded from Thursday's loss at the Devils and beat New Jersey on home ice for the sixth straight time.

Predators 4, Coyotes 2: Roman Josi had a goal and an assist, Juuse Saros stopped 37 shots and Nashville won at Arizona.

The Predators played without leading scorer Filip Forsberg, who was placed in COVID-19 protocol just before the game.

Rangers 4, Ducks 1: Ryan Lindgren scored twice in the third period after Jarred Tinordi got credit for the tiebreaking goal in New York's victory at Anaheim.

Mika Zibanejad also scored, Alexandar Georgiev made 13 saves and the Rangers rallied for four unanswered goals to move into a tie with Carolina for the Metropolitan Division lead with their fourth victory in five games.

Kings 4, Red Wings 0: Cal Petersen stopped 21 shots for his second career shutout in his first start in more than a month, and host Los Angeles rolled past Detroit.

Phillip Danault and Drew Doughty scored in the first period. Adrian Kempe had a short-handed goal, Trevor Moore added an empty-netter and the Kings won for the third time in four games.

Sabonis has career-high 42, lifts Pacers past Jazz

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Domantas Sabonis scored a career-high 42 points on 18-of-22 shooting to help the Indiana Pacers beat the Utah Jazz 125-113 on Saturday night.

Lance Stephenson added 16 points, 14 assists and four steals off the bench. Duane Washington Jr. also had 16 points, and Justin Holiday 15.

Donovan Mitchell led Utah with 36 points and nine assists. Bojan Bogdanovic scored 21 points.

The Pacers snapped a six-game losing streak and completed a season sweep of the Jazz.

Heat 123, Suns 100: Tyler Herro scored a season-high 33 points, Duncan Robinson also

had a season high with 27 and short-handed Miami rode hot shooting to win at NBA-leading Phoenix.

The Heat shot 50% from three-point range, tying a franchise record with 22 makes on 44 attempts from behind the arc. Robinson was 8 for 16 on threes. Herro made 12 of 20 shots, hitting three three-pointers.

Hornets 114, Bucks 106: Terry Rozier scored 28 points, Miles Bridges added 21 points and eight rebounds and host Charlotte beat Milwaukee, handing the defending NBA champions their third loss in four games.

LaMelo Ball added 19 points, nine rebounds and eight assists for the Hornets. They held the

Bucks to 38.9% shooting on the Milwaukee's second road game in two nights.

Celtics 99, Knicks 75: Jaylen Brown had 22 points, 11 assists and 11 rebounds for his first career triple-double, Jayson Tatum scored 19 points and host Boston beat New York.

Josh Richardson had 17 points and Robert Williams finished with 12 points, seven rebounds and four blocks for the Celtics, who split the home-and-home series after the Knicks rallied from 25 points down Thursday night in New York.

Grizzlies 123, Clippers 108: Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 26 points, Desmond Bane added 23 and Memphis tied a franchise record with its eighth straight

victory, winning at Los Angeles.

It is the fifth time in the Grizzlies' history and first since 2015 they have won eight straight. They were without star point guard Ja Morant because of left thigh soreness. They also were without coach Taylor Jenkins after he entered health and safety protocols.

Pistons 97, Magic 92: Trey Lyles scored eight of his 16 points in the fourth quarter and host Detroit won for the third time in five games, beating Orlando in a matchup of the NBA's two worst teams.

Hamadou Diallo added 17 points, and Saddiq Bey had 16. Lyles also had 13 rebounds. The Pistons improved to 8-30.