

Britain, US may see rapid drop in omicron

Associated Press

Scientists are seeing signals that COVID-19's alarming omicron wave may have peaked in Britain and is about to do the same in the United States, at which point cases may start dropping off dramatically.

The reason: The variant has proved so wildly contagious that it may already be running out of people to infect, just a month and a half after it was first detected in South Africa.

"It's going to come down as fast as it went up," said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle.

At the same time, experts have warned that much is still uncertain about how the next phase of the pandemic might unfold. The plateauing or ebbing in the two countries is not happening everywhere at the same time or at the same pace. And weeks or months of misery still lie ahead for patients and overwhelmed hospitals even if the drop-off comes to pass.

"There are still a lot of people who will get infected as we descend the slope on the backside," said Lauren Ancel Meyers, director of the University of Texas COVID-19 Modeling Consortium, which predicts that reported cases will peak within the week.

On Tuesday, Janet Woodcock, the acting head of the Food and Drug Administration, told Congress that the highly transmissible strain will infect "most people" and that the focus should turn to ensuring critical services can continue uninterrupted.

"I think it's hard to process what's actually happening right now, which is: Most people are going to get COVID, all right?," she said. "What we need to do is make sure the hospitals can still function — transportation, other essential services are not disrupted while this happens."

The University of Washington's own highly influential model projects that the number of daily reported cases in the U.S. will crest at 1.2 million by Jan. 19 and will then fall sharply "simply because everybody who could be infected will be infected," according to Mokdad.

In fact, he said, by the university's complex calculations, the true number of new daily infections in the U.S. — an estimate that includes people who were never tested — has already peaked, hitting 6 million on Jan. 6.

In Britain, meanwhile, new COVID-19 cases dropped to about 140,000 a day in the last week, after skyrocketing to more than 200,000 a day earlier this month, according to government data.

Numbers from the United Kingdom's National Health Service this week show coronavirus hospital admissions for adults have begun to fall, with infections dropping in all age groups.

Kevin McConway, a retired professor of applied statistics at Britain's Open University, said that while COVID-19 cases are still rising in places such as southwest England and the West Midlands, the outbreak may have peaked in London.

The figures have raised hopes that the two countries are about to undergo something similar to what happened in South Africa, where in the span of about a month, the wave crested at record highs and then fell significantly.

"We are seeing a definite falling-off of cases in the U.K., but I'd like to see them fall much further before we know if what happened in South Africa will happen here," said Dr. Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at Britain's University of East Anglia.

Dr. David Heymann, who previously led the World Health Organization's infectious diseases department, said Britain was "the closest to any country of being out of the pandemic," adding that COVID-19 was inching toward becoming endemic.

NATO chief: Real risk of new fighting over Ukraine

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — There is "real risk" of a new war in Ukraine, NATO's top official said Wednesday after high-level talks with Russia failed to achieve a breakthrough over Moscow's military buildup along Ukraine's borders.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, who led talks between the alliance's 30 members and Russia at alliance headquarters in Brussels, said the discussions come at "a defining moment for European security."

"There are significant differences between allies and Russia on these issues. Our differences will not be easy to bridge," Stoltenberg said. "There is a real risk for a new armed conflict in Europe."

The meeting, which came two days after a similar round of talks between the United

States and Russia in Geneva, marked the first gathering of NATO's Russia Council in more than two years.

The meeting was held as tensions in Europe have hit a post-Cold War high between Western allies and Russia, which has massed more than 100,000 troops on Ukraine's borders. The U.S. and other NATO members have said such a move by Russia would provoke severe economic sanctions and also force the alliance to fortify its eastern flank as a protective measure.

So far, Moscow has been vague about its intentions, but Russia's track record has raised concerns that a replay of its 2014 invasion and annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula is in the works. Since then, Russian-backed separatists have been at war with Ukrainian government forces in the country's east.

Moscow has also made demands of NATO

in connection with its military buildup — demands allies have said are impossible to meet.

Among them: Russia wants NATO to pull back from Eastern European states that were admitted into NATO after the Cold War. Moscow also wants a pledge from allies that Ukraine, which is seeking NATO membership, will never be allowed into the alliance.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, after the talks in Brussels with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko, rejected Russia's demands as she did two days earlier during discussions in Geneva.

"Every country has the sovereign right to choose its own path," Sherman said in a Twitter post after the NATO-Russia Council session.

Operator error likely cause of Navy fuel spill

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The fuel spill at a Navy-run facility in Hawaii that supplies water to Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam was most likely the result of an operator error, though an ongoing investigation into the cause is expected to draw more definite conclusions, service officials told the House lawmakers Tuesday.

The spill on Nov. 20 at the Red Hill underground fuel storage facility leaked jet fuel into the

base drinking water, sickening some military families and forcing about 700 people to leave their homes. The incident has cost the Navy more than \$250 million so far, said Rear Adm. John K. Korka, who is in charge of the Navy's engineering systems command.

"The Navy has a comprehensive and transparent recovery plan and we are executing our mission," Korka told members of a House Armed Services Committee subpanel during a hearing dedicated to the inci-

dent. "I pledge my commitment to continue to work alongside other service counterparts and our regulatory partners to deliver safe drinking water, return our families to their homes [and] remediate the Red Hill well."

Rear Adm. Blake Converse, the deputy commander of the Pacific Fleet, said the investigation will consider the spill's possible connection to a May 6 spill that was also concluded to have been caused by operator error.

The investigation is being

conducted by an officer outside Red Hill's chain of command and will include a team with a "high-degree of technical expertise," including third-party civilian fuel-distribution experts and local hydrologists, Converse said.

The Hawaii Department of Health in December ordered the Navy to halt operations at Red Hill and the service department on Jan. 3 gave the Navy 30 days to submit plans on how it will drain the fuel facility.

Army unit ends 'Biggest Loser' contest in Poland

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

An Army unit in Europe had to quickly abandon a companywide competition that would have made soldiers spend hours cleaning toilets if they failed to lose weight, whether they needed to slim down or not.

Soldiers of the Alaska-based 574th Composite Supply Company, which is on rotation in Poland, were slated for the first weigh-in of the "Biggest Loser"-inspired contest this week, according to U.S. Army WTF Moments' social media posts Monday.

But the contest has since been canceled and the unit's chain of command is now involved, Maj. Vonnie Wright, a spokesman for the 21st Theater Sustainment Command, told Stars and Stripes late Tuesday.

The tweets and Facebook posts revealed details of the event and an unidentified first sergeant's insistence that all soldiers participate, regardless of whether they're already within Army weight standards. Many of the affected soldiers at Drawsko Pomorski Training Area in Po-

land had no need or desire to take part, one member of the unit told the first sergeant via WhatsApp, according to a screenshot U.S. Army WTF Moments posted.

"I am not interested in what the Soldier 'want to do,'" the first sergeant replied. "It is necessarily not about weight ... or their own fitness goals. This is a company thing and a morale and team building thing."

The company would have been split into 15 teams of 10 soldiers each, with team names like Big Mac Attackers and DFAC Rats.

They were to vie to lose the most weight by Feb. 28, said a company announcement shared online.

The winning team, based on combined weight lost, was promised two four-day liberty passes upon their return to Fort Wainwright, Alaska, where the unit is part of the 17th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion.

Soldiers on teams that gained weight would have had to clock two hours of extra duty in the barracks showers, latrines and laundry rooms for each pound gained.

Newest amphibious assault ship launched at Miss. dock

GulfLive

PASCAGOULA, Miss. — With a gentle assist from tugboats, LPD 29 lifted off the floating dry dock as Ingalls Shipbuilding launched the latest in its line of amphibious assault transport ships last week.

The USS Richard M. McCool Jr. (LPD 29) is the 13th in the San Antonio class of amphibious assault force ships. Launching is one in a series of significant milestone events in bringing a ship to life, with LPD 29 expected to be delivered to the U.S. Navy later next year.

"The LPD class ships, like all of our programs, are critically important to U.S. national security," said Ingalls president Kari Wilkinson. "In addition, thousands of Americans, from engineers to electricians, have worked on LPD 29 over the years.

"Ingalls Shipbuilding is proud to build them and even more proud of the talented people that make up our shipbuilding team."

Ingalls is the nation's sole builder of the San Antonio class, state-of-the-art ships designed

to support U.S. amphibious assault, special operations and expeditionary warfare missions in the 21st century.

The 684-foot long ships displace 25,000 tons and are used to transport and land U.S. Marines, equipment and supplies ashore via air cushion or conventional landing craft and amphibious assault vehicles, supported by helicopters or vertical takeoff/landing aircraft such as the MV-22 Osprey.

LPD 29 is the first U.S. Navy ship named in honor of World War II hero Richard M. McCool Jr., who was awarded the Medal of Honor for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty" as commanding officer of infantry landing support craft at the Battle of Okinawa in June 1945.

On June 10, 1945, off the coast of Okinawa, McCool helped rescue the survivors of the sinking destroyer USS William D. Porter. The following day, his own ship was hit and severely damaged by a Japanese kamikaze aircraft.

Biden challenges Senate on election reform

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Pounding his hand for emphasis, President Joe Biden challenged senators Tuesday to “stand against voter suppression” by changing Senate rules to pass voting rights legislation that Republicans are blocking from debate and votes.

Biden told a crowd in Atlanta gathered on the grounds of Morehouse College and Clark Atlanta University that he’d been having quiet conversations with senators for months over the two bills—a lack of progress that has brought him criticism from activists in his own party.

“I’m tired of being quiet!” he shouted to cheers from the crowd.

In his remarks, Biden invoked the civil rights battles of the 1960s. He likened the wrongs of the past to modern-day efforts to subvert elections through the Capitol riot a year ago and a se-

ries of GOP-backed laws passed after former President Donald Trump lost in 2020 and then falsely claimed widespread voter fraud. Biden chastised Republicans for falling in line behind Trump’s election lies.

“Today, we call on Congress to get done what history will judge,” Biden said. “Pass the freedom to vote act.”

Biden’s speech was forceful, blunt and explicit, referring to new efforts to limit voting access as “Jim Crow 2.0.” For the first time, he directly advocated eliminating the Senate’s vote-blocking device called the filibuster in order to debate and vote on election and voting rights legislation.

Current rules require 60 votes to advance most legislation — a threshold that Senate Democrats can’t meet alone because they have just a 50-50 majority with Vice President Kamala

Harris to break ties. Republicans unanimously oppose the voting rights measures.

There also aren’t enough Democratic votes to change the Senate rule. West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin threw more cold water on the idea Tuesday, saying he believes any changes should be made with substantial Republican buy-in. And there aren’t any Republican senators willing to sign on.

“Not a single Republican has displayed the courage to stand up to a defeated president to protect Americans’ right to vote,” Biden said. “Not one. Not one.”

Congressional Democrats have written voting legislation that would usher in the biggest overhaul of U.S. elections in a generation by striking down hurdles to voting enacted in the name of election security. The package would create national election standards that would

trump state-level GOP laws. It would also restore the ability of the Justice Department to police election laws in states with a history of discrimination.

Republicans have said the changes are not aimed at fairness but at giving Democrats an advantage in elections. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, of Kentucky, accused Biden of invoking “the brutal racial hatred of Jim Crow Segregation to smear states” new voting laws.

And it is coming from “a sitting president of the United States who pledged to lower the temperature and unite America,” McConnell said.

Even if Democrats clear the obstacles to passing the legislation, it could be too late to counter voting restrictions passed in 19 states following Trump’s 2020 loss and his lies that the election was stolen through voter fraud.

US starting unit focused on domestic terrorism

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department is establishing a specialized unit focused on domestic terrorism, the department’s top national security official told lawmakers Tuesday as he described an “elevated” threat from violent extremists in the United States.

Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen, testifying days after the one-year anniversary of the riot at the U.S. Capitol, said the number of FBI investigations into suspected domestic violent extremists has more than doubled since the spring of 2020.

“We have seen a growing threat from those who are motivated by racial animus, as well as those who ascribe to extremist anti-government and anti-authority ideologies,” Olsen said.

The formulation of a new unit underscores the extent to which domestic violent extremism,

which for years after the Sept. 11 attacks was overshadowed by the threat of international terrorism, has attracted urgent attention inside the federal government and at the White House. But the issue remains politically freighted and divisive, in part because the absence of a federal domestic terrorism statute has created ambiguities as to precisely what sort of violence meets that definition.

Jill Sanborn, the executive assistant director in charge of the FBI’s national security branch, testified Tuesday that the greatest threat comes from lone extremists or small cells who radicalize online and look to carry out violence at so-called “soft targets.”

“This includes both home-grown violent extremists inspired primarily by foreign terrorist organizations as well as domestic violent extremism,” she said.

High court refuses regretful ISIS bride’s appeal to return

Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — The U.S. Supreme Court has refused to hear the appeal of a woman who left home in Alabama to join the Islamic State terror group, but then decided she wanted to return to the United States.

The justices declined without comment Monday to consider the appeal of Hoda Muthana, who was born in New Jersey in 1994 to a diplomat from Yemen and grew up in Alabama.

Muthana left the U.S. to join ISIS in 2014, apparently after becoming radicalized online.

While she was overseas, the government determined she was not a U.S. citizen and revoked her passport, citing her father’s status as a diplomat at the time of her birth. Her family sued to enable her return to the U.S.

A federal judge ruled in 2019

that the U.S. government correctly determined Muthana wasn’t a U.S. citizen despite her birth in the country. Children of diplomats aren’t entitled to birthright citizenship. The family’s lawyers appealed, arguing that her father’s status as a diplomat assigned to the United Nations had ended before her birth, making her automatically a citizen.

Muthana surrendered to U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces as ISIS fighters were losing the last of their self-declared caliphate in Iraq and Syria and going to refugee camps.

Muthana said she regretted her decision to join the group and wanted to return to the U.S. with her toddler child, the son of a man she met while living with the group. The man later died.

Her current whereabouts aren’t clear.

Inflation up 7% last year, most since '82

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Prices paid by U.S. consumers jumped 7% in December from a year earlier, the highest inflation rate since 1982 and the latest evidence that rising costs for food, rent and other necessities are heightening the financial pressures on America's households.

Inflation did slow slightly on a month-to-month basis: The Labor Department's report Wednesday showed that consumer prices rose 0.5% from November to December, down from increases of 0.8% and 0.9% in the previous two

months.

Inflation has spiked during the recovery from the pandemic recession as Americans have ramped up spending on goods such as cars, furniture and appliances.

Those increased purchases have clogged ports and warehouses, and exacerbated supply shortages of semiconductors and other parts. Gas prices, while declining a bit from November to December, have surged in the past year, in part because Americans have driven more in recent months after having cut back on travel and commuting earlier in the

pandemic.

In its report, the government said that excluding volatile food and gas prices, so-called core prices surged 0.6% from November to December, slightly more than the 0.5% increase from October to November. Measured year over year, core prices jumped 5.5% in December, the fastest such increase since 1991.

Rising prices have wiped out the healthy pay increases that many Americans have been receiving, making it harder for households, especially lower-income families, to afford basic expenses. Polls show that infla-

tion has started displacing even the coronavirus as a public concern, making clear the political threat it poses to President Joe Biden and congressional Democrats.

A significant portion of consumer inflation is still being driven by pandemic-driven mismatches between demand and supply. Used car costs rose 3.5% from November to December and have soared more than 37% compared with a year ago. With new car production restrained by shortages of semiconductors, consumers have snapped up used cars, forcing up their costs.

UN seeks \$5B in aid for Afghans as country struggles

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations on Tuesday launched its biggest ever appeal — for over \$5 billion to help 22 million Afghans whose country is on the brink of a humanitarian crisis and economic collapse, as well as 5.7 million Afghan refugees in five neighboring countries.

The U.N. said the appeal will be followed by a pledging conference in mid-March. But a number of nations announced new funding, including an additional \$308 million from the United States and \$500,000

from Israel, and there were indications that more funds will be coming from other mainly Western nations.

U.N. humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths, who called the campaign “the largest ever appeal,” said statements during the two-hour hybrid launch event were “encouraging” because there is a high degree of consensus on the increasingly desperate needs of the Afghan people.

The Afghan appeal for 2021 was the best-funded, he said, and “we are confident that member states solidarity and generosity

will come through in 2022.”

The joint appeal seeks \$4.4 billion for the U.N. and its humanitarian partners to help 22 million people in Afghanistan, about half the country's population. It calls for \$623 million for the 5.7 million Afghans who fled abroad to neighboring Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

The funding, if achieved, would be the same as about one-fourth of the country's total economic output in 2020, of more than \$20 billion, according to the World Bank.

US shoppers find some groceries scarce due to virus, weather

Associated Press

Benjamin Whitely headed to a Safeway supermarket in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday to grab some items for dinner. But he was disappointed to find the vegetable bins barren and a sparse selection of turkey, chicken and milk.

“Seems like I missed out on everything,” Whitely, 67, said. “I’m going to have to hunt around for stuff now.”

Shortages at U.S. grocery stores have grown more acute in recent weeks as new problems — like the fast-spreading omicron variant and severe weather — have piled on to the supply

chain struggles and labor shortages that have plagued retailers since the coronavirus pandemic began.

The shortages are widespread, impacting produce and meat as well as packaged goods such as cereal. And they're being reported nationwide. U.S. groceries typically have 5% to 10% of their items out of stock at any given time; right now, that unavailability rate is hovering around 15%, according to Consumer Brands Association President and CEO Geoff Freeman.

A deficit of truck drivers that started building before the pandemic also remains a problem.

The American Trucking Association said in October that the United States was short an estimated 80,000 drivers, a historic high.

As it has with staffing at hospitals, schools and offices, the omicron variant has taken a toll on food production lines. Sean Connolly, the president and CEO of Conagra Brands, which makes Birds Eye frozen vegetables, Slim Jim meat snacks and other products, told investors last week that supplies from the company's U.S. plants will be constrained for at least the next month due to omicron-related absences.

Worker illness is also impacting grocery stores. Stew Leonard Jr. is president and CEO of Stew Leonard's, a supermarket chain that operates stores in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. Last week, 8% of his workers — around 200 people — were either out sick or in quarantine. Usually, the level of absenteeism is more like 2%.

Weather-related events, from snowstorms in the Northeast to wildfires in Colorado, also have impacted product availability and caused some shoppers to stock up more than usual, exacerbating supply problems caused by the pandemic.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Firing upheld for cops who gamed amid holdup

CA SACRAMENTO — A California appellate court ruled that two Los Angeles police officers were properly fired for playing Pokémon Go instead of responding to a robbery.

The court recently ruled that the LAPD was justified in firing Louis Lozano and Eric Mitchell for misconduct in 2017, the Sacramento Bee reported.

On April 15, 2017, a video system in their patrol car captured the officers discussing how to catch a Snorlax and trying to capture the rare Tegetic in the game while ignoring a report of several people who were in the process of robbing a Macy's in the Crenshaw area, according to the ruling.

The officers claimed they hadn't heard the radio request for backup but on the patrol car recordings, they were heard discussing whether to respond and Lozano could be heard saying, "Ah, screw it," according to the court filings.

Snowy owl thrills crowds making rare appearance

DC WASHINGTON — A snowy owl apparently touring iconic buildings of the nation's capital captivated bird-watchers who managed to get a glimpse of the rare, resplendent visitor from the Arctic.

Far from its summer breeding grounds in Canada, the snowy owl was first seen on Jan. 3, the day a winter storm dumped eight inches of snow on the city.

It's been spotted flying around Washington's Capitol Hill neighborhood, landing on Union Station, the National Postal Mu-

seum, various Senate buildings, and Capitol Police headquarters.

The nocturnal hunter appears to be targeting the city's plentiful downtown rat population.

Damaged O'Keeffe art restored, back displayed

NM SANTA FE — A damaged Georgia O'Keeffe painting is back on display after conservators spent 1,250 hours and \$145,000 restoring it.

The results will be on display at the museum through Oct. 10. The painting will then travel to the San Diego Museum of Art in 2023.

The late American modernist artist painted the piece, titled "Spring," in 1948. It was last seen by the public in 2019, the Albuquerque Journal reported.

The water damage likely was caused by a tarantula tunneling through the roof at the artist's 18th-century adobe home in Abiquiú, in northern New Mexico.

Ambulance stolen from hospital, driver arrested

MD WESTMINSTER — An ambulance was stolen from a Maryland hospital and hit two law enforcement vehicles involved in the search for it, authorities said.

The Carroll County Sheriff's Office said in a news release that it was notified that a Baltimore County Fire Department ambulance was stolen from the area of the Carroll Hospital Center emergency department.

Deputies and state troopers responded to the search for the ambulance and it was found on Route 32, officials said. The ambulance continued south and

eventually struck a Maryland State Police vehicle and a sheriff's office vehicle, which was pushed into a parked car.

The ambulance eventually stopped near Gamber Fire Co., and the driver was taken into custody.

No injuries were reported after the collision.

Mountain avalanche kills 2 snowshoers and dog

CO ALMA — Two people snowshoeing in the mountains of Colorado were killed in an avalanche over the weekend, authorities said.

Their bodies and the body of their dog were found buried near Hoosier Pass in central Colorado by searchers using an avalanche rescue dog, the Colorado Avalanche Information Center said. Summit County Coroner Regan Wood identified the victims as Hannah Nash, 25, and Drake Oversen, 35, both of Colorado Springs.

Repairs complete on buoy after fire damage

FL KEY WEST — Restoration has been completed on Key West's Southernmost Point marker, one of the most photographed landmarks in the Florida Keys, following damage from a fire intentionally set early New Year's Day.

City public works staff repainted the marker, which designates the southernmost land point in the continental United States.

The marker is a replica of a marine navigational buoy with red, yellow, black and white stripes.

Key West police announced

charges against two men suspected of torching a Christmas tree next to the landmark buoy. David B. Perkins Jr., 22, of Leesburg, Fla., and Skylar Rae Jacobson, 21, of Henrietta, Texas, face charges of criminal mischief with damages over \$1,000.

Couple rescued after falling into embankment

VA SUFFOLK — Rescue crews pulled a couple to safety over the weekend after they fell down an embankment.

Officials said City of Suffolk Fire and Rescue units were called to the 4100 block of Mockingbird Lane, where the couple fell about 10 to 25 feet down a 40-foot embankment, WAVY-TV reported. They were holding on to the side of the embankment and rescuers used a harness to get down to them.

The couple was checked out by paramedics, but no one was hurt.

Planned trail would join historical sites together

KS KANSAS CITY — Plans are underway to connect a Civil War-era commercial port on the Missouri River and a Kansas City park where Lewis and Clark once camped.

The south end of the Northeast Kansas City, Kan., Heritage Trail will be Kaw Point Park, part of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail at the confluence of the Kansas and Missouri rivers. The north end will be the Quindaro Townsite, one of three National Commemorative Sites in the National Park System.

— From wire reports

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College hockey players eye Beijing

Associated Press

Jake Sanderson felt bad that he would be missing a handful of games at North Dakota to play at the Olympics.

When he expressed that sentiment to his college teammates and coaches, the star defenseman was greeted with support. It was already an easy choice for Sanderson to suit up for the United States in Beijing, and that made it even simpler.

“It was kind of a no-brainer,” he said. “It’s kind of something you can’t really pass up. It’s the Olympics. You don’t know if you’ll ever be able to play in the Olympics in your lifetime.”

After the NHL decided to withdraw from the 2022 Games, an opportunity of a lifetime was suddenly available for Sanderson, Michigan’s Owen Power and Matty Beniers, and other players in the U.S. college ranks with USA Hockey and Hockey Canada eyeing the NCAA for top talent to fill their rosters. College

players deciding whether to leave school for a few weeks to go to Beijing can look no further than the 2018 Olympics for some strong evidence in the yes column.

Anaheim’s Troy Terry, Minnesota’s Jordan Greenway and Seattle’s Ryan Donato all skated for the U.S. in Pyeongchang on a team made up of mostly older pros playing in Europe. They’ve since combined to play in 611 NHL games.

“I would tell those guys if they got the chance to cherish it, enjoy and make the most of it,” Donato said. “Coming from college, it was obviously a little nerve-racking because you have all these guys that have played in the NHL and I think it does do a lot for your confidence realizing that you could hang around with these guys.”

Sanderson, a Whitefish, Mont., native taken by Ottawa with the fifth pick in the 2020 draft, has already accepted his

invitation. The top two NHL picks in 2021 — Power, who went first to Buffalo, and Beniers, who went to Seattle — have each been invited to play for Canada and the U.S., respectively. Michigan teammates Brendan Brisson (U.S.) and Kent Johnson (Canada) are also Olympic candidates.

Greenway and Terry were U.S. candidates when it looked like the NHL was halting its season for almost three weeks to let the world’s best hockey players play in the Olympics for the first time since 2014.

Greenway said he probably would have gone if chosen, especially if coronavirus testing and quarantine restrictions were modified because, like many would-be participants, those were his biggest concerns. That’s the major difference from 2018.

“There’s also other factors that go into it now because of the circumstances and the situation,

which I understand,” Greenway said. “I think it is maybe a little bit more of a question. It’s not a no-brainer, let’s say, maybe now. It could be a little bit different for those guys. You take the hockey part alone and the experience and everything that goes into that, it’s a special, special experience.”

U.S. general manager John Vanbiesbrouck and coach David Quinn said they believed the Olympic experience was a selling point, even taking the pandemic and college duties into account. One additional motivation is that the world junior championship was canceled last month over fears of a virus outbreak, and the Olympics could serve as something of a do-over for that tournament for several players under the age of 20.

Still, Quinn realized trying to convince active college players to go to Beijing is not the same as his days recruiting at Boston University.

Kucherov’s hat trick propels Lightning past Sabres

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Nikita Kucherov scored a hat trick, Steven Stamkos had a goal and two assists, and the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Buffalo Sabres 6-1 Tuesday night.

Anthony Cirelli had a goal and an assist, Ondrej Palat extended his scoring streak to four games, and the Lightning got three assists from Alex Killorn and two from Victor Hedman. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 17 saves for his 20th win of the season.

Tampa Bay (24-9-5) has won three of four following a three-game skid to keep pace with the Florida Panthers atop the NHL standings with 53 points.

Vinnie Hinostroza scored for the Sabres, who have lost seven in a row at home and dropped to 3-13-4 over their past 20 games.

Predators 5, Avalanche 4 (OT): Matt Duchene scored two goals, including the game-winner on a power play 3:01 into overtime, and host Nashville won its fifth straight.

Luke Kunin also scored twice, Tanner Jeannot added a goal and Juuse Saros made 40 saves for the Western Conference-leading Predators. Roman Josi had three assists in a matchup between the top two teams in the Central Division.

Penguins 4, Ducks 1: Evgeni Malkin scored twice and had an assist in his season debut, Jeff Carter added two goals and visiting Pittsburgh rolled past Anaheim.

Malkin had not played since undergoing right knee surgery in June. The four-time All-Star and 2012 Hart Trophy winner had been skating with team-

mates for several weeks and was a full participant in Monday’s practice.

Blackhawks 4, Blue Jackets 2: Alex DeBrincat scored twice and Calvin de Haan got his first goal in nearly a year to lift Chicago to its second straight road win.

Connor Murphy also scored for the Blackhawks, and Marc-Andre Fleury made 24 saves for his 11th win.

Panthers 5, Canucks 2: Sam Reinhart had two goals and an assist and host Florida handed Vancouver coach Bruce Boudreau his first regulation loss in 10 games.

Boudreau was 8-0-1 since taking over the Canucks on Dec. 6. Vancouver was 8-15-2 when he replaced Travis Green.

Maple Leafs 4, Golden

Knights 3 (SO): William Nylander scored in regulation and got the winner in a shootout as visiting Toronto beat Vegas.

Auston Matthews and Ilya Mikheyev also scored in regulation for the Maple Leafs, who improved to 5-0-1 on a six-game point streak. They are 21-4-2 since opening the season 2-4-1. Jack Campbell made 31 saves.

Sharks 3, Red Wings 2 (OT): Logan Couture scored in overtime moments after a fan threw a fake octopus on the ice, and host San Jose beat Detroit.

The octopus — a longstanding fan tradition in Detroit — hit the ice less than a minute into overtime with play in the Sharks’ end. Couture directed the linesman to grab it, and play continued, with the Sharks pushing the puck to the other end.

Grizzlies top Warriors; win streak at 10

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Ja Morant scored 29 points, including five in the final minute, and the Memphis Grizzlies beat the Golden State Warriors 116-108 Tuesday night for their 10th straight win.

“I just like having that pressure,” Morant said of his scoring down the stretch. “I feel like that’s when I shine the most. I like to be the one taking that shot, hit or miss.”

Ziaire Williams and Tyus Jones had 17 points each, Williams recording a season-high in points. Jones keyed a fourth-quarter rally that put the Grizzlies ahead for good. He finished 6-for-8 from the field, including connecting on all five of his three-point attempts.

Stephen Curry led the Warriors with 27 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his second triple-double of the season. Klay Thompson finished with 14 points. Andrew Wiggins and Gary Payton II scored 13 each.

The teams had a closely played game in the second half until consecutive three-pointers by Jones gave Memphis a 109-

10 lead with 3:33 left to play. That was enough of a buffer for the Grizzlies to keep their franchise-record winning streak going, Memphis holding Golden State to 18 points in the fourth quarter.

“I thought Tyus Jones shooting threes broke the game open. That was the key,” Warriors coach Steve Kerr said.

The Grizzlies were the ones connecting from three-point range in the first half, hitting 8 of their first 13 from outside the arc. That allowed Memphis to build an 18-point lead in the second quarter, putting Golden State in catch-up mode from that point on.

Suns 99, Raptors 95: Devin Booker scored 16 points, including the go-ahead basket with 1:02 remaining, and Chris Paul had 15 points and 12 assists as visiting Phoenix snapped Toronto’s longest winning streak of the season at six games.

Jae Crowder scored 19 points, Deandre Ayton had 16 and Mikal Bridges added 12 as the Suns improved to 31-9, matching the Suns’ best record through 40 games.

Bulls 133, Pistons 87: Nikola Vucevic scored 22 points, DeMar DeRozan had 20 points and 12 rebounds, and host Chicago routed Detroit.

DeRozan sat for most of the final 16 minutes but still added seven assists. The Eastern Conference-leading Bulls won after their season-best nine-game winning streak ended Sunday in Dallas.

Clippers 87, Nuggets 85: Amir Coffey had 18 points, Reggie Jackson scored 11 of his 13 in the fourth quarter and host Los Angeles rallied from a 25-point deficit in the second half for a stunning victory.

Terance Mann scored nine of his 13 points in the fourth quarter for Los Angeles, which won for the fourth time in 10 games since Paul George joined Kawhi Leonard on its lengthy injured list. The Clippers won despite managing a meager 28 points in the lowest-scoring first half in the NBA this season and then falling behind 59-34 midway through the third period.

Wizards 122, Thunder 118: Kentavious Caldwell-Pope hit a go-ahead three-pointer with

30.8 seconds remaining and host Washington beat Oklahoma City despite being without star Bradley Beal because of health and safety protocols.

The Thunder lost their fifth straight game, and the key possession came with about a half-minute to play and the score tied at 118. The Wizards worked the shot clock down, and Caldwell-Pope’s attempt from the right wing went in off the glass. He responded by holding both arms out, apparently in relief, disbelief or both.

Pelicans 128, Timberwolves 125: Brandon Ingram capped a 33-point, nine-assist performance by hitting three three-pointers in the final 1:13 — the last with less than a second left — and host New Orleans edged Minnesota.

Ingram went 6-for-7 from three-point territory and his most pivotal shots came in a long-range exchange with the Timberwolves’ Anthony Edwards, whose fifth three of the game cut the Pelicans’ lead to 117-115 before Ingram hit from the right wing while being fouled for a four-point play.

Djokovic admits not isolating was an ‘error’

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Novak Djokovic knew he’d tested positive for COVID-19 when he attended a newspaper interview and photo shoot in Serbia last month, saying Wednesday he made an “error of judgment” and should have immediately gone into isolation.

In a statement posted to his social media accounts, the tennis star also blamed “human error” by his support team for failing to declare that he had traveled in the two-week period before entering Australia.

Upon arrival, his visa was revoked and then later reinstated in an ongoing saga over whether he should be allowed into the coun-

try despite not being vaccinated against COVID-19. The news that Djokovic was granted an exemption to vaccination rules to enter the country provoked an initial outcry and the ensuing dispute has since overshadowed the lead-up to the Australian Open.

Djokovic acknowledged the lapses when he sought to clarify what he called “continuing misinformation” about his movements after he became infected last month — though he did not spell out what inaccuracies he was referring to.

The statement was posted while the men’s tennis No. 1 was in Rod Laver Arena holding a practice session, his third on the tournament’s main court since

being released from four nights in immigration detention.

The nine-time and defending Australian Open champion remains in limbo before the year’s first tennis major starts next Monday. The stakes are particularly high since he is seeking a men’s record 21st Grand Slam singles title.

He won a legal battle on procedural grounds Monday that allowed him to stay in the country, but he still faces the prospect of deportation because his exemption from COVID-19 vaccination rules has been questioned. That decision is entirely at the discretion of Australia’s immigration minister if deemed to be in the public interest for health and

safety reasons. Deportation could result in sanctions ranging up to a three-year ban from entering Australia, a daunting prospect for a player who has won almost half of his 20 Grand Slam singles titles here.

Court documents detailing Djokovic’s positive test sparked speculation over the star player’s attendance at events in his native Serbia last month. Further questions also were raised about errors on his immigration form that could potentially result in the cancellation of his visa.

On the form, Djokovic said he had not traveled in the 14 days before his flight to Australia, despite being seen in Spain and Serbia in that period.

No. 15 Texas Tech stuns No. 1 Baylor

Associated Press

WACO, Texas — Texas Tech ended No. 1 Baylor's nation-best winning streak at 21 games, with the 19th-ranked Red Raiders getting a second consecutive victory over a Top 10 team while still not at full strength.

Kevin McCullar, not even close to fully healthy after missing the previous two games with an ankle injury, had 12 points with a key three-pointer late as Texas Tech won 65-62 on Tuesday night to hand the Bears their first loss since before last season's NCAA Tournament. The 19th-ranked Red Raiders are still without injured leading scorer Terrence Shannon.

"Just a lot of determination and grit and character," said Mark Adams, who was promoted to head coach when Chris Beard left last offseason to become coach at Texas. "Very proud of them and blessed to be their coach."

Baylor (15-1, 3-1 Big 12) had lost only once at home over the past three seasons. The last loss anywhere had been in the Big 12 tournament last March. The Bears then won all six NCAA tourney games on the way to their first national title.

The Red Raiders (12-3, 2-1) had their biggest lead at 59-52 when McCullar hit his three from the left corner in front of their bench with 2:39 left, and they held on to follow up their home win Saturday over then-No. 6 Kansas.

"Everybody was just yelling," McCullar said of the reaction from his teammates behind him when the shot went in.

McCullar played 31 minutes off the bench. He was 5-for-8 shooting with six rebounds, five assists and three steals.

"He played with a lot of courage," Adams said. "He played with a lot of heart tonight,

and we couldn't have won without Kevin's performance."

Adam Flagler and James Akinjo each had 17 points with their own late threes for Baylor (15-1, 3-1), but the Bears fell two short of matching their own Big 12 record of 23 consecutive wins set two seasons ago.

No. 4 Auburn 81, No. 24 Alabama 77: Freshman Jabari Smith scored a season-high 25 points and Allen Flanigan made four straight free throws in the final 54 seconds, lifting the Tigers to a win over the host Crimson Tide.

Auburn (15-1, 4-0 Southeastern Conference) lost a 14-point lead before managing to avoid becoming the third top-five team to lose on the night. The Tigers pushed their win streak to 12 games in the rivals' first Top 25 matchup in 35 years.

Wendell Green Jr. scored 13 of his 19 points in the second half for Auburn. K.D. Johnson had 13 points and eight rebounds. Flanigan finished with 10 points.

Jahvon Quinerly led Alabama (11-5, 2-2) with 14 points and Jaden Shackelford scored 13.

Stanford 75, No. 5 Southern California 69: Harrison Ingram and Spencer Jones scored 21 points apiece and the host Cardinal beat the Trojans for their first win over a top-five team in nearly 15 years.

Stanford (9-4, 2-1 Pac-12) returned from a nearly three-week break for COVID-19 protocols and delivered a big win in a nearly empty arena.

Isaiah Mobley scored 16 points to lead USC (13-1, 3-1) and Boogie Ellis added 14.

No. 9 Kansas 62, No. 15 Iowa State 61: Dajuan Harris hit a driving layup with 8 seconds left, and the host Jayhawks got the better of a wild finish against the Cyclones.

There were four lead changes in the final 38 seconds, and Kansas (13-2, 2-1 Big 12) survived when Iowa State's Gabe Kalschauer missed a three-pointer just before the buzzer.

Isaiah Brockington scored 17 points for the Cyclones (13-3, 1-3).

No. 18 Kentucky 78, Vanderbilt 66: Oscar Tshiebwe scored a career-high 30 points and had 13 rebounds as the Wildcats defeated the host Commodores.

Kentucky (13-3, 3-1 Southeastern Conference) won its 11th straight in the series, and coach John Calipari improved to 22-4 against Vanderbilt with his 797th overall victory.

Scotty Pippen Jr. scored 32 points to lead the Commodores (9-5, 1-2).

No. 21 Texas 66, Oklahoma 52: Andrew Jones scored a season-best 22 points and made four steals, and the host Longhorns beat the Sooners.

Christian Bishop had 10 points and eight rebounds for Texas (13-3, 3-1 Big 12). Allen and Courtney Ramey added 10 points apiece.

No. 22 Tennessee 66, South Carolina 46: Santiago Vescovi scored 14 points and the host Vols overcame a sluggish start to beat the Gamecocks.

Josiah-Jordan James had 11 points and 12 rebounds for Tennessee (11-4, 2-2 Southeastern Conference).

No. 25 Illinois 81, Nebraska 71: Trent Frazier scored a season-high 29 points, Kofi Cockburn had his eighth straight double-double with 16 points and 13 rebounds, and the visiting Illini held off the struggling Cornhuskers.

Illinois (12-3, 5-0 Big Ten) has won five straight games and 10 of 11 and is out to its best start in conference play since 2005.

Source: MLB labor talks set to resume on Thursday

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Major League Baseball and the players' association are scheduled to meet Thursday, ending a 42-day break in negotiations that began when management started a lockout, the sport's first work stoppage since 1995.

With the scheduled start of spring training five weeks away, management was planning to make a new proposal to players,

several people familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press on Tuesday. The people spoke on the condition of anonymity because no announcement was made.

The sides last met Dec. 1 in Irving, Texas, a brief session that broke off hours before the collective bargaining agreement expired. Since then, negotiations have been limited to peripheral issues. The meeting Thursday is

scheduled to be conducted by video conference.

MLB payrolls dropped 4% in 2021 compared to the league's last full season in 2019, and the \$4.05 billion total was the lowest in a fully completed year since 2015.

Players have asked for liberalized eligibility for free agency and salary arbitration, raising the luxury tax threshold from \$210 million to \$245 million,

changes to spark increased competition among clubs and measures to address what the union claims is service time manipulation.

Management has offered to increase the tax threshold to \$214 million, to extend the designated hitter to the National League and to eliminate draft pick compensation for losing players in free agency, a provision that has existed in various forms since 1976.