

## US: 'Severe' response if Ukraine is invaded

Associated Press

BERLIN — Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned Thursday that there would be a “swift, severe” response from the United States and its allies if Russia sends military forces into Ukraine.

Blinken’s comments in Berlin appeared to be another effort to clear up confusion about the position of the U.S. and its NATO allies after President Joe Biden was heavily criticized for saying a “minor incursion” by Russia would elicit a lesser response.

“If any Russian military forces move across the Ukrainian border and commit new acts of aggression against Ukraine, that will be met with a swift, severe, united response from the United States and our allies and partners,” Blinken said during a news conference with his German counterpart.

Blinken later accused Russia of threatening the foundations of world order with its buildup of an

estimated 100,000 troops near Ukraine’s border. He said Russia must face a concerted and severe global response if it invades.

The stark warning was delivered in Berlin, the formerly divided city that symbolized the Cold War split between East and West, as Blinken prepares to meet Friday in Geneva with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in a high-stakes bid to ease tensions that appears likely to fail.

“These are difficult issues we are facing, and resolving them won’t happen quickly,” Blinken said. “I certainly don’t expect we’ll solve them in Geneva tomorrow.”

He said Russia’s actions toward Ukraine are an attempt to subvert international norms and just the latest in a string of Moscow’s violations of numerous treaties, agreements and other commitments it has made to respect the sovereignty and territory of other countries.

“To allow Russia to violate those principles with impunity would drag us all back to a much more dangerous and unstable time, when this continent — and this city — were split in two, separated by no-man’s-lands patrolled by soldiers, with the threat of all-out war hanging heavily over everyone’s lives,” Blinken said at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences. “It would also send a message to others around the world that these principles are expendable.

“We will not treat the principles of sovereignty or territorial integrity as negotiable,” he said, adding that the situation is “bigger than a conflict between two countries, and it’s bigger than a clash between Russia and NATO. It’s a crisis with global consequences. And it requires global attention and action.”

The speech came after Blinken and top diplomats from Britain, France and Germany met in Berlin to project a united front to

Russia over concerns that it may be planning to invade Ukraine. A day earlier, he met Ukraine’s president in Kyiv to discuss the threat.

Biden said Wednesday that he thinks Moscow will invade and warned Russian President Vladimir Putin that his country would pay a “dear price” in lives lost and a possible cutoff from the global banking system if it does.

But Biden also prompted consternation among allies after saying that the response to a Russian invasion “depends on what it does.”

“It’s one thing if it’s a minor incursion and then we end up having a fight about what to do and not do, et cetera,” he said.

“We want to remind the great powers that there are no minor incursions and small nations. Just as there are no minor casualties and little grief from the loss of loved ones,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy tweeted.

## China demands Navy end patrols in South China Sea

By ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

A guided-missile destroyer steamed past two disputed island chains in the South China Sea this week, provoking demands from China’s military that the United States cease its freedom-of-navigation patrols in the region.

The USS Benfold cruised through the Spratly Island chain Tuesday, then turned north for a similar demonstration near the Paracel Islands on Thursday, according to an email from Lt. Mark Langford, spokesman for the U.S. 7th Fleet. The two chains are about 500 miles apart.

China’s Southern Theatre Command said Thursday that its

naval forces tracked and later warned the Benfold away from the Paracels.

“We solemnly demand that the U.S. side immediately stop such provocative actions, otherwise it will bear the serious consequences of unforeseen events,” the command said in a statement.

The Benfold’s operations defied three countries — China, Vietnam and Taiwan — that claim both island chains as their territory and require “advanced notification or permission” from warships before they navigate the area, Langford said.

Citing international law, the U.S. Navy asserts that ships from any nation, including warships,

have the right of innocent passage through territorial waters and that any requirement of permission or notification is unlawful.

Langford said China’s claim that the Benfold was warned away from the Paracels is “false” and that the destroyer operated in accordance with international law.

The Benfold’s passage Thursday challenged all three countries’ claims to the Paracels, according to a Navy news release Thursday. But the statement drew specific attention to baselines China drew around nearly the entire chain in 1996, effectively declaring the region as its sovereign territory.

China occupied the Paracel Islands in 1974 and maintains about 20 outposts throughout the chain, according to the CIA World Factbook website. More than 1,000 Chinese personnel reside on the largest feature, Woody Island, the agency estimates.

The Benfold made a previous visit to the Paracels on July 12, according to Langford’s email.

The Navy regularly conducts freedom-of-navigation operations in the South China Sea and regular transits through the Taiwan Strait, all in an effort to ensure a “free and open Indo-Pacific.” The Chinese government regularly condemns the demonstrations.

# N. Korea signals it might resume nuke, ICBM tests

By DAVID CHOI  
*Stars and Stripes*

North Korea may be signaling its intent to restart tests of long-range ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons following a recent statement that took aim at the United States, policy experts told Stars and Stripes on Thursday.

The state-run Korean Central News Agency on Wednesday called for “immediately bolstering more powerful physical means” to curb “hostile moves” by the U.S. that are “getting ever more serious day by day.”

The statement follows a policy meeting Wednesday of the ruling Workers’ Party of Korea that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is said to have attended, according to KCNA.

“It reads like a stern warning

from Kim that unless the U.S. addresses the issue of its ‘hostile policy,’ North Korea has no choice but to resume its weapons testing,” Soo Kim, a policy analyst for Rand Corp. and an adjunct instructor at American University, told Stars and Stripes in a text message Thursday.

In 2018, North Korea announced a pause of its long-range missile and nuclear tests a week before Kim met with South Korean President Moon Jae-in at the border village of Panmunjom and about two months before he met with then-U.S. President Donald Trump in Singapore. The Trump-Kim summit ended with a broad joint statement on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula that lacked specifics. Thursday’s statement mentioned the Singa-

pore summit as part of “sincere efforts for maintaining the general tide for relaxation of tension.”

That tide appears to be turning, however. The top communist leadership of North Korea, the Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee, “unanimously recognized that we should make more thorough preparation for a long-term confrontation with the U.S. imperialists,” according to KCNA.

The statement also refers to possibly restarting all temporarily suspended activities, an apparent reference to the regime’s nearly five-year pause on nuclear weapon and intercontinental ballistic missile tests.

Yang Uk, an associate research fellow at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul, theorized

that North Korea may already have a “roadmap” for its weapons program and is using its latest statement to justify upcoming testing.

“They may already have a schedule for the further testing of ICBMs,” he told Stars and Stripes by phone on Thursday. “They could be making some grounds for the condition of those tests.”

North Korea so far in January has already tested five short-range missiles, including one it claimed was a hypersonic weapon capable of “superior maneuverability.”

Following the tests, the U.S. imposed sanctions against six North Koreans, a Russian, and a Russian company suspected of procuring material aid for the regime’s weapons program.

## Russia to hold vast naval drills with 140 warships

*Associated Press*

MOSCOW — Russia on Thursday announced sweeping naval drills in several parts of the world, and claimed the West is plotting “provocations” in neighboring Ukraine where the Kremlin has been accused of planning aggressive military action.

Amid a buildup of an estimated 100,000 Russian troops near the border with Ukraine and massive joint war games with Belarus, the Defense Ministry said it will also conduct maneuvers this month involving the bulk of Russia’s naval potential.

“The drills are intended to practice navy and air force action to protect Russian national interests in the world’s oceans and to counter military threats to the Russian Federation,” the ministry said, adding that they will run through February.

It said the exercise will involve over 140 warships and more than

60 aircraft, and will be conducted in both littoral waters and more distant “operationally important” areas including the Mediterranean, northeastern Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean.

The ministry said several Russian warships are currently taking part in a joint exercise with China and Iran in the Gulf of Oman that began Tuesday and will last until the weekend.

President Joe Biden said Wednesday he thinks Russia will invade Ukraine and warned President Vladimir Putin that his country would pay a “dear price” in lives lost and a possible cutoff from the global banking system if it does. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova alleged that Ukrainian and Western claims of an imminent Russian attack on Ukraine were a “cover for staging large-scale provocations of their own, including those of military character.”

## CIA: Most ‘Havana syndrome’ cases aren’t linked to enemy

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The CIA believes it is unlikely that Russia or another foreign adversary is using microwaves or other forms of directed energy to attack hundreds of American officials who attribute symptoms associated with brain injuries to what’s come to be known as “Havana syndrome.”

The agency’s findings, according to one official familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the intelligence, drew immediate criticism from those who have reported cases and from advocates who accuse the government of long dismissing the array of ailments.

Investigators have studied hundreds of cases reported globally by U.S. intelligence officers, diplomats and military personnel and whether the injuries are caused by exposure to forms of directed energy. Peo-

ple affected have reported headaches, dizziness, nausea and other symptoms consistent with traumatic brain injuries.

Most cases under review by intelligence officers have been linked to other known medical conditions or to environmental factors, the official said, adding that in some cases, medical exams have revealed undiagnosed brain tumors or bacterial infections. A few dozen cases are unresolved and remain under active investigation, the official said.

Mark Zaid, a Washington lawyer representing intelligence officers who have reported cases, asserted that the CIA is having a “revolt within its workforce” among people who do not want to take overseas assignments for fear of being attacked.

Of the findings, Zaid tweeted, “Too bad this is contradicted by classified information that CIA won’t release.”

# Dem voting legislation stalls in Senate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Voting legislation that Democrats and civil rights leaders say is vital to protecting democracy collapsed when two senators refused to join their own party in changing Senate rules to overcome a Republican filibuster after a raw, emotional debate.

The outcome Wednesday night was a stinging defeat for President Joe Biden and his party, coming at the tumultuous close to his first year in office.

Despite a day of piercing debate and speeches that often carried echoes of an earlier era when the Senate filibuster was deployed by opponents of civil rights legislation, Democrats could not persuade holdout senators Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Joe Manchin of West Virginia to change the Senate procedures on this one bill and allow a simple majority to advance it.

“I am profoundly disappointed,” Biden said in a statement after the vote.

However, the president said he is “not deterred” and vowed to “explore every measure and use every tool at our disposal to stand up for democracy.”

Voting rights advocates are warning that Republican-led states nationwide are passing laws making it more difficult for Black Americans and others to vote by consolidating polling locations, requiring certain types of identification and ordering other changes.

Vice President Kamala Harris briefly presided over the Senate, able to break a tie in the 50-50 Senate if needed, but she left before the final vote. The rules change was rejected 52-48, with Manchin and Sinema joining the Republicans in opposition.

The nighttime voting brought an end, for now, to legislation that has been a top Democratic priority since the party took control of Congress and the White House.

“This is a moral moment,” said Sen. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga.

The Democrats’ bill, the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act, would make Election Day a national holiday, ensure access to early voting and mail-in ballots — which have become especially popular during the COVID-19 pandemic — and enable the Justice Department to intervene in states with a history of voter interference, among other changes. It has passed the House.

Both Manchin and Sinema say they support the legislation, but Democrats fell far short of the 60 votes needed to push the bill over the Republican filibuster. It failed to advance 51-49 on a largely party-line vote. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., cast a procedural vote against so the bill could be considered later.

Next, Schumer put forward a rules change for a “talking filibuster” on this one bill. It would require senators to stand at their desks

and exhaust the debate before holding a simple majority vote, rather than the current practice that simply allows senators to privately signal their objections.

But that, too, failed because Manchin and Sinema were unwilling to change the Senate rules a party-line vote by Democrats alone.

Emotions were on display during the floor debate.

When Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., asked Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky whether he would pause for a question, McConnell left the chamber, refusing to respond.

Durbin said he would have asked McConnell, “Does he really believe that there’s no evidence of voter suppression?”

The No. 2 Republican, Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, said at one point, “I am not a racist.”

McConnell, who led his party in doing away with the filibuster’s 60-vote threshold for Supreme Court nominees during Donald Trump’s presidency, warned against changing the rules again.

McConnell derided the “fake hysteria” from Democrats over the states’ new voting laws and called the pending bill a federal takeover of election systems. He admonished Democrats in a fiery speech and said doing away with filibuster rules would “break the Senate.”

## Biden says nation weary but rising with him in office

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden acknowledged that the pandemic has left Americans exhausted and demoralized but insisted at a news conference marking his first year in office that he has “outperformed” expectations in dealing with it.

Facing sagging poll numbers and a stalled legislative agenda, Biden conceded Wednesday he would likely have to pare back his “build back better” recovery package and instead settle for “big chunks” of his signature economic plan. He promised to further attack inflation and the pandemic and blamed Republicans for uniting in opposition to his proposals rather than offering ideas of their own.

This is a perilous time for Biden: The nation is gripped by a new surge of virus cases, and inflation is at a level not seen in a generation. Democrats are bracing for a potential midterm rout if he can’t turn things around.

Biden insisted that voters will come to em-

brace a more positive view of his tenure — and of his beleaguered party — in time. His appeal to voters for patience came with a pledge to spend more time outside Washington to make the case to them directly.

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research showed more Americans disapprove than approve of how Biden is handling his job as president, 56% to 43%. As of now, just 28% of Americans say they want Biden to run for reelection in 2024, including only 48% of Democrats.

On Wednesday, Biden also addressed the brewing crisis on the Ukraine border. He declared Russia would pay a “dear price” if Putin launches a military incursion.

Biden held forth for 1 hour and 50 minutes in the East Room of the White House, appearing to relish the opportunity to parry questions from two dozen journalists with doses of wit and a few flashes of anger. At several points, he looked at his watch, smiled

and kept calling on reporters.

He fielded questions about inflation, nuclear talks with Iran, voting rights, political division, trade with China and the competency of government. Those questions showed the multitude of challenges confronting the president, each of them as much a risk as an opportunity to prove himself.

The president began by reeling off early progress in fighting the virus and showcasing quick passage of an ambitious bipartisan roads-and-bridges infrastructure deal. But his economic, voting rights, police reform and immigration agenda have all been thwarted in a barely Democratic-controlled Senate, while inflation has emerged as an economic threat to the nation and a political risk for Biden.

Despite his faltering approval numbers, Biden claimed to have “probably outperformed what anybody thought would happen” in a country still coping with the coronavirus.

# Jan. 6 panel able to get Trump documents

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a rebuff to former President Donald Trump, the Supreme Court is allowing the release of presidential documents sought by the congressional committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection.

The justices on Wednesday rejected a bid by Trump to withhold the documents from the committee until the issue is finally resolved by the courts. Trump's lawyers had hoped to prolong the court fight and keep the documents on hold.

Following the high court's ac-

tion, there is no legal impediment to turning over the documents, which are held by the National Archives and Records Administration. They include presidential diaries, visitor logs, speech drafts and handwritten notes dealing with Jan. 6 from the files of former chief of staff Mark Meadows.

The committee has already begun to receive records Trump wanted kept secret, said Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., and Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., the committee chairman and vice chairwoman, respec-

tively.

"The Supreme Court's action tonight is a victory for the rule of law and American democracy," Thompson and Cheney said in a statement pledging to "uncover all the facts about the violence of January 6th and its causes."

White House spokesman Mike Gwin called the ruling "an important step forward" for the investigation, "and in ensuring accountability for an unprecedented assault on our democracy and the rule of law."

Alone among the justices, Clarence Thomas said he would

have granted Trump's request to keep the documents on hold.

In an unsigned opinion, the court acknowledged there are "serious and substantial concerns" over whether a former president can win a court order to prevent disclosure of certain records from his time in office in a situation like this one.

But the court noted that the appeals court determined that Trump's assertion of privilege over the documents would fail under any circumstances, "even if he were the incumbent."

## Amazon plans for clothing store in Southern Calif.

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Amazon said it plans to open a clothing store in a Southern California mall this year, a first for the online behemoth and a new test for already struggling traditional retailers.

Amazon said Thursday that the store, which will sell women's and men's clothing as well as shoes and other accessories, will open at the Americana at Brand mall in Glendale, Calif.

Shoppers will get personalized recommendations pushed to their phones as they browse the new Amazon Style store stocked mostly with non-Amazon fashion labels, the Seattle-based company said. Amazon declined to offer any more details on the labels.

The store will be about 30,000 square feet, similar in size to a Kohl's but about one-third the size of other department stores, like Macy's. But it will offer more than double the number of styles as traditional stores do because it will show one of each style on display while keeping the rest in the back room. The selection is chosen by Amazon curators who also use feedback provided by millions of customers shopping on Amazon.com.

The store concept is likely to

add more strain on the already challenged traditional clothing sellers, particularly department stores that have been scrambling to adapt to shoppers' shift to online shopping that has been accelerated during the pandemic.

Simoina Vasen, managing director of Amazon Style, declined to comment on rollout plans of the new store concept or sales projections. Amazon didn't give a precise date for the opening of the Glendale store.

The move is the latest foray in physical stores for Amazon, which has been opening grocery stores, cashierless convenience locations and book stores. In 2017, it bought Whole Foods Market for more than \$13 billion.

Amazon's move into physical fashion stores comes as it unseated Walmart's No. 1 spot in clothing sales last year, helped by the pandemic-induced e-commerce explosion. Wells Fargo forecast in a report in March 2021 that Amazon's clothing and footwear sales in the United States increased by about 15% in 2020 to more than \$41 billion. That's about 20% to 25% above Walmart. That represents 11% to 12% share of all clothing sold in the U.S. and 34% to 35% share of all clothing sold online.

## US unemployment claims are highest since October

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits rose to the highest level in three months as the fast-spreading omicron variant disrupted the job market.

Jobless claims rose for the third straight week — by 55,000 to 286,000, the highest since mid-October, the Labor Department reported Thursday.

The four-week average of claims, which smooths out weekly volatility, rose by 20,000 to 231,000, highest since late November.

A surge in COVID-19 cases has set back what had been a strong comeback from last year's short but devastating coronavirus recession.

Jobless claims, a proxy for layoffs, had fallen mostly steadily for about a year and late last year dipped below the pre-pandemic average of around 220,000 a week.

Altogether, 1.6 million people were collecting jobless aid the week that ended Jan. 8.

Companies are hanging on to workers they have at a time when it's difficult to find re-

placements. Employers posted 10.6 million jobs in November, the fifth-highest monthly total in records going back to 2000.

A record 4.5 million workers quit their jobs in November — a sign that they are confident enough to look for something better.

The job market has bounced back from last year's brief but intense coronavirus recession.

When COVID-19 hit, governments ordered lockdowns, consumers stayed at home and many businesses closed or cut back hours.

Employers slashed millions of jobs in March and April 2020, and the unemployment rate rocketed to 14.7%.

But massive government spending — and eventually the rollout of vaccines — brought the economy back. Last year, employers added a record 6.4 million jobs — but that was still not enough to make up for the unprecedented 9.4 million jobs lost in 2020. And hiring slowed in November and December last year as employers struggled to fill job openings.

Still, the unemployment rate fell last month to a pandemic low 3.9%.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Man who refused to give up live grenade arrested**

**AZ** SNOWFLAKE — A man in the town of Snowflake is in FBI custody after a live grenade was found in his RV.

The Navajo County Sheriff's Office announced the arrest of the 61-year-old man.

According to sheriff's officials, they received a call Jan. 2 about a possible explosive device at the man's home. They spoke to the man, who admitted to possessing a live grenade. He then threatened to make another one if they seized it.

Sheriff's deputies returned the next day with a search warrant. They found the grenade, which was properly disposed of by state Department of Public Safety bomb technicians. The man surrendered to the FBI without incident.

**Former USAF station on the market for \$4.5M**

**SD** GETTYSBURG — A former Air Force station in north central South Dakota is on the market for \$4.5 million.

While the 42-acre base is no longer active, the Federal Aviation Administration continues to operate a radar site on the property at Gettysburg.

Lev Goukassian, who owns the property, initially listed the base for about \$1 million, but the asking price jumped to \$4.5 million.

While photos of the property show its buildings are showing their age, Goukassian said the base buildings have strong walls and some unique features, including underground tunnels that connect them.

**Fire department saves 4 deer trapped on lake**

**VT** NORTH HERO — Four deer trapped on Lake Champlain have been brought to shore, the North Hero Volunteer Fire Department said.

The deer had been trapped on the ice since Sunday afternoon, the department said on its Facebook page. The department used an airboat on Monday to get the animals to shore, WCAX-TV reported.

One deer died overnight and two others had to be euthanized, according to the news station.

**Teammate charged in assault with plunger**

**MN** DULUTH — A Duluth high school student has been charged with sexually assaulting a football teammate with a plunger.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune reported the 17-year-old defendant was charged in juvenile court with third-degree sexual assault on Friday. Prosecutors are seeking to move the case into adult court.

According to police, the boy and the victim were teammates at Proctor High School in September. Someone sent a lewd photo to a group of Proctor football players on Snapchat using the victim's phone over the Labor Day weekend. That prompted a response that the victim was "going to get the plunger."

The 17-year-old and other players chased the victim after practice on Sept. 7. One or more of the players tackled him and the 17-year-old assaulted him with the plunger.

Interviews with players revealed a plunger was regularly

used as part of "crass" locker room behaviors. The assault led to coach Derek Parendo's resignation in October.

**Couple charged after infant ingests drug, dies**

**OH** CIRCLEVILLE — An infant died and another young child became very ill after they ingested fentanyl in their family's apartment, authorities said.

Nicholas Lee, 25, and Brianna Roush, 26, of Circleville, are each charged with involuntary manslaughter, attempted involuntary manslaughter, possessing and trafficking in fentanyl and two counts of child endangerment.

Officers responded to a hospital Sunday after a 20-month-old child and their 3-year-old sibling were taken there, authorities said. The infant wasn't breathing; the older child was ill and vomiting.

The infant was pronounced dead a short time later; the 3-year-old recovered and was later released to relatives.

Authorities said Lee and Roush admitted to using and selling narcotics, but don't know how the children got the fentanyl.

**Deputies: Man tried to kill jogger in ambush**

**FL** COCOA — An 18-year-old Florida man is accused of ambushing a jogger, who he planned to kill and hide the body in a bedroom closet at his home, sheriff's officials said.

The man told Brevard County Sheriff's investigators he had first noticed the jogger passing by about six weeks ago. On Monday, he hid behind a light pole

and waited for the jogger to pass by, authorities said in an arrest report. He was armed with a rubber mallet, an aerosol deodorant can and a bed sheet, the report said. When the jogger passed by, the man threw a belt from a robe around his neck.

But the jogger, who is trained in martial arts, foiled the attack by freeing himself and holding the man down until law enforcement officials arrived and arrested him. The jogger was not injured.

"He further planned to place the victim's body into his closet where the defendant stated no one would know and the defendant could have the victim's body all to himself," Deputy Carson Hendren wrote in an arrest report.

The man was charged with attempted murder.

**Police: 953 pounds of pot found in camper**

**AL** LEEDS — Two men were jailed in Alabama after police said they found almost 1,000 pounds of marijuana worth nearly \$3 million hidden in a camper just off Interstate 20.

An officer saw a camper running off the road while exiting the highway Tuesday morning, news outlets reported. The officer stopped the vehicle outside a store and the men agreed to a search, police said.

Officers found 953 pounds of marijuana wrapped in plastic hidden throughout the camper, authorities said. Quan Xu, 32, of Mountain House, Calif., and Huaitian Li, 27, of Los Angeles, were jailed on trafficking charges.

— From wire reports



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# Titans betting on Tannehill's experience

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Ryan Tannehill disputes the idea he ever lost his mojo as the Tennessee Titans quarterback.

In a season where Tannehill was one of only three Titans on the offense to start every game during the regular season, the 10-year veteran led Tennessee to a 12-5 record and the AFC's No. 1 seed. That's a first for a quarterback who never played in the postseason until coming to the team in 2019.

That makes having a third straight shot at playoff success even more fun for a quarterback who loves winning.

"I love doing that and I'm proud of our guys and the way we've... fought through a lot and continued to find ways to win," Tannehill said. "So, it hasn't always been perfect and pretty — it's football, it never is. So, the fact that we can continue to find ways to win has been a lot of fun."

Now the Titans hope to tap into Tannehill's experience Saturday in the divisional round against his young counterpart, Joe Burrow.

The quarterback who won the

national championship with LSU before becoming the No. 1 pick in the 2020 draft just snapped a 31-year playoff win drought for the Cincinnati Bengals (11-7) in his NFL postseason debut.

"I've played in a lot of big games throughout my career," Burrow said Tuesday. "Whether it's this year, I mean every game the last half of the season was a playoff game or those games playing in the college football playoffs and the national championship I think I've been in that situation before."

Tannehill, the highest player drafted in 2012 still playing, will be making his fifth playoff start with Tennessee. He has postseason wins over Tom Brady and Lamar Jackson from Tennessee's run to the AFC championship game two years ago.

Titans coach Mike Vrabel has made it clear he loves Tannehill, particularly the quarterback's toughness. Only Burrow was sacked more (51) than Tannehill (47) during the regular season.

"His toughness is second to none," Vrabel said. "I know that being a professional quarter-

back requires a level of toughness. I am not going to say that our guys aren't tough, but we know that Ryan has a very high ability to stand in there and not flinch."

Cincinnati coach Zac Taylor knows that, and Tannehill, only too well. He was a graduate assistant at Texas A&M when Tannehill played both wide receiver and quarterback, and Taylor also coached quarterbacks, including Tannehill for four seasons with the Dolphins.

Taylor said Tannehill can make every throw and the former pre-med student could have played receiver in the NFL if he had wanted. Tannehill caught 55 passes for 844 yards and five touchdowns his first season in college.

"He's a tremendous quarterback," Taylor said. "It's no surprise he's helped that team get in the position they've been in these last couple of years. He really executes that offense at a high level and he can make a defense pay if you let him. They've got the right quarterback on board there."

Tannehill's experience certainly paid off for Tennessee as

the Titans shuffled through 91 players, an NFL record in a non-strike season. Derrick Henry, the 2020 AP NFL Offensive Player of the Year, missed the final nine games. Wide receivers A.J. Brown and Julio Jones both had stints on the injured reserve.

So while Burrow was re-writing the Bengals' record book with a 108.3 passer rating, 4,611 yards passing and 34 TDs, Tannehill's best statistic might be how the Titans won their most games and also earned the No. 1 seed for the first time since 2008.

Tannehill did match his career high with seven TD runs, but he had his lowest passer rating since 2015. He also had 14 interceptions while throwing for 3,734 yards and 21 TDs. He helped Tennessee win three of its final four games to clinch that top seed.

How much will his added experience help Saturday?

"Hopefully it helps a little bit," Tannehill said. "You have been there before. The experience is not new. At the end of the day, you have to go out and execute and play well."

## Allen vs. Mahomes revisited in Bills-Chiefs rematch

Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — A second consecutive postseason matchup pitting Buffalo's Josh Allen against Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes seemed almost inevitable after two of the NFL's top young quarterbacks met in last year's AFC championship game.

The same could not have been envisioned as recently as four years ago.

What might be lost in all the hype leading up to the divisional playoff meeting at Kansas City on Sunday is both players' connections to the Bills, and the second-guessing which followed two key Buffalo decisions in finally arriv-

ing on its franchise quarterback.

The Bills were roundly panned during the 2017 draft for passing up the chance to select Mahomes. They instead traded the 10th pick to the Chiefs, allowing them to land an electrifying player who has led them to Super Bowl appearances in each of the past two years.

Though even Buffalo owners Terry and Kim Pegula favored selecting Mahomes, first-year coach Sean McDermott and then but soon to be fired GM Doug Whaley balked by placing a priority on stockpiling draft picks to rebuild what had been a losing team.

That didn't stop more criticism

being directed at the Bills a year later during general manager Brandon Beane's first draft in Buffalo.

The Bills were questioned for trading up five spots to select Allen at No. 7, and ahead of Josh Rosen. Of the five quarterbacks — starting with Baker Mayfield going first — chosen in the first round in 2018, the strong-armed Allen was considered one of the bigger risks. He had issues with accuracy and was so overlooked on the college recruiting front the central California native wound up at Wyoming.

Four seasons later, Mayfield has yet to secure a second contract in Cleveland, Rosen is al-

ready on his third team, while Allen was locked up with a six-year, \$258 million contract extension in August.

In Buffalo, Allen is so revered his name is plastered on a banner hanging over a midtown intersection welcoming visitors to the city's "Allentown" bar and restaurant district.

Though Mahomes has more hardware, including a Super Bowl MVP and NFL MVP, Allen is no longer considered a consolation prize. And don't forget how the Bills used the Chiefs' draft pick in 2017 to select Tre'Davious White, who has established himself as one of the NFL's top shutdown cornerbacks.

# No. 2 Auburn has easy time with Georgia

Associated Press

AUBURN, Ala. — Walker Kessler had 15 points and six blocked shots to lead a half-dozen scorers in double figures for No. 2 Auburn in an 83-60 rout of Georgia on Wednesday night.

The Tigers (17-1, 6-0 South-eastern Conference) built a 25-point lead by halftime and coasted to their 14th consecutive win, tied with Davidson for the nation's longest current streak. It's their best SEC start in 63 years.

Jaylin Williams scored 13 points, while Bulldogs transfer KD Johnson, Wendell Green Jr. and Jabari Smith all finished with 12. Allen Flanigan added 10 for Auburn, which is the only SEC team without a league loss. Green had 11 assists and four steals against Georgia (5-13, 0-5), the only SEC team without a league win.

Christian Wright led the Bulldogs with 16 points, going 8-for-9 from the free-throw

line. Noah Baummann and Braelen Bridges scored 11 apiece. Georgia was without leading scorer Kario Oquendo for undisclosed reasons.

The Bulldogs' Aaron Cook, a so-called super senior, became just the 18th Division I player to play in 150 games and scored nine.

**Marquette 57, No. 11 Villanova 54:** Justin Lewis buried a three from the top of the arc with 11.5 seconds left to help the Golden Eagles snap the Wildcats' 29-game on-campus winning streak.

Marquette (13-7, 5-3 Big East) briefly fumbled the ball, but Lewis recovered to nail the biggest shot of the season and send the Golden Eagles to their fifth straight win. Marquette's players stormed the court and mobbed each other in wild celebration after Collin Gillespie's last-second heave was well off the mark for Villanova.

**No. 12 Kentucky 64, Texas**

**A&M 58:** Sahvir Wheeler scored 12 points to lead a balanced scoring attack and the Wildcats used a strong second half to win on the road against the Aggies.

The victory extended Kentucky's winning streak to four games and snapped an eight-game winning streak for Texas A&M (15-3, 4-1 SEC).

**Alabama 70, No. 13 LSU 67:** Keon Ellis made two free throws with 5 seconds left, and the host Crimson Tide held off a late comeback bid by the Tigers to snap a three-game skid.

LSU trailed by eight with 1:08 remaining. Tari Eason, who finished with 26 points and 10 rebounds, dunked to draw the Tigers closer. Brandon Murray hit two free throws, and after four missed foul shots by Alabama, Murray made a three-pointer with 8 seconds remaining to cut the Crimson Tide's advantage to 68-67.

**No. 20 Xavier 68, DePaul**

**67:** Jack Nunge scored 15 of his 23 points in the second half, and the Musketeers rallied past the host Blue Demons.

Colby Jones had 13 points for Xavier (14-3, 4-2 Big East), which trailed by as many as 12. Paul Scruggs finished with eight points and seven assists.

**Army 76, American 66:** Jalen Rucker scored 25 points and Matt Dove scored 14 and the host Black Knights beat the Eagles for their fifth-straight win.

Chris Mann added 11 points and Josh Caldwell added 10 points and had seven rebounds for Army (11-8, 5-2 Patriot League),

**Lehigh 69, Navy 61:** Evan Taylor had 21 points as the visiting Mountain Hawks defeated the Midshipmen.

Greg Summers had 12 points for Navy (12-6, 5-2). John Carter Jr. added 11 points and six rebounds. Daniel Deaver had 10 points and seven rebounds.

## Medvedev handles Kyrgios; upsets in women's action

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Daniil Medvedev faced a hostile crowd and a full array of Nick Kyrgios' outbursts and tricks, and still remained calm for long enough to reach the third round at the Australian Open.

The 115th-ranked Kyrgios worked up the crowd, hit 'tweeners and drop shots, mixed up the pace of his groundstrokes and tossed in an under-arm serve in a bid to ruffle the second-ranked Russian.

Medvedev kept his composure, taking a quick trip to the locker room after losing the third set and recovering to win 7-6 (1), 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 Thursday at a rowdy Rod Laver Arena.

In an on-court TV interview with former champion Jim Courier, Medvedev was asked how he managed to stay so composed.

"That's the only choice when

you get booed between first and second serve," he said, triggering some boos from the crowd.

In the seventh game of the third set, Kyrgios got two break-point chances when he bunted away a backhand from Medvedev directed at his body and then took off on a circular run behind the baseline to celebrate like he'd scored a goal.

When he converted the break, he danced in the change-over and worked up the crowd. Medvedev lowered the volume with two service breaks in the fourth set to beat the talented but erratic Kyrgios for the first time in three attempts. He served 31 aces to 17 for the Aussie, and converted four of his 11 break-point chances while saving seven of nine on his own serve.

Told later that he may have misheard the boos, and that Kyrgios' supporters were mimick-

ing the "siiiuuu" sound that soccer fans yell when Cristiano Ronaldo scores goals, Medvedev said still "it's not easy to play against the crowd."

"But they stay as fun matches afterwards because in the end, yeah, we gave the crowd a big show," he said. "Probably Nick more, because, well, he's a big entertainer."

Medvedev was the runner-up last year but avenged that loss by beating Novak Djokovic in the U.S. Open final.

He's the quasi No. 1 now, anyway, because Djokovic was deported on the eve of the tournament for failing to meet Australia's strict COVID-19 vaccination regulations.

There were plenty of surprises in the women's draw on Day 4, with No. 3 Garbiñe Muguruza the highest-seeded player to exit only minutes after No. 6 Anett

Kontaveit lost.

U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu lost a night match to Danka Kovinic 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.

Raducanu needed treatment for blisters on her right hand two nights after her first-round win over 2017 U.S. Open champion Sloane Stephens. The blisters, on top of a recent bout of the coronavirus, had some people in her team convinced the 19-year-old Raducanu shouldn't play.

Second-seeded Aryna Sabalenka served nine double-faults in her first two service games, 12 in the first set and appeared to be on the brink of a second-round defeat before recovering to hold off 100th-ranked Wang Xinyu 1-6, 6-4, 6-2.

Muguruza never managed to earn a single break point and made 33 unforced errors, more than twice her opponent's total, in a 6-3, 6-3 loss to Alize Cornet.

# Embiid paces Sixers with 50 points in 27 minutes

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Joel Embiid tied his career high with 50 points in just 27 minutes, leading a dominant third quarter that carried the Philadelphia 76ers to a 123-110 victory over the Orlando Magic on Wednesday night.

Embiid also had 12 rebounds and three blocks while making 17 of 23 field goals and 15 of 17 free throws. The four-time All-Star and MVP candidate played 58 seconds of the fourth quarter.

Tobias Harris added 21 points for Philadelphia, which has won nine of 11.

Mo Bamba set career highs with 32 points and seven three-pointers for Orlando. The rebuilding Magic dropped to an NBA-worst 8-38 with their 13th defeat in their last 14 games.

**Pacers 111, Lakers 104:** Caris LeVert scored 22 of his 30 points in the fourth quarter, Malcolm Brogdon added 19 and visiting Indiana increased the pressure on Los Angeles coach Frank Vogel.

Domantas Sabonis had 20 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists as the Pacers snapped their four-game losing streak with just their second victory in 12 games. The Eastern Conference's 13th-place team roared past the Lakers in the fourth, starting with a 14-2 run led by LeVert and concluding with his three consecutive buckets in the final two minutes.

**Nets 119, Wizards 118:** Kyrie Irving scored 22 of his 30 points in the first half, and Brooklyn won at Washington when Kyle Kuzma and Spencer Dinwiddie missed three-pointers in the final seconds.

The Wizards trailed by as many as 16 points, but a three-pointer by Kuzma cut the lead to one with 36 seconds left. That set the stage for a wild finish.

**Mavericks 102, Raptors 98:** Luka Doncic scored a season-high 41 points, including a clutch three-pointer with 1:01 to play, and tied a season best with 14 rebounds as host Dallas held off Toronto.

Kristaps Porzingis had 18 points and seven rebounds to help the Mavs win their fourth straight and 10th in 11 games. Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 16 off the bench for Dallas, which hosts NBA-best Phoenix on Thursday.

**Bucks 126, Grizzlies 114:** Giannis Antetokounmpo had 33 points and 15 rebounds,

and Khrist Middleton scored 27 to lead host Milwaukee past short-handed Memphis.

The Grizzlies, who had won 12 of 13, were without two of their leading scorers in Dillon Brooks and Desmond Bane.

**Nuggets 130, Clippers 128 (OT):** Nikola Jokic had 49 points and 14 rebounds, and the reigning MVP fed Aaron Gordon for a tie-breaking three-pointer with 1.9 seconds left in overtime for his 10th assist to give host Denver a wild victory over Los Angeles.

Jokic drew a double-team, then whipped a pass across the court into the left corner. Gordon made his fourth three of the game to give him 28 points and Jokic his third straight triple-double and 10th of the season.

**Hornets 111, Celtics 102:** LaMelo Ball had 15 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists to lead Charlotte to a win at Boston.

Terry Rozier led Charlotte with 28 points, Miles Bridges scored 22 and Kelly Oubre Jr. added 18 for the Hornets, who won for the ninth time in 12 games.

**Bulls 117, Cavaliers 104:** DeMar DeRozan scored 30 points, Nikola Vucevic added 24 points and 12 rebounds, and host Chicago closed out Cleveland with a 14-2 run.

The Bulls steadied themselves after losing a season-high four straight and falling into a first-place tie with Miami in the Eastern Conference.

**Heat 104, Trail Blazers 92:** Caleb Martin scored 26 points, Bam Adebayo added 20 points and 11 rebounds, and host Miami beat Portland.

Max Strus scored 15 points for Miami, including a three-pointer with 2:01 remaining that put the Heat up 10.

**Hawks 134, Timberwolves 122:** Trae Young scored 23 of his 37 points in the third quarter, sparking Atlanta's comeback against visiting Minnesota.

**Spurs 118, Thunder 96:** Dejounte Murray had 23 points, 14 assists and 10 rebounds, and host San Antonio made 15 three-pointers as it rolled past Oklahoma City.

**Rockets 116, Jazz 111:** Garrison Mathews scored 23 points, including five three-pointers, to send Houston to a win at scuffling Utah.

**Pistons 133, Kings 131:** Cory Joseph made a 14-foot jumper with 25.9 seconds remaining to cap a game-ending 11-0 run that rallied Detroit to a win at Sacramento.

# Rangers surge by Maple Leafs

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Ryan Reaves scored twice, Adam Fox had two goals and an assist, and the New York Rangers scored three times in the third period to beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 6-3 on Wednesday night for their seventh win in nine games.

Chris Kreider got his 25th goal of the season, Ryan Strome had a goal and an assist, and Jacob Trouba and Artemi Panarin each added two assists for New York, which rallied from a pair of two-goal deficits. Igor Shesterkin stopped 35 shots — including 27 over the final two periods after giving up three goals in the first.

Mitch Marner had a goal and an assist, and Ilya Mikheyev and Michael Bunting also scored for Toronto. Jack Campbell had 21 saves.

**Coyotes 4, Devils 1:** Lawson Crouse scored a goal and added an assist, and Karel Vejmelka made 35 saves to help lead Arizona to a win at New Jersey.

**Avalanche 2, Ducks 0:** Pavel Francouz made 34 saves for his second career shut-out, Nazem Kadri had a goal and an assist and Colorado won at Anaheim and earned a point in its 10th straight game.

# NHL on track to end its regular season April 29

Associated Press

Despite postponing more than 100 games for coronavirus-related reasons, the NHL is still on track to complete the regular season on time by the end of April.

While it came at the expense of players competing in the Beijing Olympics, the new schedule keeps the top hockey league in the world on pace to award the Stanley Cup before July 1.

The NHL on Wednesday revealed new dates for 98 postponed games, keeping the initial target date of April 29 for the end of the regular season. That would allow the traditional 16-team playoffs to begin in early May as originally planned.

"We are profoundly grateful to our fans for their support and understanding during a challenging time and to our clubs, the NHL Players' Association and the players for their cooperation in a rescheduling of unprecedented logistical complexity," Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said.