

US, Russia look to lower temperature

Associated Press

GENEVA—The United States and Russia sought to lower the temperature in a heated standoff over Ukraine, even as they reported no breakthroughs in high-level, high-stakes talks on Friday aimed at preventing a feared Russian invasion.

Armed with seemingly intractable and diametrically opposed demands, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met in Geneva for roughly 90 minutes at what the American said was a “critical moment.”

But there was no apparent movement on either side, and Blinken said the U.S. and its allies remain resolute in rejecting Russia’s most important demands.

Nonetheless, Blinken told Lavrov that the U.S. would present Russia with written responses to its proposals next week and suggested the two men would likely meet again shortly after that.

With an estimated 100,000 Russian troops massed near Ukraine, many fear Moscow is preparing an invasion although Russia denies that. The U.S. and its allies are scrambling to present a united front to prevent that or coordinate a tough response if they can’t.

“We didn’t expect any major breakthroughs to happen today, but I believe we are now on a clearer path to understanding each other’s positions,” Blinken told reporters after the meeting.

Blinken said Lavrov repeated Russia’s insistence that it has no plans to invade Ukraine but stressed that the U.S. and its allies were not convinced of that.

“We’re looking at what is visible to all, and it is deeds and actions and not words that make all the difference,” he said, adding that Russia should remove its troops from the Ukrainian border if it wanted to prove its point.

Lavrov, meanwhile, called the talks “constructive and useful” and said the U.S. agreed to provide written responses to Russian demands on Ukraine and NATO next week. That could at least delay any imminent aggression for a few days.

But Lavrov declined to characterize the U.S. pledge.

“I can’t say whether we are on the right track or not,” he told reporters. “We will understand that when we receive the U.S. written response to all of our proposals.”

Moscow has demanded that the NATO al-

liance promise that Ukraine — a former Soviet republic — never be allowed to join. It also wants the allies to remove troops and military equipment from parts of eastern Europe.

The U.S. and its NATO allies have flatly rejected those demands and say that Russian President Vladimir Putin knows they are nonstarters. They have said they’re open to less dramatic moves.

Blinken said the U.S. would be open to a meeting between Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden, if it would be “useful and productive.” The two leaders have met once in person, in Geneva, and have had several virtual conversations on Ukraine that have proven largely inconclusive.

Washington and its allies have repeatedly promised “severe” consequences such as biting economic sanctions — though not military action — against Russia if an invasion goes ahead.

Blinken repeated that warning Friday. He said the U.S. and its allies were committed to diplomacy, but also committed “if that proves impossible, and Russia decides to pursue aggression against Ukraine, to a united, swift and severe response.”

‘Minor incursion’ by Russia could complicate response

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Short of an all-out invasion, Russian President Vladimir Putin could take less dramatic action in Ukraine that would complicate a U.S. and allied response. He might carry out what President Joe Biden called a “minor incursion” — perhaps a cyberattack — leaving the U.S. and Europe divided on the type and severity of economic sanctions to impose on Moscow and ways to increase support for Kyiv.

Biden drew widespread criticism for saying Wednesday that retaliating for Russian aggression in Ukraine would depend on the details. “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,” he said.

Biden and others worked Thursday to clean up his comments. Biden stressed that

if “any assembled Russian units move across the Ukrainian border, that is an invasion” and it would be met with a “severe and coordinated economic response.”

But even if the “minor incursion” remark was seen as a gaffe, it touched on a potentially problematic issue: While the U.S. and allies agree on a strong response to a Russian invasion, it’s unclear how they would respond to Russian aggression that falls short of that, like a cyberattack or boosted support for pro-Russian separatists fighting in eastern Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was among those expressing concern about Biden’s “minor incursion” remark.

“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,” he tweeted.

Complaints came quickly that Biden had made clear to Putin where and how to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its European allies, by using only a portion of the large military force he has assembled near Ukraine’s borders to take limited action. Russian officials have said they have no intention of invading Ukraine, but the deployment of a large combat force along its borders, estimated at 100,000 troops, has created fear of a crippling land war.

“Deeply troubling and dangerous,” Rep. Liz Cheney, a Wyoming Republican and a crucial ally of Democrats on some issues, tweeted about Biden’s remark.

“A green light for Putin,” said Republican Rep. Mike Garcia of California.

ISIS attacks Syrian prison, Iraqi barracks

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — More than 100 militants from Islamic State carried out a complex attack on Syria's largest prison holding suspected extremists, officials said Friday, as members of the group in Iraq stormed an army barracks, killing 11 soldiers as they slept.

The prison break in Syria is believed to be the largest since the militants lost the final sliver of territory they held nearly three years ago. In recent months, ISIS sleeper cells have become more active in both countries, claiming attacks that killed scores of Iraqis and Syrians.

In Iraq, ISIS gunmen attacked an army barracks in a mountainous area north of Baghdad early

Friday, killing 11 soldiers as they slept, the Iraqi military and security officials said.

The officials said the attack occurred in the Al-Azim district, an open area north of the city of Baqouba in Diyala province. The circumstances of the attack were not immediately clear, but two officials who spoke to The Associated Press said ISIS militants broke into the barracks at 3 a.m. local time and shot dead the soldiers before fleeing.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity as they weren't authorized to issue official statements. An Iraqi military statement said the dead included an officer with the rank of lieutenant and 10 soldiers.

The brazen attack more than 75 miles north of the capital,

Baghdad, was one of the deadliest targeting the Iraqi military in recent months.

In Syria, more than 100 ISIS fighters using heavy machine guns and vehicles rigged with explosives attacked the Gweiran Prison in the northeastern city of Hassakeh where some 3,000 suspected ISIS militants are being held, according to a spokesman for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, Farhad Shami. He said seven U.S.-backed Kurdish fighters were killed and several others were wounded. At least 23 ISIS attackers were also among the dead, he said.

"This is the biggest attack not only in Syria but also in Iraq and the region," Shami said in reference to attacks carried out by

ISIS since the militant group was defeated in Syria in March 2019. "The prisoners include commanders and are among the most dangerous."

The attack was mounted on Thursday evening and aimed to free fighters from the group incarcerated there. Syrian Kurdish-led forces who control the Gweiran Prison said prisoners inside the facility rioted simultaneously and tried to escape while a car bomb went off outside the prison and gunmen clashed with security forces.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, also known as SDF, said 89 militants who escaped were arrested. Another group of inmates staged a new escape attempt Friday, the SDF added.

Dems urge DOD to end copays for birth control

By **NIKKI WENTLING**

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers urged Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Thursday to eliminate copayments for birth control for service members and their families in order to "rectify the injustice" of troops paying for contraceptives that are free to most women through public and private insurers.

In total, 141 Democrats signed onto a letter to Austin. They asked him to designate health care visits related to contraceptives as preventative services, which would waive the copayments through TRICARE, the military's health insurance provider.

Lawmakers have been attempting for the past few years to eliminate copays for birth control by passing a bill that would prohibit TRICARE from

collecting them.

The bill has failed to pass through Congress. The Democrats asked Austin to take action now as they work to build support for a more comprehensive change.

The Women's Democratic Caucus drafted the letter. The lawmakers pointed out the discrepancy between the benefits offered to service members and their families versus other Americans.

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act guarantees that employer-sponsored health care and public insurance cover all contraceptive methods without cost-sharing.

"These protections do not apply to coverage through TRICARE," they wrote. "As a result, military families have fewer rights than those they serve to protect."

Biden, Japanese leader discuss China concerns

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Friday used their first formal meeting to discuss concerns about China's growing military assertiveness that's spurring increasing disquiet in the Pacific.

Kishida said that the two leaders spent a "significant amount" of their 80-minute call on issues surrounding China, including shared concerns about China's increasing aggression toward Taiwan. China claims self-governing Taiwan as its own territory, to be annexed by force if necessary.

In recent months, China has stepped up military exercises near the island, frequently sending warplanes near Taiwan's airspace.

Biden and Kishida also discussed the situations in Hong

Kong and China's Xinjiang province.

Biden has repeatedly called out Beijing over its crackdown on democracy activists in Hong Kong and forced labor practices targeting China's Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang.

Japan remains concerned about China's intentions in the South China Sea, where it has stepped up its military presence in recent years, and the East China Sea, where there is a long-running dispute about a group of uninhabited islets administered by Tokyo but claimed by Beijing.

Kishida said after the meeting that he expressed his determination to drastically strengthen Japan's defense power while Biden spoke of the U.S. commitment to abiding by the 1960 Japan-U.S. security treaty.

Dems eye new strategy on voting rights

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democrats were picking up the pieces Thursday following the collapse of their top-priority voting rights legislation, with some shifting their focus to a narrower bipartisan effort to repair laws Donald Trump exploited in his bid to overturn the 2020 election.

Though their bid to dramatically rewrite U.S. election law failed during a high-stakes Senate floor showdown late Wednesday, Democrats insisted their brinkmanship has made the new effort possible, forcing Republicans to relent, even if just a little, and engage in bipartisan negotiations.

The nascent push is focused on the Electoral Count Act, an 1887 law that created the convoluted process for the certification of presidential election results by Congress. For more than 100 years, vulnerabilities in the law were an afterthought, until Trump's unrelenting, false claims that voter fraud cost him the 2020 election culminated in a mob of his supporters storming the Capitol.

An overhaul of the Gilded Age statute could be Democrats' best chance to address what they call an existential threat to American democracy from Trump's "big lie" about a stolen election. But with seri-

ous talks only beginning in the Senate and dwindling time before this year's midterm elections, reaching consensus could prove difficult.

"We know history is on the side of voting rights, and we know that forcing leaders to take stands will ultimately move the ball forward," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Thursday.

Just weeks ago, many Democrats were adamant that updating the Electoral Count Act was no substitute for their voting legislation. Updating the 1887 law, they pointed out, would do nothing to counter the Trump-inspired push in 19 states to make it more difficult to vote.

They still hold that position, but after the defeat of their marquee elections bill, they are running out of options. Meanwhile, Trump loyalists are girding for the next election, working to install sympathetic leaders in local election posts and, in some cases, backing political candidates who participated in the riot at the U.S. Capitol.

Biden conceded this week that updating the electoral bill may be Democrats' best opportunity to pass voting legislation through a 50-50 Senate, where much of his agenda has stalled.

"I predict to you they'll get something done," Biden told reporters Wednesday.

Court won't speed challenge to Texas limits

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In the latest setback for abortion rights in Texas, the Supreme Court on Thursday refused to speed up the ongoing court case over the state's ban on most abortions.

Over dissents from the three liberal justices, the court declined to order a federal appeals court to return the case to a federal judge who had temporarily blocked the law's enforcement.

The court offered no explanation for its action.

The Texas ban is thus likely to remain in effect for the foreseeable future, following a decision by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans to send the case to

the Texas Supreme Court, which is entirely controlled by Republican justices and does not have to act immediately.

Abortion providers had asked the high court to countermand the appellate order, which they said in court papers has no purpose other than to delay legal proceedings and prevent clinics from offering abortions beyond around six weeks of pregnancy.

The law has devastated abortion providers in Texas, Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote: "Instead of stopping a Fifth Circuit panel from indulging Texas' newest delay tactics, the Court allows the State yet again to extend the deprivation of the federal constitutional rights of its citizens through

procedural manipulation," Sotomayor wrote, joined by Justices Stephen Breyer and Elena Kagan. "The Court may look the other way, but I cannot."

Chief Justice John Roberts joined the three liberals in December in a dissent that called for allowing a broader challenge to the law and a quick return to the lower federal court. Roberts did not note his position on Thursday.

Clinics fear that their challenge to the law might not be resolved before the justices rule in a Mississippi case that could roll back abortion rights across the country. That decision, which could overrule the landmark *Roe v. Wade* case from 1973, is expected by late June.

US drops case against professor accused of ties to China

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department dropped charges Thursday against a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor accused of concealing ties to the Chinese government, a further setback to a federal initiative that was set up to prevent economic espionage and theft by Beijing of trade secrets and academic research.

The department revealed its decision in the case against Gang Chen in a filing in federal court in Boston, saying it could no long-

er meet its burden of proof.

U.S. Attorney Rachael Rollins, the top federal prosecutor in Massachusetts, said the move was "in the interests of justice" and was the result of new information the government had received about the allegations.

The outcome, which had been expected and was earlier recommended by prosecutors in Boston, is a blow to a Justice Department effort known as the China Initiative, which was set up in 2018 to crack down on

Chinese economic espionage and trade secret theft. A key prong of the initiative has focused on academics in the U.S. accused of concealing research ties to China on grant applications. But critics have long said the effort unduly targets researchers based on ethnicity and that it chills academic collaboration.

The Justice Department is currently reviewing the future of the program, a process expected to be complete in the coming weeks, said spokesperson Wyn Hornbuckle.

Spain prepping endemic virus response

Associated Press

MADRID — When the coronavirus pandemic was first declared, Spaniards were ordered to stay home for more than three months. For weeks, they were not allowed outside even for exercise. Children were banned from playgrounds, and the economy virtually stopped.

But officials credited the draconian measures with preventing a full collapse of the health system. Lives were saved, they argued.

Now, almost two years later, Spain is preparing to adopt a different COVID-19 playbook. With one of Europe's highest vaccination rates and its most pandemic-battered economies, the government is laying the groundwork to

treat the next infection surge not as an emergency but an illness that is here to stay. Similar steps are under consideration in neighboring Portugal and in Britain.

The idea is to move from crisis mode to control mode, approaching the virus in much the same way countries deal with the flu or measles. That means accepting that infections will occur and providing extra care for at-risk people and patients with complications.

Spain's center-left prime minister, Pedro Sanchez, wants the European Union to consider similar changes now that the surge of the omicron variant has shown that the disease is becoming less lethal.

"What we are saying is that in the next few months and years, we are going to have to think, without hesitancy and according to what science tells us, how to manage the pandemic with different parameters," he said Monday.

Sanchez said the changes should not happen before the omicron surge is over, but officials need to start shaping the post-pandemic world now: "We are doing our homework, anticipating scenarios."

Just over 80% of Spain's population has received two vaccine doses, and authorities are focused on boosting the immunity of adults with third doses.

Vaccine-acquired immunity, coupled with widespread infec-

tion, offers a chance to concentrate prevention efforts, testing and illness-tracking resources on moderate- to high-risk groups, said Dr. Salvador Trenché, head of the Spanish Society of Family and Community Medicine, which has led the call for a new endemic response.

COVID-19 "must be treated like the rest of illnesses," Trenché told The Associated Press.

The public also needs to come to terms with the idea that some deaths from COVID-19 "will be inevitable," Tranche said. "We can't do on the sixth wave what we were doing on the first one: The model needs to change if we want to achieve different results," he said.

Bill proposes preteens be vaxed without parents

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California would allow children age 12 and up to be vaccinated without their parents' consent, the youngest age of any state, under a proposal late Thursday by a state senator.

Alabama allows such decisions at age 14, Oregon at 15, Rhode Island and South Carolina at 16, according to Sen. Scott Wiener, a Democrat from San Francisco who is proposing the change. Only Washington, D.C., has a lower limit, at age 11.

Wiener argued that California already allows those 12 and up to consent to the Hepati-

tis B and Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines, and to treatment for sexually transmitted infections, substance abuse and mental health disorders.

"Giving young people the autonomy to receive life-saving vaccines, regardless of their parents' beliefs or work schedules, is essential for their physical and mental health," he said. "It's unconscionable for teens to be blocked from the vaccine because a parent either refuses or cannot take their child to a vaccination site."

Currently in California, minors ages 12 to 17 cannot be vaccinated without permission

from their parents or guardian, unless the vaccine is specifically to prevent a sexually transmitted disease.

Wiener's bill would lift the parental requirement for that age group for any vaccine that has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That includes immunizations against the coronavirus, but Wiener said vaccine hesitancy and misinformation has also deterred vaccinations against measles and other contagious diseases that can then spread among youths whose parents won't agree to have them vaccinated.

Open hearing sought on trial evidence in Floyd killing

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Prosecutors in the trial of three former Minneapolis police officers on civil rights charges in George Floyd's killing asked the judge to open at least parts of a hearing Friday on the admissibility of some evidence.

A jury was seated in a single day Thursday for Tou Thao, J. Kueng and Thomas Lane, who are charged with depriving Floyd of his rights while acting under government authority. Opening statements are Monday.

Judge Paul Magnuson has limited access to the trial to five media pool seats and a

small number of family members for the defendants, with other media and the general public in an overflow room with a closed-circuit feed that has limited views. Magnuson has cited the coronavirus pandemic, and rejected earlier media attempts to expand access.

The prosecution filing said that Friday's hearing deals with defense motions to exclude certain evidence, including still images from video of Floyd's May 25, 2020, arrest; side-by-side exhibits that will play two videos at once; and dispatch and 911 calls.

Prosecutors said they were notified that

the hearing would be closed because the parties would be reviewing evidence that would be shown but might not be admitted at trial. But they said both sides have agreed that the visual content is admissible, and the motion for exclusion is only over prosecutors' proposal for how it is displayed.

Under long-standing federal court rules, the proceedings are not being livestreamed or broadcast to the public, in contrast to last year's murder trial in state court of Derek Chauvin, the white former Minneapolis officer who kept Floyd pinned to the pavement with his knee on his neck.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Thunderbirds begin monthlong training trip

NM TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES — The Thunderbirds, the U.S. Air Force's aerial demonstration squadron, have begun a monthlong training trip to New Mexico and Arizona in preparation for their 2022 show season.

The unit based at Nellis Air Force Base in metro Las Vegas arrived last week at the New Mexico Spaceport near Truth or Consequences for two weeks of training and will then shift to Fort Huachuca, an Army base in Sierra Vista, Ariz., for the trip's second training leg.

The Thunderbirds' show schedule begins March 19 at Luke Air Force Base near Phoenix and ends at Nellis on Nov. 5-6.

Parking indicates drop-off in attendance

PA HARRISBURG — The Pennsylvania Farm Show returned as an in-person event this month, but parking revenue suggests many stayed away during the still-raging COVID-19 pandemic.

The Department of Agriculture said that parking revenue was down by more than 40% from 2020, the most recent in-person show. Last year's show was done virtually.

Parking revenue is used as a rough proxy to gauge attendance at the Farm Show, because the massive indoor agriculture exposition held every January in Harrisburg does not charge admission or count how many people come through its doors.

In a normal year, some half-million people attend.

Lawmaker resigning, cites inappropriate act

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — A state lawmaker from Oklahoma City has announced his resignation for what he calls inappropriate actions on New Year's Eve.

In a statement to local media, Democrat Jose Cruz did not provide details of his actions or the event, but said he apologizes, is embarrassed and must resign.

"I started 2022 by exercising poor judgment and acting inappropriately during a gathering," according to the statement.

"I deeply regret my conduct and that my actions made someone else uncomfortable," Cruz said.

Cruz was elected to the south Oklahoma City seat in 2020 and served on the Agriculture and Rural Development and the criminal Judiciary committees. He has also been a member of the Appropriations and Budget subcommittees on judiciary and public safety.

Police: Anti-violence worker among 3 killed

MD BALTIMORE — Three men, including an anti-violence worker, were killed in a shooting in East Baltimore, police said.

Officers responding to the 2400 block of East Monument Street found four men suffering from apparent gunshot wounds, police said in a news release. One died on the scene, two others were pronounced dead at hospitals and the fourth is expected to survive, police said.

One of the men who was

killed was a Safe Streets East worker, police said.

Safe Streets outreach workers mediate disputes in an effort to prevent violence and work to steer young people away from violence.

In July, Safe Streets Cherry Hill worker Kenyell Wilson was fatally shot. Last January, Safe Streets leader Dante Barksdale was shot and killed. He had served time in prison and was the nephew of Nathan Barksdale, whose crimes and run-ins with police inspired characters and storylines in HBO's "The Wire."

Mayor Brandon Scott called the shooting "a horrific tragedy," saying that Safe Streets workers put their lives on the line "because they believe in a better future for our city — a future we all should believe in."

Proposed science museum gets \$1M gift

SD FARGO — A proposed science museum in the Fargo and Moorhead, Minn., area has received a \$1 million donation from a local business leader.

Officials with the Fargo-Moorhead Science Museum say the gift from John Ballantyne will help with facility planning and feasibility studies for the facility in the community of about 250,000 people.

Ballantyne is co-founder of the Fargo biological sciences company Aldevron and serves as its chief scientific officer.

The museum would focus on the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, collectively known as STEM. The plans include a mobile STEM classroom.

Tax nears end, but city wants to keep it

MS PASCAGOULA — A restaurant tax in Pascagoula that was set to end this summer could be sticking around for awhile, officials said.

The 2% tax went into effect in 2017 and is being used to help pay for a new \$12 million sports complex, WLOX-TV reported.

The Pascagoula City Council this week voted to extend the deadline and allow the city to continue collecting the tax.

Community Relations Director Katarina Scott says the plan is to either continue collecting the tax for a period of years or get rid of the deadline and allow the tax to be collected indefinitely. The city will now ask the state Legislature to approve its plans for the tax.

Technician dies during work on escalator

VA RICHMOND — A technician died while working on an escalator at a department store, fire officials said.

The Richmond Fire Department said an escalator technician was doing maintenance at the Dillard's at Stony Point Fashion Park and died after falling through the machine, news outlets reported. First responders found the man trapped and unresponsive and he was pronounced dead at the scene.

The medical examiner hasn't determined his cause of death and Virginia Occupational Safety and Health Administration is still investigating the circumstances of the incident.

— From Associated Press

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Stakes raised for 49ers-Packers rematch

Associated Press

It was the rally that sparked the Green Bay Packers toward the NFL's best regular-season record.

The Packers had split their first two games—a blowout loss to New Orleans and a home victory over Detroit—before visiting San Francisco for a Sunday night matchup. After getting the ball at Green Bay's 25-yard line with 37 seconds and no timeouts left, Aaron Rodgers drove the Packers into position for Mason Crosby's 51-yard winning field goal as time expired.

That 30-28 victory was part of a seven-game winning streak that helped the Packers win a third straight NFC North title. Nearly four months after that Sept. 26 thriller, the Packers (13-4) and 49ers (11-7) meet again Saturday night in an NFC divisional playoff game.

"Getting that win streak and getting everything rolling, it was huge, the implications on the NFC and the standings," Packers running back Aaron Jones said.

The Packers used that game

as a catalyst to earn the NFC's No. 1 seed, which included a first-round bye and home-field advantage for the conference playoffs. Saturday's forecast in Green Bay calls for a high temperature of 21 and a low of 5 with a 50% chance of snow.

"Hoping for a loud crowd that has a nice enjoyable afternoon, maybe doesn't go too hard, leaves some room for some enjoyment from like 7-10:30 p.m. on Saturday night," Rodgers said. "It's an exciting opportunity to be back at Lambeau for a playoff game in prime time."

Quite a bit has changed since these teams last met.

San Francisco's Elijah Mitchell missed the regular-season matchup with a shoulder injury. Deebo Samuel had a season-low 52 yards from scrimmage, including zero yards rushing on just two carries.

Samuel, an All-Pro receiver, has since become a major factor in the 49ers' ground attack and teamed up with Mitchell for 168 yards rushing on 37 carries in a 23-17 victory at Dallas on Sunday. They could bother a Green

Bay run defense that allowed three of its last five opponents to gain at least 5½ yards per carry.

Two seasons ago, the 49ers rushed for 285 yards in a 37-20 NFC championship game victory over the Packers. Raheem Mostert, who ran for 220 yards and four touchdowns that day, won't be available Saturday after suffering a knee injury in the 49ers' season opener.

"This is a physical football team that brings in all three phases, offensively, defensively and on special teams," Packers coach Matt LaFleur said. "And we are going to have to get our minds right to have a physical football game."

The changes for the 49ers aren't restricted to the running game.

Rookie cornerback Ambry Thomas was left inactive for the loss to the Packers but has since become a vital contributor. Jauan Jennings, who has emerged as a reliable third-down target late in the season, played just three offensive snaps in the regular-season loss to the Packers.

"It's just nice to see when a team's executing better," 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan said. "When you feel like guys are practicing, playing better together as a unit. And I think we're in a better spot now than we were at that time."

One thing that hasn't changed about the 49ers: They're still capable of delivering comebacks.

They trailed Green Bay 17-0 back in September but took a 28-27 lead in the final minute before Rodgers and Crosby came through. The 49ers fell behind 17-0 again in the final week of the regular season but secured a playoff berth by coming back to beat the Los Angeles Rams 27-24 in overtime on the road.

The 49ers followed that by grabbing a 23-7 lead at Dallas and holding on for the victory. A third straight road upset this weekend would send the 49ers to the NFC championship game.

"If you look at them as of late, this is a confident group," LaFleur said of the 49ers. "You can see it on tape. You can see it in how they've played."

Titans RB Henry facing dinged-up Bengals D-line

Associated Press

CINCINNATI—If Tennessee Titans running back Derrick Henry returns for the playoffs Saturday, he'll be running into a Cincinnati Bengals defensive line that is already banged up.

The Bengals had been relatively healthy until last week in the first-round playoff win over the Las Vegas Raiders.

Stalwart defensive tackle Larry Ogunjobi suffered a foot injury that will sideline him for the rest of the playoffs. Edge rusher Trey Hendrickson, the team's sacks leader, had been in concussion protocol all week but has been cleared to play Saturday.

Defensive end Sam Hubbard has sore ribs, and defensive tackle Mike Daniels left the Raiders game with a groin injury and and likely will be out Saturday. Defensive tackle Josh Tupou is hobbled by a sore knee.

Henry, the 6-foot-3, 247-pounder who was the AP Offensive Player of the Year in 2020, is expected to return for the playoff

game Saturday against the Bengals in Nashville. He's been out since breaking his right foot on Oct. 31.

"He definitely weighs on you," Bengals defensive tackle D.J. Reader said. "He's a big back, but you've got to do your job of not letting him get going out there and put hits on him. Make sure we're wearing on him just as much as he's wearing on us."

Reader and B.J. Hill will occupy the middle of the Cincinnati line, and if Hendrickson isn't able to go, rookie Cam Sample and second-year player Khalid Kareem will need to step up. To add some depth, the Bengals this week signed defensive tackle Zach Kerr from the Arizona Cardinals practice squad. Coach Zac Taylor said Kerr could play Saturday.

"I think everybody's excited about it, but it always starts with us up front," Reader said. "So we've got to always create that special moment up front and just create the game going from there. It's going to start

and end up front, every game."

Henry said he felt good in full-contact practices this week, even with a steel plate in his foot. He said he doesn't know how much he'll play Saturday. It's likely he'll split time with D'Onta Foreman and Dontrell Hilliard.

"They did a great job this whole year," Henry said of the Bengals defense. "Watching them against the Raiders, I feel like they did a great job. They had a couple guys go down, but overall they are physical penetrators."

Titans offensive coordinator Todd Downing said the game plan won't change.

"They have some versatile guys so maybe I think you have to look more at the structure than the personnel," he said. "Obviously, we had three quarters of a game or more of the playoff game against the Raiders to take a peek at them, but overall we've got to let our rules be our rules and go in with one-on-one matchups."

Undermanned Pacers stun Curry, Warriors

Associated Press

DALLAS — The Golden State Warriors were frenzied, rushing shots and being careless with the basketball. It led to perhaps their worst loss this season to an Indiana team with a handful of injured stars watching in street clothes.

Keifer Sykes hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 1:41 left in overtime and a layup the next possession, Chris Duarte scored 27 points and the undermanned Pacers beat Stephen Curry and the Warriors 121-117 on Thursday night.

Golden State got one last chance with 6.4 seconds left after a jump ball and Klay Thompson checked in but couldn't get a shot off.

"We were definitely sped up a little bit, 9-for-42 from three, but it wasn't a great game in terms of our execution to get those 42 three-point shots," coach Steve Kerr said. "I don't think we earned the right to

make a lot more than that. It just felt like we were scattered out there and in a rush for sure."

Curry scored 39 but none in overtime, missing a three from the top of the arc with 16.5 seconds left. He had a tying layup with 2:44 left and four free throws in the final 34.5 seconds of regulation, but Golden State surrendered Justin Holiday's tying three with 6 seconds left to send the game into OT.

"As far as the three-point shot that tied it, I'm normally a fouler and I take the hit on that one, too. This was my night to stink it up," Kerr said.

Duarte hit clutch jumpers late in regulation as the determined Pacers hung tough on a night they were missing the starting backcourt duo of Malcolm Brogdon and Caris LeVert, along with starting center Domantas Sabonis because of injuries.

"Golden State is a great,

great team. They got two of the best players — two of the best shooters that you've ever seen in this game — so I think us coming out with the win, it's a huge, huge win for us," Duarte said.

Pelicans 102, Knicks 91: Jonas Valanciunas had 18 points and 10 rebounds, Josh Hart added 17 points and visiting New Orleans beat New York.

Brandon Ingram and Devonte' Graham each had 15 points for New Orleans, with Jose Alvarado adding 13 and Herbert Jones scoring 11.

RJ Barrett and Mitchell Robinson each scored 17 for the Knicks, with Robinson adding 15 rebounds.

New Orleans only led 46-42 at halftime, but opened the second half on a 32-12 run, which culminated with Hart making three free throws with 3:52 left in the third quarter.

Suns 109, Mavericks 101:

Devin Booker scored 28 points, Chris Paul had 20 points and 11 assists, and visiting Phoenix rallied late to beat Dallas.

In a matchup of two of the NBA's hottest teams, Phoenix (35-9) finished a sweep of its season-high, five-game road trip and won its ninth straight against the Mavericks.

Luka Doncic scored 28 points, Jalen Brunson added 19 and Kristaps Porzingis had 18 points and 11 rebounds for the Mavericks (26-20), who finished a home back-to-back and had a four-game winning streak snapped.

After Mikal Bridges' floater gave Phoenix a 101-99 lead with 2:56 left, Bismack Biyombo — playing only his seventh game this season after joining the Suns this month — followed his free throw with a dunk to give Phoenix a 104-99 lead. Paul's three-pointer with 19 seconds to go was the clincher, putting the Suns ahead 107-99.

Phinisee helps Indiana knock off fourth-ranked Purdue

Associated Press

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — Rob Phinisee scored a season-high 17 points in the first half and then made the decisive three-pointer with 16.5 seconds left to send Indiana past No. 4 Purdue 68-65 on Thursday night.

Phinisee finished with a career-best 20 points as the Hoosiers (14-4, 5-3 Big Ten) snapped a nine-game losing streak against their top rival and improved to 12-0 at home this season — sending fans streaming onto the court. Xavier Johnson added 18 points and Phinisee had four steals.

Purdue's Jaden Ivey scored 19 of his 21 points in the second half as the Boilermakers (15-3, 4-3) lost for the first time in their last six trips to Assembly Hall.

No. 1 Gonzaga 78, San Francisco 62: Drew Timme scored

23 points, Chet Holmgren added 22 and the host Bulldogs beat the Dons in the makeup of a Jan. 6 game postponed by COVID-19 issues.

Anton Watson had 11 points and Andrew Nembhard finished with 10 for Gonzaga (15-2, 4-0 West Coast Conference), which regained the No. 1 ranking Monday after Baylor lost twice last week.

No. 3 Arizona 85, Stanford 57: Oumar Ballo had 21 points and the visiting Wildcats dominated the Cardinal.

Benedict Mathurin and Pelle Larsson each scored 13 for the Wildcats (15-1, 5-0 Pac-12), who are off to their best start since a 21-0 run to begin the 2013-14 season. They overwhelmed a Cardinal team that beat then-No. 5 USC nine days earlier.

No. 9 UCLA 63, Utah 58:

Johnny Juzang scored a season-high 28 points and the Bruins outlasted the host Utes.

Jules Bernard added 14 points for the Bruins (12-2, 4-1 Pac-12), who had a difficult time shaking the last-place Utes even after a brilliant start.

No. 16 USC 61, Colorado 58: Chevez Goodwin scored all 14 of his points in the second half and grabbed 18 rebounds as the Trojans ended three years of frustration against the host Buffaloes.

Max Agbonkpolo added 11 points and went 3-for-4 at the free-throw line in the final 15 seconds for the Trojans (15-2, 5-2 Pac-12), who had dropped seven straight to the Buffaloes (12-5, 4-3).

No. 21 Providence 83, Georgetown 75: Ed Crowell scored 15 points on 7-for-7 shooting and Noah Horchler had 14 points

and seven rebounds to lead the host Friars past the Hoyas.

Al Durham added 15 points and Nate Watson scored 10 for the Friars (15-2, 5-1 Big East), who won for the 10th time in 11 games.

No. 25 UConn 75, Butler 56: Tyrese Martin scored 25 of his career-high 27 points in the second half and the visiting Huskies beat the Bulldogs for the second time this week.

Adama Sanogo added 15 points and Isaiah Whaley had 11 points and 10 rebounds for the Huskies (13-4, 4-2 Big East).

Air Force 69, UNLV 62: Ethan Taylor recorded 16 points and 10 rebounds to lead the host Falcons over the Runnin' Rebels.

A.J. Walker had 14 points for Air Force (9-7, 2-3 Mountain West Conference). Jeffrey Mills added 13 points.

Defending champion Osaka eliminated by No. 60 Anisimova

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Within an hour of her third-round loss at the Australian Open, defending champion Naomi Osaka had consigned it to the past.

It's part of her new resolution for 2022. No dwelling on what's already happened.

Osaka had two match points against 60th-ranked Amanda Anisimova in the third set Friday, and she missed two backhands.

Anisimova held serve to force a tiebreaker, which she dominated, and finished with an ace for a 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (5) comeback victory over the four-time major champion.

In doing so, the 20-year-old American ensured that the so-called final-before-the-final — a much-anticipated fourth-round showdown between Osaka and top-ranked Ash Barty — won't happen.

"I'm not sure if I'm going to have regrets about those two match points," Osaka said. "Like, I thought she played really well. But I can't really look in the past anymore, you know?"

Anisimova, who had lost her previous nine matches against top 20 players and had to rebound from a set and a break down to survive her first-round match, hit 46 winners to Osaka's 21.

Osaka, one of the most powerful hitters in the women's draw, praised Anisimova's service returns and described how the ball kept coming back at her so low and fast that she couldn't adjust her footwork to counter it.

"I just want to soak in this moment," said Anisimova, who took out Olympic champion Belinda Bencic in the second

round. "It was an amazing match. It was very close. You know, there were a bit of nerves, and to play Naomi for the first time ... it's unreal, honestly."

Anisimova won her first WTA hardcourt title at a tuneup tournament in Melbourne this month and is now on an eight-match winning streak — the longest of her career in main draw matches.

Barty is hoping to become the first Australian woman to win the championship here since 1978.

She advanced to the fourth round with a 6-2, 6-3 win over 30th-seeded Camila Giorgi and has only conceded eight games and spent less than three hours on court.

Osaka's loss means Victoria Azarenka remains the last woman to successfully defend an Australian Open singles title. She overpowered 15th-seeded Elina Svitolina 6-0, 6-2 to reach the fourth round at Melbourne Park for the first time since 2016.

The 2012 and 2013 titlist will next play French Open champion Barbora Krejickova, who rallied from a set and a break down to beat 26th-seeded Jelena Ostapenko 2-6, 6-4, 6-4.

Other fourth-round pairings that were set up Friday include fifth-seeded Maria Sakkari against 21st-seeded Jessica Pegula and No. 8 Paula Badosa against Madison Keys, who held off Wang Qiang 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (2) on Friday.

Rafael Nadal wrapped up the Day 5 program on Rod Laver Arena by beating Olympic silver medalist Karen Khachanov 6-3, 6-2, 3-6, 6-1 and continuing his bid for a men's record 21st Grand Slam title.

Streaking Penguins knock off Senators

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Evgeni Malkin and Sidney Crosby scored, and the streaking Pittsburgh Penguins held off the Ottawa Senators 6-4 on Thursday night.

Jake Guentzel's team-best 21st goal of the season was a much-needed empty-netter, as Pittsburgh nearly blew a four-goal lead in the third period.

Mike Matheson scored twice, Dominik Simon also had a goal and Tristan Jarry stopped 39 shots for the Penguins, who have won three straight and 14 of 16. Pittsburgh has won 10 in a row at home against Ottawa and has points in 13 consecutive home games versus the Senators dating to Feb. 13, 2013.

Bruins 4, Capitals 3: Charlie McAvoy scored a power-play goal with 45 seconds left in the third period, lifting host Boston over Washington.

David Pastrnak had two goals and Jake DeBrusk also scored for the Bruins, who cashed in on a late opportunity when Washington's Nic Dowd was called for tripping with just 2:34 left in the third. DeBrusk set up McAvoy for a wrist shot from the slot that gave the Bruins the lead for good after Washington rallied from deficits of 2-1 and 3-2.

Blue Jackets 2, Flyers 1: Host Philadelphia dropped its 10th straight game for the second time this season, the first team to accomplish that ignominious feat in over a decade.

The Flyers also lost 10 straight games from Nov. 18 to Dec. 18; the first skid cost coach Alain Vigneault his job after the first eight games. Interim coach Mike Yeo lost the final two games and, of course, all 10 in this streak.

The last team to lose 10 straight twice in one season was Colorado in 2010-11.

Golden Knights 4, Canadiens 3 (OT): Shea Theodore scored in overtime and host Vegas beat Montreal.

The Golden Knights salvaged the final game of an extended homestand after two road games were postponed due to COVID-19, closing out the stretch 3-3-2 before opening a rugged road trip Monday at Washington.

Avalanche 4, Kings 1: Kiefer Sherwood scored his first goal in nearly three years, Mikko Rantanen had a power-play goal and visiting Colorado stayed hot with a win over Los Angeles.

Nicolas Aube-Kubel and Devon Toews also scored for the Avalanche, who have won five straight and are 10-0-1 in their past 11.

Kraken 3, Sharks 2: Carson Soucy had the first two-goal game of his career, Calle Jarnkrok scored in the third period and host Seattle beat San Jose.

Seattle won consecutive games for the first time since Nov. 27 and 29, when the Kraken won at Florida and Buffalo.

Stars 5, Sabres 4: Tyler Seguin and Jason Robertson each scored twice, including consecutive goals late in the third period, to lift visiting Dallas over Buffalo.

Seguin tied it with 7:37 left on a power play, then set up Robertson's go-ahead goal with 3:32 remaining, also on a power play.

Panthers 6, Oilers 0: Sergei Bobrovsky made 40 saves for his first shutout of the season and visiting Florida beat ice-cold Edmonton.

Aleksander Barkov had two goals and an assist for the Panthers, who improved to 9-1-1 in their last 11 games.

Predators 5, Jets 2: Ryan Johansen and Mikael Granlund each scored a goal and assisted on another to lead host Nashville over Winnipeg.

Eeli Tolvanen, Luke Kunin and Tanner Jeannot also scored for Nashville, which halted a four-game skid. Roman Josi had two assists and Juuse Saros made 36 saves.