

US troops on alert for Europe deployment

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Thousands of U.S. troops are now on heightened alert for a possible NATO mission in Eastern Europe, but one potential obstacle stands in the way: All 30 alliance members must agree to the deployment.

The Pentagon said Monday that roughly 8,500 troops based in the United States are ready to mobilize on short notice should NATO activate its quick-reaction force.

“I want to stress, particularly with the NATO Response Force, it has not been activated,” Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters. “It is a NATO call to make, but we have contributions to that response force, as do other nations.”

Kirby’s comments made it clear that the Pentagon’s pref-

erence is that any large troop mobilizations from the U.S. to Eastern Europe be done in conjunction with the rest of NATO.

“Other nations are going to have to contribute as well,” he said.

That means pressure will be on the rest of the alliance, most notably Germany, to come to a quick consensus on moving forces for a reassurance mission inside eastern member countries should Russia launch a new invasion into Ukraine.

Germany, the economic powerhouse of Europe, is already at odds with some allies over its refusal to provide defensive weapons to Ukraine, which has received arms shipments from the U.S., the United Kingdom and the Baltic states.

Berlin also opposes threatening Russia with severe economic sanctions on Russian banks, which could have a ripple effect

on the German economy.

In addition, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has wavered on whether Germany will cancel Nord Stream 2, a pipeline for Russian gas that has yet to go into operation, if Moscow escalates the conflict in Ukraine.

But Germany and other allies could be put on the spot by the U.S. to ramp up NATO’s military presence in the East, where the Baltic states, Poland and Romania are looking for military reassurance.

For NATO, activating the force of 40,000 troops for a large-scale security mission in Europe is unprecedented. Established 20 years ago, the force includes high-readiness air, land, maritime and special operations units.

It’s never been used in response to a Russian threat. After Russia’s initial intervention in Ukraine in 2014, the NATO

Response Force sat on the sidelines while the U.S. and other allies acted on their own to reinforce the Baltic states.

Some security analysts have said failure to mobilize the response force a second time around would be a blow to alliance solidarity.

Putting the unit into action is at the discretion of NATO’s highest decision-making body, the North Atlantic Council, which is made up of leaders from all member states.

Once it is activated, the forces fall under the command of NATO’s supreme allied commander, currently U.S. Gen. Tod Wolters.

Given disagreements over how best to deal with Russia and its military buildup around Ukraine, unanimous agreement on mobilizing the force will be a test of alliance cohesion.

Ukraine urges calm, says Russian invasion not imminent

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine’s leaders sought Tuesday to reassure the nation that an invasion from neighboring Russia was not imminent, even as they acknowledged the threat is real and received a shipment of U.S. military equipment to shore up their defenses.

Moscow has denied it is planning an assault, but it has massed an estimated 100,000 troops near Ukraine in recent weeks and is holding military drills at multiple locations in Russia. That has led the United States and its NATO allies to rush to prepare for a possible war.

Several rounds of high-stakes diplomacy have failed to yield any breakthroughs, and tensions escalated further this week. NATO said it was bolstering its deterrence in the Baltic Sea region, and the U.S. ordered 8,500 troops on higher alert for potential de-

ployment to Europe as part of an alliance “response force” if necessary. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson also said he is prepared to send troops to protect NATO allies in Europe.

The U.S. and its allies have vowed to hit Russia with sanctions like never before if Moscow sends its military into Ukraine but they have provided few details, saying it’s best to keep President Vladimir Putin guessing.

The U.S. State Department has ordered the families of all American personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv to leave the country, and it said that nonessential embassy staff could leave. Britain said it, too, was withdrawing some diplomats and dependents from its embassy, and families of Canadian diplomatic staff also have been told to leave.

In Ukraine, however, authorities have sought to project calm in order not to desta-

bilize the situation and avoid panic — and many citizens have expressed skepticism that there will be an invasion soon.

In parliament, Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said that “as of today, there are no grounds to believe” that Russia is preparing to invade imminently, noting that its troops have not formed what he called a battle group that could force its way through the border.

“Don’t worry, sleep well,” he said. “No need to have your bags packed.”

Reznikov’s remarks follow multiple reassurances from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other officials. On Monday, Zelenskyy told the nation that the situation was “under control.”

In an interview aired late Monday, however, the defense minister acknowledged that “there are risky scenarios” that “are possible and probable in the future.”

S. Korea: N. Korea fires 2 more projectiles

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — A pair of projectiles fired by North Korea on Tuesday morning are presumed to be cruise missiles, a South Korean military official told Stars and Stripes soon after they were launched.

U.S. and South Korean intelligence agencies detected the projectiles, according to the military official, who spoke on the customary condition of anonymity. Further details, including flight distance and altitude, were not immediately available.

North Korea last fired a missile on Jan. 17 when the communist regime launched a pair

of guided missiles toward an island target off its eastern coast. Those launches were the fourth and fifth by Pyongyang so far this month, including one it claimed was a hypersonic missile.

Following the Jan. 17 test, the state-run Korean Central News Agency signaled it would “immediately” bolster its military program due to the United States’ “hostile moves.”

“All the facts clearly prove once again that the hostile policy toward [North Korea] will exist in the future, too, as long as there is the hostile entity of U.S. imperialism,” KCNA said in a Jan. 20 statement.

The United Nations Security Council sanctions North Korea and bans it from conduct-

ing ballistic missile tests, but not cruise missiles.

The Security Council convened last week after eight nations proposed to slap additional sanctions against five North Koreans suspected by the U.S. to have been contributing to the North’s “unlawful weapons programs.”

China and Russia, however, two permanent members of the Security Council, reportedly blocked the proposal behind the closed-door meeting on Jan. 21. The two countries previously campaigned to loosen existing sanctions in November, according to a draft of the resolution seen by multiple news agencies.

US military entrance stations dropping group exams

By ALEXANDER RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes

No matter what military service they join, hopeful recruits have shared one defining experience — the unusual, and for some, embarrassing group medical exams at military entrance processing stations.

But a new approach to screenings will consist of fewer exercises and will eliminate group exams, U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command said Monday.

Recruits will no longer be required to stand in their underwear among fellow military hopefuls, and instead will undergo a neuro-muscular-skeletal exam of just 10 exercises individually, it said.

The knee walk and knee fall are being eliminated, while other maneuvers will be combined or altered. This will allow recruits to proceed to follow-on stations without having to wait around for the

group, the statement said.

The old exam required enlistees of the same gender to perform 23 exercises in tandem and individually in front of their peers, while chief medical officers assessed muscular and skeletal readiness, the command said.

The changes have been driven by more focused and efficient examination techniques, U.S. Army Lt. Col. Kevin Cummings, MEPCOM command surgeon, said in the statement.

“We’ve progressed in our ability to evaluate physical function to the point that people standing around together isn’t necessary,” Cummings said. “If this method of screening was still effective, we would still do it because mission comes first. But it’s not as effective.”

One exam that will remain in a private, abbreviated form is the infamous “duck

walk,” which for many recruits is their first experience in the military.

Social media blogs and videos prepare applicants for the exam and explain what they can expect — even before swearing the oath of enlistment and boarding the bus to basic training. The move asks participants to walk in a crouched position, lifting their feet off the ground without standing up and rolling the foot heel-to-toe as smoothly as possible.

Officials said the maneuver still fits the proverbial bill and helps evaluate whether recruits have flat feet or other skeletal issues that could prevent them from “taking flight” and performing demanding physical tasks later in their military training.

The new exam will begin at select stations in the coming days, with a broad rollout following in February.

Carrier-landing mishap injures F-35C pilot, 6 sailors

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

An F-35 pilot is in stable condition after ejecting from the aircraft during a landing mishap on the deck of an aircraft carrier Monday in the South China Sea that injured six other sailors, the Navy said Monday.

The F-35C Lightning II fighter

jet, assigned to Carrier Air Wing 2, was landing on the USS Carl Vinson during routine flight operations, the Navy said in a statement. The pilot ejected and was recovered by a U.S. military helicopter.

Six other sailors were injured during the crash, said the Navy, which did not provide details on

how they were injured or where they were during the mishap.

“There were seven total Sailors injured; three Sailors required MEDEVAC to a medical treatment facility in Manila, Philippines, and four were treated by on-board medical personnel,” the Navy said. Three of those treated on board have been released.

The sailors who were evacuated are listed in stable condition, the Navy said.

The cause of the crash is under investigation, the Navy said.

The Carl Vinson and Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Groups began dual-carrier operations in the South China Sea on Sunday, according to a Navy news release.

Study to eye facial hair's effect on gas masks

By **CHAD GARLAND**
Stars and Stripes

The Navy and Marine Corps have until April to launch a study into how facial hair affects gas mask functionality.

As part of the study, the services must also identify potential alternatives for service members with beards, Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said in a memo detailing several diversity and inclusion efforts.

Del Toro's memo, issued in November, was the basis for a court filing Monday asking a judge to halt a lawsuit over Navy "forced shaving" policies that four sailors say violate their religious freedoms.

In the suit filed last April in federal court in Washington, D.C., the four petty officers say the Navy has been insisting that sailors on sea duty not be granted religious shaving waivers be-

cause "a beard supposedly 'reduces safe and effective wear and operation of protective equipment'" such as gas masks and respirators.

A federal judge had granted an urgent request by one of those sailors, an electrician's mate aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt, to temporarily block his command from forcing him to shave his beard.

In the latest filing, both sides have asked Judge Timothy James Kelly to halt the court proceedings until Del Toro's directives can be implemented, including requirements that the Navy and Marine Corps review and update uniform regulations and grooming standards.

The results of the gas mask study should be used to guide changes, Del Toro said in the memo.

The Army began requiring

frequent clean-shaves just before World War I, where chemical weapons would pose a serious threat. But the Navy didn't begin banning beards until 1985. In recent years, officials with several services have responded to calls for looser shaving standards by continuing to cite the possibility facial hair would prevent gas masks from functioning properly.

But Del Toro's memo has already forced the naval services to reconsider some facial hair policies. He gave them until next Monday to update grooming standards related to pseudo-folliculitis barbae — or razor bumps — a condition that causes inflammation on the face and neck when curly beard hair curves back into the skin after a shave.

The condition primarily affects Black men and is treata-

ble, the Navy has said, but it cited the fact that whiskers can hinder the effectiveness of breathing devices when it stopped issuing permanent shaving waivers for it in 2019.

The Navy secretary is now directing the services to make updates that "provide service members with relief from undue burdens as they deal with this medical condition."

The Marine Corps has already said its policy will change next week to make the skin condition no longer grounds on its own to boot Marines from the service or issue them reprimands.

The services also have until the end of February to study and propose changes to their uniform rules to better allow for racial, ethnic, religious or gender differences, Del Toro's memo says.

DOD: Vaccine mandate halt for federal workers does not impact troops

By **COREY DICKSTEIN**
AND **CAITLIN DOORNBOS**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A federal judge's order temporarily halting President Joe Biden's coronavirus mandate for federal workers does not impact military service members, Pentagon officials said Monday.

Defense Department lawyers believe the injunction ordered by Texas-based U.S. District Judge Jeffrey Brown on Friday applies only to civilian federal employees, including DOD civilian workers, according to a defense official who was not authorized to speak publicly and requested anonymity. Top Pentagon officials do not plan to alter their current "lawful orders" requiring the coronavirus shots for

troops, unless they are granted waivers for medical or religious purposes, the official said Monday.

A Pentagon spokesperson confirmed the Defense Department was not making any immediate changes for uniformed service members.

"We have not been informed of any changes to the [coronavirus] vaccination policy for service members," the Pentagon spokesperson wrote Monday in an email.

The new temporary injunction ordered Friday by Brown blocks the Defense Department from punishing unvaccinated civilian workers, though Pentagon spokespersons declined to comment citing pending litigation. The Justice Department plans to appeal the ruling.

Experts hope that omicron is global turning point on virus

Associated Press

World health officials are offering hope that the ebbing of the omicron wave could give way to a more manageable phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, even as they warn of difficult weeks ahead and the possibility of a more dangerous variant arising.

In the U.S., cases have crested and are dropping rapidly, following a pattern seen in Britain and South Africa, with researchers projecting a period of low spread in many countries by the end of March. Though U.S. deaths — now at 2,000 each day — are still rising, new hospital admissions have started to fall, and a drop in deaths is expected to follow.

The encouraging trends after two years of coronavirus misery have brought a noticeably hopeful tone from health experts. Rosy predictions have crumbled before, but this time they are backed by what could be called omicron's

silver lining: The highly contagious variant will leave behind high levels of immunity.

On Sunday, Dr. Anthony Fauci talked on ABC "This Week" about a "best-case scenario" where COVID-19 would fall to manageable levels. And on Monday, the World Health Organization issued a statement anticipating an end to the "emergency phase" of the pandemic this year and saying that the omicron variant "offers plausible hope for stabilization and normalization." Both Fauci and the WHO's Europe regional director, Dr. Hans Kluge, cautioned that new variants are likely to emerge, but with vaccination, new drug therapies and — during surges — testing and masks, the world could reach a less disruptive level of disease in which the virus is, as Fauci put it, "essentially integrated into the general respiratory infections that we have learned to live with."

Testimony begins in 3 Minn. officers' trial

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Prosecutors played video from a police body camera Tuesday as witness testimony resumed at the federal civil rights trial of three former Minneapolis police officers accused of violating George Floyd's civil rights as fellow Officer Derek Chauvin killed him.

Former officers J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao are broadly charged with depriving Floyd of his civil rights while acting under government authority. Floyd died on May 25, 2020, after Chauvin knelt on his neck for 9½ minutes as the 46-year-old Black man was facedown, handcuffed and gasping for air. Kueng knelt on Floyd's back, Lane held his legs and Thao kept bystanders from intervening in the videotaped killing that triggered worldwide

protests and a reexamination of racism and policing.

Prosecutors told U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson that they did not plan to play all of the video evidence in court, but want it available to the jury when they deliberate.

Prosecutor Samantha Trepel, who works for the Justice Department's civil rights division, said during opening statements Monday that the videos will show the three officers stood by as Chauvin "slowly killed George Floyd right in front of them" and told jurors that they "will ask you to hold these men accountable."

But it was Chauvin, the senior officer at the scene, who called "all of the shots," one defense attorney told jurors, adding that the Minneapolis Police Department did too little to train officers to intervene when a col-

league should be stopped.

Another officer's attorney focused on Floyd's struggle with police before they restrained him. And an attorney for the third officer said his client raised concerns about the restraint of Floyd, but was rebuffed.

Chauvin was convicted of murder and manslaughter last year in state court in the videotaped killing that triggered worldwide protests and a reexamination of racism and policing. He also pleaded guilty to a federal count of violating Floyd's civil rights.

Kueng, who is Black, Lane, who is white, and Thao, who is Hmong American, are all charged for failing to provide Floyd with medical care. Thao and Kueng face an additional count for failing to stop Chauvin, who is white. Both counts allege the officers' actions resulted in Floyd's death.

Police investigating Downing Street lockdown parties

Associated Press

LONDON — London police said Tuesday that they were investigating Downing Street lockdown parties in 2020 to determine if U.K. government officials violated coronavirus restrictions, putting further pressure on Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

The Metropolitan Police Service has launched an inquiry into "a number of events" at Downing Street because they met the force's criteria for investigating the "most serious and flagrant" breaches of COVID-19 rules, Commissioner Cressida Dick told the London Assembly, the capital's local government council.

Johnson is facing calls to resign amid reve-

lations that he and his staff attended a series of parties during the spring and winter of 2020 when most social gatherings were banned throughout England, forcing average citizens to miss weddings, funerals and birthdays as friends and relatives died alone in hospitals. The gatherings are already being investigated by senior civil servant Sue Gray whose report, expected this week, will be crucial in determining whether Johnson can remain in power.

The Cabinet Office said Gray's investigation would continue. But it wasn't immediately clear whether Gray would have to delay the announcement of her findings because of the police investigation.

Johnson has apologized for attending a party in the garden of his Downing Street offices in May 2020, but said he had considered it a work gathering that fell within the social distancing rules in place at the time.

In the latest revelation, ITV News reported late Monday that Johnson attended a birthday party in his Downing Street office and later hosted friends at his official residence upstairs in June 2020. His office denied that the gathering violated lockdown regulations, saying that the prime minister hosted a small number of family members outdoors, which was in line with rules at the time.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan welcomed the police investigation.

SAT is going digital amid shift in college admissions

Associated Press

The SAT exam will move from paper and pencil to a digital format, administrators announced Tuesday, saying the shift will boost its relevancy as more colleges make standardized tests optional for admission.

Test-takers will be allowed to use their own laptops or tablets but they'll still have to sit for the test at a monitored testing site or in school, not at home.

The format change is scheduled to roll out internationally next year and in the United States in 2024. It will also shave an hour from the current version, bringing the reading, writing and math assessment from three hours to about two.

"The digital SAT will be easier to take, easier to give and more relevant," said Priscilla Rodriguez, vice president of College Readiness Assessments at the New York City-based College Board, which administers the SAT and related PSAT. "We're not simply putting the current SAT on a digital platform. We're taking full advantage of what delivering an assessment digitally makes possible."

Once essential for college applications, scores from admission tests like the SAT and rival ACT carry less weight today as colleges and universities pay more attention to the sum of student achievements and activities throughout high school.

Amid criticism that the exams favor wealthy, white applicants and disadvantage minority and low-income students, an increasing number of schools have in recent years adopted test-optional policies, which let students decide whether to include scores with their applications.

The coronavirus pandemic accelerated the trend as testing sessions were canceled or inaccessible.

Nearly 80% of bachelor's degree-granting institutions are not requiring test scores from students applying for fall 2022, according to a December tally by the National Center for Fair & Open Testing, a watchdog group that opposes standardized testing.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Smoking fee leads to motel shooting

ID BOISE — A man upset with being charged a \$150 fee for smoking in his motel room fired multiple rounds from an assault-style rifle into the building before driving away, authorities in eastern Idaho said.

The shooting occurred at the Motel 6 in Rexburg and no one was injured, Rexburg Police Assistant Chief Gary Hagen said.

Hagen said the man was taken into custody later that day in Alpine, Wyo. His name wasn't released.

East Idaho News reported that the front of the building was hit multiple times, and that some bullets went through glass doors and through more walls inside.

Driver hits deer, watches as vehicle burns

VT ORWELL — A teenager survived after his car crashed into a deer and caught on fire in Orwell.

The crash happened when the deer ran into the path of the vehicle, state police said. The vehicle hit the animal, came to a stop and caught fire, police said.

The teen driver from Nassau, N.Y., was taken to Porter Hospital for minor injuries. The 2021 Subaru Forester was totaled.

Man arrested for DUI after hitting police car

SD SIOUX FALLS — A man was arrested for DUI after his vehicle struck a Sioux Falls Police car.

Police said an officer saw a

vehicle driving the wrong way and turned on his lights, waiting for the vehicle to stop.

Police said the officer's squad car was going about 5 mph when it was struck by the other vehicle that was estimated to be going about 25 mph.

The 37-year-old driver of the vehicle was arrested for DUI and other traffic violations.

Man gets jail for stealing van with body inside

MO CLAYTON — A Missouri man who stole a mortuary van with a body inside last year was sentenced last week to six years in prison.

Brian Schaake, 39, pleaded guilty in October to a felony count of stealing a motor vehicle. Prosecutors said Schaake and Christina Kalb, 31, took the van on Feb. 11 from a Quik Trip in north St. Louis County.

The van, belonging to the William Harris Funeral Home, was left unattended with the engine running, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported.

The two suspects were later arrested in Festus and the body was recovered.

No charges in death of jogger who fell

MA BOSTON — Prosecutors said there will be no criminal charges in the death of a Boston University professor who fell through a rusted staircase.

David Jones, 40, was out for a run when he plunged through a broken section of the staircase on Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority property at JFK/UMass Station in September, officials said. The unre-

paired stairs had been blocked off and unattended for more than a year, The Boston Globe reported.

Photos of the area taken after the fatal fall showed several stairs were missing.

Jones was an associate professor in the Department of Health Law, Policy and Management at Boston University's School of Public Health.

More than century-old bridge closed for safety

AL BIRMINGHAM — A more than 100-year-old bridge that links Birmingham's northern and southern sides was shut down to cars and trucks because of concerns over its safety.

Dedicated in 1919 to an Alabama regiment that fought in the "Rainbow Division" of World War I, the Richard Arrington Jr. Blvd. Bridge spans railroad tracks that bisect the city. But it has a weight limit of 3 tons that's sometimes ignored, and officials decided to close it to limit further damage from traffic.

Pedestrians, bicycles and scooters can continue using the bridge, the city said in an announcement.

A contractor is designing a replacement for the bridge.

Corrections officer impersonator arrested

FL MIAMI — An 18-year-old is accused of impersonating a corrections officer while talking to staff members at Miami Palmetto Senior High School.

He was wearing a Miami-Dade County Corrections and Rehabilitation Department

jacket and traffic vest, and had a Florida corrections badge with a photo that police said did not look like him, the report said.

Police said he had a handcuff case attached to his belt, along with a pouch on his hip in the shape of a firearm.

Officers detained him and found a pair of handcuffs, a thermometer shaped like a firearm, a pocket knife and two credit cards that did not belong to him.

He was arrested for impersonating an officer, trespassing on school property with a firearm, unlawfully possessing a stolen credit or debit card, burglary, and unlawful use of a police badge.

Woman sentenced in elder fraud conspiracy

NV LAS VEGAS — A 38-year-old Las Vegas woman was sentenced to more than eight years in federal prison after she was convicted in New York in an elder fraud conspiracy targeting about 7,500 victims and generating about \$10 million in proceeds.

Federal prosecutors said Romana Leyva was a leader of a conspiracy that exploited elderly victims by remotely accessing their computers and convincing them to pay for computer services.

Leyva pleaded guilty in June to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and conspiracy to intentionally damage victims' computers.

In addition to the 100-month prison sentence, she was ordered to forfeit nearly \$4.7 million and pay more than \$2.7 million in restitution.

— From wire reports



Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting World, National and Military News

Beijing showcasing new hockey talent

Associated Press

The disappointment of the NHL not participating in the 2022 Winter Olympics quickly turned to excitement for a handful of U.S. players at the world junior championship.

Matty Beniers, Jake Sanderson and Brock Faber were together in Red Deer, Alberta, when USA Hockey's John Vanbiesbrouck asked them to go to Beijing.

"I was kind of blown out of my shoes," Beniers said.

All three said yes. While Connor McDavid, Auston Matthews and Nathan MacKinnon will not get the chance to play in their first Olympics, the men's hockey tournament in Beijing could be a showcase for the next generation of talent, with 2021 top pick Owen Power expected to suit up for Canada and Beniers, Sanderson and Faber among eight U.S. players under the age of 21.

"NHL players won't be there, but it's still going to be some pretty good hockey and it'll be really fun," Sanderson said. "There's going to be really good talent there. To play with Matty and Brock Faber and (goalie) Drew Comness, I'm super excited."

The precedent is there for the youngest players to be among the best at the Olympics.

When the NHL decided not to send players to Pyeongchang in 2018, it gave Russian sniper Kirill Kaprizov, Finnish defenseman Miro Heiskanen and winger Eeli Tolvanen, and American forwards Troy Terry, Ryan Donato and Jordan Greenway opportunities to stand out. Kaprizov and Tolvanen were the second- and third-leading scorers in that tournament, while Donato led the U.S. in goals and Terry in assists.

While Russia, Finland and

other European teams are going with mostly older rosters from professional leagues, the U.S. figured the kids are all right: 15 of the 25 players named to the team are currently in college, including 13 who have already been drafted by an NHL team.

Vanbiesbrouck said the young players will have an immediate impact on the team. Columbus Blue Jackets president of hockey operations John Davidson, who broadcasted five Olympics, figures the next step is the NHL.

"You never know: They could be here next year or the following year," Davidson said. "This is a stage for them."

It's also something of a do-over after the world juniors were canceled midstream because of virus concerns. That tournament was shut down roughly a week after the NHL withdrew from Beijing, so the opportunity snatched away became more

motivation for Beniers, Sanderson, Faber and Comness to commit to the Olympics.

Participating in 2018 did wonders for the likes of Terry, Greenway and Kaprizov. Terry leads the Anaheim Ducks in goals and points this season, while Kaprizov is teammates with Greenway on the Wild and is tops for Minnesota in scoring.

For 20-year-old Brendan Brisson, the performances of Terry, Greenway and Donato in Pyeongchang stick out in large part because they helped U.S. management learn to trust college players.

"I loved watching last time, the U.S., seeing those college guys have success," Brisson said. "They led in goals and assists and played a really big role on their team, so it's just something that we have to work towards and maybe we can be like that in Beijing."

Yandle ties record but Flyers lose 12th straight

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Keith Yandle tied the NHL record for consecutive games played with 964, but the Philadelphia Flyers tied a franchise record with their 12th straight winless game, losing 3-1 to the Dallas Stars on Monday night.

Jacob Peterson scored the go-ahead goal with 3:25 left and Joe Pavelski added an empty-netter to seal the win.

The Flyers have lost all 12 games over that span, matching a mark for futility set during the 1998-99 season when they lost eight games and tied four over a 12-game stretch. There are no ties to save them from this indignity.

Avalanche 2, Blackhawks 0: Nazem Kadri and Mikko Rantanen scored, Pavel Francouz made 23 saves for his third career shutout and host Colorado blanked Chicago to extend its

franchise-record home winning streak to 16 games.

It was the seventh straight victory overall for the Avalanche, who tied the 1976 Boston Bruins for the fifth-longest home winning streak in NHL history.

Rangers 3, Kings 2 (SO): Adam Fox scored the deciding goal in the sixth round of a shootout and host New York beat Los Angeles for its ninth win in 12 games.

Chris Kreider got his NHL-leading 30th goal, Barclay Goodrow also scored and Artemi Panarin had two assists as the Rangers won their fifth straight at home. Igor Shesterkin stopped 34 shots to pick up his 20th win.

The Kings' Anze Kopitar and Panarin scored in the third round of the tiebreaker, and Kings rookie Quanton Byfield and New York's Alexis Lafre-

niere converted in the fifth round. After Shesterkin denied Arthur Kaliyev in the sixth round, Fox roofed a slick backhand that stuck in the net to win it.

Golden Knights 1, Capitals 0: Robin Lehner made 34 saves for his first shutout of the season, backstopping visiting Vegas to a victory over Washington.

Making his sixth consecutive start, Lehner recorded his first shutout since April 16 and the 17th of his NHL career. The Capitals were shut out for the first time this season in their 43rd game.

Ducks 5, Bruins 3: Troy Terry scored his team-leading 23rd goal, Ryan Getzlaf had a goal and set up another, and visiting Anaheim cooled off Boston.

Isac Lundestrom, Derek Grant and Greg Pateryn also scored for the Ducks, who won for the fourth time in 11 games.

John Gibson made 23 saves and Hampus Lindholm had three assists.

Wild 8, Canadiens 2: Connor Dewar got his first career goal and added an assist when Nico Sturm scored 22 seconds later, helping host Minnesota match its franchise record for goals.

Jared Spurgeon, Marcus Foligno, Mats Zuccarello, Matt Boldy, Jordie Benn and Kevin Fiala also scored as the Wild dominated NHL-worst Montreal to ease Cam Talbot's return to the net after an injury.

Flames 7, Blues 1: Matthew Tkachuk had a career-high five assists, Johnny Gaudreau had a goal and three assists, and host Calgary routed St. Louis.

Nikita Zadorov, Chris Tanev, Elias Lindholm, Sean Monahan, Blake Coleman and Adam Ruzicka also scored for the Flames (19-12-6), who won for just the second time in seven games.

NBA-best Suns rally past Jazz as Paul puts up 27

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Devin Booker scored 33 points, Chris Paul had 15 of his season-high 27 points in the fourth quarter, and the Phoenix Suns rallied for a 115-109 win over the short-handed Utah Jazz on Monday night.

Paul just missed a triple-double with 14 assists and nine rebounds. The Suns improved their NBA-best record to 37-9, matching the 2006-07 team for the best start in franchise history.

The Jazz led 95-91 early in the fourth, but Phoenix responded with a 14-2 run to take control. Paul made his first five shots of the period, including two three-pointers.

Utah was missing All-Stars Donovan Mitchell, Rudy Gobert and Mike Conley. The Jazz lost for the eighth time in 11 games. Jordan Clarkson led them with 22 points.

Cavaliers 95, Knicks 93: Kevin Love scored 20 points — nine straight in a three-point barrage in just over a minute — and Darius Garland had 12 assists as host Cleveland survived a late rally by New York.

Down by 15 in the fourth quarter, the Knicks made it close, but Julius Randle's 38-foot three-pointer at the buzzer was way short.

RJ Barrett scored 24 points and Randle 18 for New York.

Bulls 111, Thunder 110: Nicola Vučević had 26 points and 15 rebounds, and Chicago withstood a fierce rally to win at Oklahoma City.

The Bulls led by 28 points in the third quarter, but the Thunder had a chance to tie it in the closing seconds. Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander missed a three-pointer that would have evened the score with 2.3 seconds to play.

Gilgeous-Alexander had 31 points and 10 assists, and Lu Dort added 16 points for Oklahoma City.

Pelicans 117, Pacers 113: Devonte Graham scored 25 points, Josh Hart had 22 points and 10 rebounds, and host New Orleans beat Indiana.

Graham went 5-for-9 from three-point range on a night when the rest of his team missed 20 of 21 from deep. Jonas Valanciunas had 16 points, 12 rebounds and six assists for the Pelicans.

Pacers rookie Duane Washington Jr. hit a career-best seven shots (on 12 attempts) from deep for a career-high 21 points.

Caris LeVert scored 19 and Chris Duarte 14 for Indiana.

Kansas downs Texas Tech in double overtime

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Ochai Agbaji scored a career-high 37 points to help No. 5 Kansas avenge its only conference loss of the season with a 94-91 double overtime win over No. 13 Texas Tech on Monday night.

Agbaji outdueled Bryson Williams, who poured in 33 points for Tech. Agbaji, the reigning co-Big 12 Player of the Week, had seven of the Jayhawks' eight made three-pointers. He had 24 points in the second half and two overtimes.

Kansas led by one in the second overtime when Williams banked in a three-pointer. KJ Adams tipped in a miss to tie the game at 91 with 1:39 left. Jalen Wilson gave the Jayhawks (17-2, 6-1 Big 12) the lead, hitting the second of two free throws 21 seconds later.

After both teams went scoreless over the next 50 seconds, Christian Braun hit two free throws with 10.1 seconds remaining to make it a 94-91. Terrence Shannon missed a three-pointer that would have tied it a few seconds later.

Braun added 15 points for Kansas, which also got 13 from David McCormack.

The Red Raiders (15-3, 5-3) got 17 points from Kevin Obanor and 15 from Davion Warren.

"It was kind of like our game Saturday (when KU overcame a 17-point second-half deficit to beat Kansas State) and the Chiefs game," Agbaji said. "When we went to overtime, I thought (the Kansas City Chiefs) won at all costs. We have to do the same thing. That was so much fun."

"It was a great win," Kansas coach Bill Self said. "We played a terrific team that played terrific. We didn't play great, but we played good. We had one guy go off."

"I think we can play better, but I don't know if an individual can play better. I told him that I don't ever remember us having a player play better than that."

No. 15 Southern California 78, Arizona State 56: Drew Peterson scored 16 points and the host Trojans shook off a slow start to defeat the Sun Devils.

Southern California (17-2, 7-2 Pac-12), playing its third game in five days, fell behind by 12 points midway through the first half. The Trojans missed 15 of their first 18 and committed eight turnovers in the first 14 minutes before turning things around.

USC closed the first half on a 21-2 run to take a 31-24 lead at halftime.

US downhill ski racer Johnson pulls out of Olympics with injury

Associated Press

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy — The United States team for next month's Olympics lost one of its top medal prospects Tuesday when downhill racer Breezy Johnson said an injury will force her to miss the Beijing Games.

Johnson placed second behind Olympic champion Sofia Goggia in each of the three World Cup downhills she started this season, then crashed in training runs before two races in January.

"I have to announce that I have unfortunately injured my knee and must withdraw from the Olympics," Johnson said on her Instagram account.

The 26-year-old racer crashed in training in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, last week, one week after skipping a downhill

in Austria to let a cut and bruised knee heal.

Johnson wrote that in Cortina she "immediately felt a massive crack in my knee" and had dislodged cartilage.

"I was given the option to try to compete on it. But I don't think that that is realistic or smart," she said.

Johnson placed seventh in the downhill at the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics.

"It was the pleasure of my life to represent @teamusa at the Games in 2018," Johnson said. "And all I have wanted ever since was to come back, stronger, faster, to win a gold medal."

The women's downhill is scheduled for Feb. 15. Goggia, who has won four of five World Cup races, is also an uncertain starter after two crashes in January.

Nadal fends off Canada's Shapovalov

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — With another Australian Open semifinal spot secured after a four-hour, five-set victory, Rafael Nadal looked toward his support team in Rod Laver Arena and nodded his head.

It was like he was just confirming the plan: Five wins down, two to go in his bid for a men's record 21st major title.

On the other side of the net, 14th-seeded Denis Shapovalov, of Canada, broke his racket on the hard blue court after a frustrating 6-3, 6-4, 4-6, 3-6, 6-3 loss to Nadal, who later acknowledged he felt "destroyed" physically on a hot Tuesday afternoon.

There were plenty of momentum-shifting moments, including Nadal needing attention for a stomach ailment in the third and fourth sets after dominating the first two.

Shapovalov openly complained to chair umpire Carlos Bernardes during the quarterfinal match about Nadal getting longer breaks than players usually are entitled to, and taking

too long between points.

He took a few shots at Nadal in his post-match news conference, too, saying he's "100%" convinced the 35-year-old Spaniard receives special treatment.

At a tournament where he's clinched the title only once (2009) and had lost seven of his previous 13 quarterfinals — by far his worst conversion rate at any of the four major tournaments — Nadal looked vulnerable in the third and fourth sets.

But following a seven-minute break — when Nadal left the court and went to the locker room — between the last point of the fourth set and his first serve in the fifth, he recovered sufficiently to save a break point with an ace, hold serve and then break Shapovalov for a 2-0 lead.

"I don't know, was a little bit of miracle," Nadal said of his revival. "I was destroyed honestly physically. But my serve worked well, and for me, every game that I was winning with my serve was a victory, no?"

He rejected any assertion

that he gets any special treatment from umpires or referees, and added that Shapovalov, 22, was young and said he would get over it.

"I honestly feel sorry for him. I think he played a great match for a long time," Nadal said. "Of course is tough to accept to lose a match like this, especially after I was feeling destroyed and probably he felt that, and then I was able to manage to win.

"I wish him all the very best ... probably he will understand later on after he thinks the proper way that probably he was not right today."

Nadal shares the men's record of 20 major singles titles with Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic, and he's got an inside run with the absence of his long-time rivals at Melbourne Park. Federer continues to recover from knee surgery, and Djokovic was deported for failing to meet Australia's strict COVID-19 vaccination requirements.

The women's quarterfinals were over in straight sets, with 2017 U.S. Open runner-up Ma-

dison Keys beating French Open champion Barbora Krejčíková 6-3, 6-2 in the Day 9 opener on Rod Laver Arena and top-ranked Ash Barty advancing with a 6-2, 6-0 win over No. 21 Jessica Pegula.

Barty is back in the semifinals at Melbourne Park for the second time in three years; Keys is back seven years after losing her first Grand Slam semifinal to Serena Williams in Australia.

Barty, who won the Wimbledon title last year and the French Open in 2019, wants to become the first Australian woman to win the Australian Open singles title since 1978. In her best run to date, she lost in the 2020 semifinals to eventual champion Sofia Kenin.

"I've grown as a person. I've grown as a player," Barty said. "I feel like I'm a more complete player."

Keys continued her resurgent 2022 season, extending her winning streak to 10 matches, including a title run in a tuneup event, and 11 overall for the year.

MLB players withdraw demand for free agency shift

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Locked-out Major League Baseball players removed the first of three major obstacles to a labor contract, withdrawing their proposal for more liberalized free agency when the sides met face-to-face Monday for the first time since the management lockout began Dec. 1.

During a bargaining session that lasted a little more than two hours at the Midtown Manhattan office of the Major League Baseball Players' Association, the union also modified its revenue-sharing proposal, asking the amount shifted from big markets to smaller ones be cut by what it said was \$30 million, a

figure management disputed. Players earlier asked for a \$100 million reduction.

Management is adamant not to decrease revenue sharing. Clubs also maintain they will not budge on salary arbitration eligibility, which players want to restore to its pre-1987 level when it was two years of major league service.

Another meeting in the contentious talks was scheduled for Tuesday, the first consecutive sessions since the bargaining collapse last fall that led to baseball's ninth work stoppage, its first since 1995.

Neither side commented publicly on the proposal, a response to management's offer on Jan.

13 — made during an online session that was the first bargaining over core economics after a 42-day break. Details of the union's proposal were discussed by two people familiar with the negotiations who spoke on the condition of anonymity because no public statements were authorized.

While there was significant movement in one of three areas clubs claim are both key to a deal and non-negotiable, the Feb. 16 start of spring training remains threatened.

Opening day is scheduled for March 31, and a deal would have to be reached by late February or early March for an on-time start, given the need for players

to go through COVID-19 protocols and then have at least three weeks of training and some exhibition games.

Free agent eligibility has been six years of service since 1976. Players proposed last summer that it be lowered gradually by the 2025-26 offseason to six years of service or five years of service and age 29.5, whichever comes earlier.

Players withdrew that proposal but still ask that service time can be credited for special accomplishments, such as finishing among the top five in Rookie of the Year voting or being picked for a first- or second-team all-MLB team.