

## Concerns grow on Navy's \$13B carrier

*Bloomberg News*

The combat system for the Navy's newest and costliest warship, the \$13 billion USS Gerald R. Ford, "has yet to demonstrate that it can effectively" defend the aircraft carrier from anti-ship missiles and other threats, according to a new assessment by the Pentagon's testing office.

Mixed performance by missile interceptors, radar and data dissemination systems on a testing vessel limited the ability to destroy replicas of incoming weapons even though sensor systems "satisfactorily detected, tracked and engaged the targets," according to the report obtained by Bloomberg News in advance of its release.

The carrier built by Huntington Ingalls Industries is still dogged as well by the "poor or unknown reliability" of its aircraft launch and recovery systems, according to the five-page report. And recent shock tests to assess the vulnerability of key systems "identified several design shortfalls not previously discovered," the testing office said. It said "the Navy has already identified several survivability" opportunities to improve the four-carrier class of ships "against underwater threat engagements."

The persistent shortcomings undercut the Navy's hope to showcase the Ford as the

first in a new class of nuclear-powered carriers that can project U.S. power globally and are more combat-capable, reliable and affordable to operate than the Nimitz class it's replacing.

The latest assessment raises new questions for Pentagon officials and lawmakers about how fully the Navy will demonstrate improvements before the Ford is deployed in mid-September on its first patrol with aircraft and escort vessels.

The report, which contains unclassified and "controlled unclassified" information and has been circulated to the Navy, found that "only a limited assessment" of the combat system's effectiveness is possible at this point. It said Nickolas Guertin, the new head of the testing office, plans to send Congress an interim report on the Ford's self-defense capabilities by Sept. 30.

The Naval Sea Systems Command said in a statement that it "welcomed the opportunity to review and provide comment on" the assessment draft.

"Overall," it said, recent post-delivery testing of the Ford "indicate(s) the risk of system reliability impacting mission accomplishment is decreasing."

Answering concerns about the new aircraft carrier's defense system — with its

dual-band radar, data fusion and other advanced capabilities — takes on added urgency as China increases its inventory of patrol boats, frigates, cruisers and conventional submarines with advanced anti-ship cruise missiles.

The Navy's three tests so far of the Ford's self-defense system on board a specialized vessel designed to evaluate performance were "not adequate to assess the combat system's capability against supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles and subsonic maneuvering missiles, and there were no future test events planned against threats that could provide additional data," according to the testing office.

The vessel's Gatling gun-like system "experienced numerous reliability failures that in several cases prevented the system from executing its mission," the test office said.

After a series of additional evaluations and exercises with the Ford's air wing, the plan is for the carrier to "to visit multiple theaters of operation with multiple allies" by the end of summer, Rear Adm. James Downey, the Navy's program executive officer for aircraft carriers, told reporters Friday.

He said the Navy is confident in the vessel's combat systems.

## Sexual harassment becoming a crime under UCMJ

**By NIKKI WENTLING**

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden was to sign an executive order Wednesday to make sexual harassment a crime under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

The executive order will also "strengthen the military's response" to domestic violence and instances of service members sharing "intimate visual images" without permission, the White House said. The order hadn't been publicly released as of Wednesday morning, and other details of its contents, such as the potential penalties for these offenses, are not known.

The action comes after Congress approved significant changes in December to how the military prosecutes major crimes, including rape and sexual assault. Under

the new law, commanders will be removed from prosecution decisions for those cases. Instead, each military branch will establish a new Office of Special Trial to oversee those cases. It will be independent of the chain of command.

The new law also addresses sexual harassment. Lawmakers moved to make sexual harassment a crime under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and allegations of harassment must be reviewed by independent investigators. How the executive order differs from the new law were unclear Wednesday morning.

A renewed effort toward military justice reform was incited by the killing of Spc. Vanessa Guillen in 2020. Guillen, a 20-year-old small arms repairer stationed at Fort Hood in Texas, was killed by another sol-

dier. Guillen's family has said she faced sexual harassment on the base but was too afraid to report it.

Afterward, female service members and veterans used the hashtag #IamVanessaGuillen to share their own stories of sexual harassment and assault while serving in the military. Lawmakers and advocates called for change to the military's handling of sexual harassment and assaults, describing the moment as a "reckoning" against a scourge of sexual violence in the armed forces.

An estimated one in four women and one in 16 men experience sexual harassment within the Defense Department, according to a study last year by Rand Corp., a non-profit think tank. One in 16 women and one in 143 men experience sexual assault.

# US gives written reply to Russian demands

*The Washington Post*

MOSCOW — The United States on Wednesday delivered written responses to Russia's demands for security guarantees over NATO expansion and activities in Eastern Europe, as senior government representatives of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine met in Paris in a bid to revive the stalled Ukraine peace process.

The responses, which the U.S. ambassador to Russia sent to Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "sets out a serious diplomatic path forward, should Russia choose it," Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters. The document also lays out concerns "about Russia's actions that undermine our security" and it offers "our own proposals for areas where we may be able to find common ground," he added.

America's written response

included proposals for improving "reciprocal transparency" between Russia and the West regarding "force posture in Ukraine" and military exercises conducted in the region, Blinken said. It also includes proposals addressing the placement of missile systems in Europe and arms control, such as "our interest in a follow-on agreement to the New START treaty that covers all nuclear weapons," he said.

The Biden administration recently agreed to extend New START until February 2026.

The document, Blinken said, "reiterates what we've said publicly for many weeks, and in a sense for many years: that we will uphold the principles of NATO's open door, and that's ... a commitment that we're bound to."

He noted that the responses "were fully coordinated with Ukraine and our European allies

and partners," and that their recommendations were "incorporated ... into the final version delivered to Moscow."

"NATO's door is open, remains open, and that is our commitment," he said.

NATO is expected to deliver the Russians a list of written responses of its own.

Blinken said that NATO's response "fully reinforces ours" and that "there's no daylight among the United States and our allies and partners on these matters."

The U.S. and NATO proposals will fall short of demands Russia has made to bar Ukraine and Georgia from ever joining NATO and dramatically scale back the military alliance's presence in Eastern Europe.

Blinken said he expects to speak with his counterpart, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in the coming days —

and that in the meantime, he hopes the Russians keep the written proposals private.

According to analysts, Russia's military escalation near Ukraine's borders is moving into a more advanced stage. Lavrov warned Wednesday that Moscow "would not sit idly by" as the West supplies Kyiv with lethal weapons, after Ukraine took delivery Tuesday of 79 tons of arms, including U.S. antitank missiles, intended for self-defense.

Speaking to the State Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament, Lavrov said: "It would suffice to mention the increasingly provocative exercises held near our borders, the drawing of the Kyiv regime into the NATO orbit, its supply with lethal weapons, and the push for its direct provocations against the Russian Federation," according to an official transcript of his remarks.

## Navy plans to recover F-35 from South China Sea

BY ALEX WILSON

*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. Navy is planning to recover an F-35C stealth fighter that fell into the South China Sea after crash-landing on the USS Carl Vinson earlier this week, according to a Navy official.

The incident is the fifth in a series of Class-A mishaps involving the Carl Vinson's aircraft contingent, Carrier Air Wing 2, in recent months.

The F-35C Lightning II was attempting to land aboard the aircraft carrier during routine flight operations on Monday. The jet struck the flight deck before falling into the water, 7th Fleet spokeswoman Cmdr. Hayley Sims told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday.

"The U.S. Navy is making recovery operations arrangements for the F-35 aircraft to be recovered, but I don't have any details past that," she said.

The pilot ejected and was picked up by a rescue helicopter, the Navy said Monday. Six other sailors were injured in the crash. Three

were flown to a hospital in Manila, the Philippines; the remaining four were treated aboard the Carl Vinson.

All seven were in stable condition Wednesday afternoon, Sims said.

The cause of the crash is still under investigation, and no additional details were immediately available, Sims said. The "C" variant of the fifth-generation fighter is configured for carrier landings and costs approximately \$103 million per aircraft, according to manufacturer Lockheed Martin.

The Carl Vinson was taking part in a dual-carrier training operation that began Sunday and included the USS Abraham Lincoln and their respective carrier strike groups.

Sims verified that four Class A mishaps involving aircraft assigned to the carrier occurred between Nov. 22 and Dec. 31. The Navy defines a Class A mishap as either involving loss of life or permanent disability, or the complete loss of an aircraft or property damage of at least \$2.5 million.

The first mishap occurred Nov. 22, when an

F/A-18E Super Hornet's starboard engine caught fire mid-flight. The fighter jet landed safely, and no one was injured, according to the Naval Safety Center.

Two days later, an MH-60R Seahawk's dipping sonar equipment "unexpectedly detached" from the helicopter during an anti-submarine warfare training exercise, according to a Dec. 2 report from Navy Times.

On Nov. 29, another Super Hornet suffered a system failure while airborne. The aircraft was recovered safely without injuries, but subsequent inspections revealed what appeared to be Class A damage to the fighter's structure, according to the Naval Safety Center.

Two days later, a CMV-22B Osprey tiltrotor aircraft's starboard engine caught fire on the Carl Vinson's flight deck. No injuries were reported.

All five incidents remain under investigation, said Sims, who couldn't "speak to any pattern or any kind of speculation" on them until the investigations are concluded.

# Vaccination booster drive faltering in US

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The COVID-19 booster drive in the United States is losing steam, worrying health experts who have pleaded with Americans to get an extra shot to shore up their protection against the highly contagious omicron variant.

Just 40% of fully vaccinated Americans have received a booster dose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And the average number of booster shots dispensed per day in the U.S. has plummeted from a peak of 1 million in early December to about 490,000 as of last week.

Also, a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that Americans are more likely to see the initial vaccinations — rather than a booster — as essential.

“It’s clear that the booster effort is falling short,” said Jason Schwartz, a vaccine policy expert at Yale University.

Overall, the U.S. vaccination campaign has been sluggish. More than 13 months after it began, just 63% of Americans, or 210 million people, are fully vaccinated with the initial rounds of shots. Mandates that could raise those numbers have been hobbled by legal challenges.

Vaccination numbers are stagnant in states such as Wyoming, Idaho, Mississippi and Alabama, which have been hovering below 50%.

In Wyoming, 44% are fully vaccinated, up just slightly from 41% in September. To boost numbers, the state has been running TV ads with health care workers giving grim accounts of unvaccinated people

struggling with COVID-19.

“Certainly we would like to see higher rates. But it would be wrong for anyone to think that the rates we have are due to lack of effort,” Wyoming Health Department spokeswoman Kim Deti said Tuesday.

And in neighboring Idaho, which also has one of the country’s lowest vaccination rates, the number of people getting their first vaccine dose has remained under 1,000 almost every day this year and the number getting booster shots is also declining. Still, officials have said they won’t give up.

“I don’t like to use the word ‘resigned,’” said Elke Shaw-Tulloch, administrator of the Idaho Division of Public Health. “I think we just need to keep saying it over and over again, how important it is.”

## San Jose OKs 1st US insurance law for gun owners

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — A California city voted Tuesday night to require gun owners to carry liability insurance in what’s believed to be the first measure of its kind in the United States.

The San Jose City Council overwhelmingly approved the measure despite opposition from gun owners who said it would violate their Second Amendment rights and promised to sue.

The Silicon Valley city of about 1 million followed a trend of other Democratic-led cities that have sought to rein in violence through stricter rules. But while similar laws have been proposed, San Jose is the

first city to pass one, according to Brady United, a national nonprofit that advocates against gun violence.

Council members said it was a step toward dealing with gun violence that Councilman Sergio Jimenez called “a scourge on our society.”

Having liability insurance would encourage people in the 55,000 households in San Jose who legally own at least one registered gun to have gun safes, install trigger locks and take gun safety classes, Mayor Sam Liccardo said.

The liability insurance would cover losses or damages resulting from any accidental use of the firearm, including death, in-

jury or property damage, according to the ordinance. If a gun is stolen or lost, the owner of the firearm would be considered liable until the theft or loss is reported to authorities.

Gun owners who don’t have insurance, however, won’t lose their guns or face any criminal charges, the mayor said.

The council also voted to require gun owners to pay an estimated \$25 fee, which would be collected by a yet-to-be-named nonprofit and doled out to community groups to be used for firearm safety education and training, suicide prevention, anti-domestic violence efforts and mental health services.

## Pelosi to seek reelection with Dem majority at risk

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced Tuesday that she will seek reelection, ending speculation that she would retire as Democrats face the threat of losing control of Congress in the 2022 midterms.

“While we have made progress, much more needs to be done to improve people’s lives,” the 81-year-old Pelosi said in an online video.

“This election is crucial. Nothing less is at stake than our democracy,” she added.

By announcing she would seek a 19th term, Pelosi avoids becoming a lame duck in a year when Democrats are clinging to a fragile majority in the House and the party is under

pressure to raise vast sums of money to defend control of Congress.

Her decision to remain in the chamber follows announcements by 29 House Democrats that they won’t seek reelection this year.

The party that controls the White House typically loses seats in Congress in midterm elections, and Democrats are defending both chambers at a time when President Joe Biden’s approval rating has been slipping.

“Our democracy is at risk because of assaults on the truth, assault on the U.S. Capitol and the state-by-state assault on voting rights,” she added.

The San Francisco Democrat made histo-

ry 15 years ago when she became the first female speaker of the House. She has served in Congress since 1987.

Earlier this month in an interview with The Associated Press, Pelosi only hinted at another run, saying she “may” seek reelection.

In a Twitter post, California Republican Kevin Kiley, a congressional candidate and state assemblyman, said Pelosi’s announcement was “all the more reason we need Republicans in Congress who will fight.”

Pelosi will be an overwhelming favorite in her heavily Democratic district — she won with 78% of the vote in 2020. But she’s also running at a time when her hometown has been criticized for squalor and crime.



# Kurds recapture prison held by ISIS in Syria

*Associated Press*

BEIRUT — U.S.-backed Kurdish-led forces said they wrestled control of the last section of a prison controlled by Islamic State militants and freed a number of child detainees used as human shields. It ended a weeklong assault by the extremists on one of the largest detention facilities in Syria.

The attack was the biggest by ISIS since the fall of the group's "caliphate" in 2019 and came as the militants staged a number of deadly attacks in Syria and Iraq that stoked fears they may be staging a comeback.

In the week of clashes, dozens from both sides have been killed, the U.S.-led coalition has carried out nearly a dozen airstrikes and thousands of civilians living nearby have been displaced.

"The whole prison is now under control," said Farhad Shami,

a spokesman for the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces. "The operation today was on the cells where child detainees were held. We were able to surround a number of terrorists who had taken them as shields and we killed them."

Shami said the force was then able to enter the cells and the remaining militants surrendered. A large number of children were freed, he said, but he had no specific number.

Shami said about 3,000 inmates have surrendered.

The militants had used child detainees as human shields, slowing down the effort to retake the facility located in the northeastern city of Hassakeh, Kurdish officials said.

After breaking into the prison late Thursday, the militants were joined by others rioting inside the facility.

Around 200 armed militants were believed to be holed up in the northern wing at one end of the prison complex, holding hostages from among the prison staff.

The Syria prison complex, known as al-Sinaa or Gweiran prison, houses more than 3,000 inmates, including around 600 minors.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 124 ISIS militants, 50 fighters with the Kurdish-led forces and seven civilians were killed in the weeklong attack that extended outside the walls of the prison into residential areas. Thousands of civilians have been displaced.

The assault began Thursday just hours before another brazen attack on military troops in neighboring Iraq. Together, they signaled a new spike in violence by emboldened militants who had for months been carrying out low-

level assaults, largely on security patrols, checkpoints and other mobile targets.

Eleven Iraqi soldiers were killed in their sleep after gunmen attacked an army barracks in Diyala province on Friday. It was the deadliest attack in months to target Iraq's military and was blamed on ISIS.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces said earlier Wednesday that it had freed 23 of its servicemen held hostage by ISIS militants. Later it said inmates continued to surrender.

The SDF, backed by U.S.-led coalition Bradley Fighting Vehicles and air support, had been closing in on the prison wing controlled by the militants. Fighters from the SDF and other security teams took control of adjacent buildings and used loudspeakers to call on the militants to surrender.

## Justice Breyer reportedly retiring; Biden to fill seat

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Liberal Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer is retiring, giving President Joe Biden an opening he has pledged to fill by naming the first Black woman to the high court, two sources told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Breyer, 83, has been a pragmatic force on a court that has grown increasingly conservative in recent years, trying to forge majorities with more moderate justices right and left of center.

The sources spoke on condition of anonymity so as not to preempt Breyer's announcement.

Breyer has been a justice since 1994, appointed by President Bill Clinton. Along with the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Breyer opted not to step down the last time the Democrats controlled the White House and the Senate during Barack Obama's presidency. Ginsburg died in

September 2020, and then-President Donald Trump filled the vacancy with a conservative justice, Amy Coney Barrett.

Breyer's departure, expected over the summer, won't change the 6-3 conservative advantage on the court because his replacement will be nominated by Biden and almost certainly confirmed by a Senate where Democrats have the slimmest majority.

Among the names being circulated as potential nominees are California Supreme Court Justice Leondra Kruger, U.S. Circuit Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, prominent civil rights lawyer Sherrilyn Ifill and U.S. District Judge Michelle Childs, whom Biden has nominated to be an appeals court judge. Childs is a favorite of Rep. James Clyburn, D-S.C., who made a crucial endorsement of Biden just before South Carolina's presidential primary in 2020.

## EPA acts to assist minority communities on Gulf Coast

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency is taking a series of enforcement actions to address air pollution, unsafe drinking water and other problems afflicting minority communities in three Gulf Coast states, following a "Journey to Justice" tour by Administrator Michael Regan last fall.

The agency will conduct unannounced inspections of chemical plants, refineries and other industrial sites suspected of polluting air and water and causing health problems to nearby residents, Regan said. And it will install air monitoring equipment in Louisiana's "chemical corridor" to enhance enforcement at chemical and plastics plants between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. The region contains several hotspots where cancer risks are far above national levels.

The EPA also issued a notice

to the city of Jackson, Miss., saying its aging and overwhelmed drinking water system violates the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. The order directs the city to outline a plan to "correct the significant deficiencies identified" in an EPA report within 45 days.

In separate letters, Regan urged city and state officials to use nearly \$79 million in funding allocated to Mississippi under the bipartisan infrastructure law "to solve some of the most dire water needs in Jackson and other areas of need across Mississippi."

The actions were among more than a dozen steps being taken in response to Regan's tour last November. Regan visited low-income, mostly minority communities in Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas as part of an effort to focus federal attention on communities adversely affected by decades of industrial pollution.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Bill would allow people to make liquor at home**

**WV** CHARLESTON — West Virginia lawmakers are considering a proposal that would allow people to make liquor at home for themselves and for family members.

According to West Virginia state law, it is already legal for people to make beer and wine at home.

House Bill 2972 would allow people over the age of 21 to make up to 50 gallons of liquor at home in a year.

The proposal bans the sale of any liquor made at home. It passed the West Virginia House of Delegates and is now headed to the state Senate.

**Anti-Semitic flyers distributed in 2 cities**

**FL** SURFSIDE — Anti-Semitic flyers were distributed last weekend to hundreds of homes in two South Florida cities with large Jewish populations, authorities said.

Miami Beach Mayor Dan Gelber tweeted that flyers in plastic sandwich bags with small pebbles were distributed to hundreds of homes. In neighboring Surfside, the same type of flyers were distributed to homes, officials said in a “community alert” email to residents.

Local and federal law enforcement agencies were investigating the flyers’ origins, officials said.

**Charge refiled against man dressed as Joker**

**MO** CLAYTON — Eastern Missouri prosecutors refiled a felony terrorist threat charge against a man ac-

cused of livestreaming threats to bomb and kill people while he was dressed up as the Batman villain known as The Joker.

St. Louis County prosecutors refiled the charge against Jeremy Garnier, 50, of University City, a day after a judge dismissed the case because prosecutors could not produce a key witness for the grand jury, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported.

Garnier was arrested in March 2020 in a University City restaurant during his livestream. In it, prosecutors say, he’s dressed as The Joker and orders a soda in the restaurant, saying: “I can’t be inebriated when I’m planning on, you know, killing a bunch of people.”

**Substitute charged with groping himself in class**

**IL** CHICAGO — A substitute teacher was charged with three counts of sexual exploitation of a child after he allegedly touched himself inappropriately in front of students in a Chicago elementary school classroom.

James Ruml, 29, of Chicago, turned himself in and appeared in court, when a judge prohibited him from having contact with anyone under the age of 18 while the case is pending.

According to Cook County prosecutors, Ruml, while substitute teaching at Walt Disney Magnet School in the Uptown neighborhood on Nov. 16, “leaned back in his chair, stretched his legs wide open and began touching his genital area,” as three 11-year-old students watched, the Chicago Sun-Times reported.

Prosecutors, who said Ruml didn’t take any clothes off, allegedly walked to a corner of the

classroom where he continued touching himself. He is scheduled to return to court Feb. 3.

**Report: Vandalism leads to water spill at oil well**

**ND** BISMARCK — Officials said a produced water spill at an oil well near Watford City was due to vandalism.

North Dakota Oil and Gas Division officials said valves were opened on the location, leading to a spill of more than 18,000 gallons. Most of the wastewater had been recovered by vacuum trucks, officials said.

Produced water is a mixture of saltwater and oil that can contain drilling chemicals. It’s a byproduct of oil and gas development.

**2 tax preparers plead guilty in filing scheme**

**NC** GREENSBORO — Two North Carolina tax preparers pleaded guilty to charges that they prepared fraudulent tax returns with an estimated loss to the government of \$1.5 million, the U.S. Department of Justice said.

Court documents said Whitney Danielle Sales owned and operated a tax preparation business in Durham, and from 2014 to 2018 she and fellow tax return preparer Janelle Marie Corley prepared fraudulent returns for clients that claimed false education credits or manipulated the clients’ income to qualify for larger earned income tax credits. They also filed false personal income tax returns, prosecutors said.

Sales and Corley pleaded guilty this month to conspiring to defraud the United States. Sales is scheduled for sentencing May 19, and Corley is scheduled to be sen-

tenced May 26, officials said.

**Man tried to drop weed, contraband via drone**

**GA** McRAE-HELENA — A South Carolina man was arrested by a Georgia sheriff who said the man was trying to drop marijuana and other contraband into a state prison using a drone.

Telfair County Sheriff Sim Davidson said deputies were called to Telfair State Prison in McRae-Helena. He said they arrested Jon-Michael Austin of Greenwood, S.C., finding him with a drone, marijuana, tobacco, cell phones and fentanyl patches.

Austin was charged with possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, possession of a scheduled substance with intent to distribute and criminal attempt to introduce contraband.

**2 injured in explosion and fire at tank battery**

**OK** OKARCHA — Two workers were injured Monday in an explosion and fire at a central Oklahoma oil tank battery, officials said.

The incident happened at a Devon Energy oil well pad in Okarcha, about 35 miles northwest of Oklahoma City, according to a spokeswoman for Devon.

The workers were employed by a contractor and were cleaning equipment not in use for production at the site when the fire started, Devon spokeswoman Lisa Adams said.

The two were taken to local hospitals, and crews quickly extinguished the fire. The cause of the fire was under investigation, Adams said.

— From wire reports

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and Military News

# Big Papi elected to Baseball Hall of Fame

Associated Press

David Ortiz gazed at his phone, his pursed lips revealing nerves rarely seen from one of the game's great clutch hitters.

Pedro Martinez's hand rested on Ortiz's shoulder, and Martinez grinned when the good news came through. The former teammates embraced, and Martinez welcomed Ortiz into a rare space in baseball history.

Big Papi is bound for Cooperstown — and on the first ballot, too.

Ortiz was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in his first try Tuesday, while steroid-tainted stars Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens were denied entry in their final year under consideration by the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

Ortiz, a 10-time All-Star over 20 seasons mostly with the Boston Red Sox, was named on 77.9% of ballots, clearing the 75% threshold needed for enshrinement. He's the 58th player inducted in his first time up for consideration.

"Man, it's a wonderful honor to be able to get in on my first

rodeo," Ortiz said.

Big Papi was among baseball's most recognizable faces through the 2000s and 2010s. His enormous grin endeared him to fans, but the Dominican's hulking frame menaced pitchers, especially in the late innings. Three of his 23 career game-ending hits came during Boston's drought-breaking 2004 postseason, when the Red Sox thwarted the rival Yankees and then won their first World Series title in 86 years.

He's the fourth Hall of Famer born in the Dominican Republic, joining Juan Marichal, Martinez and Vladimir Guerrero.

"I can imagine how New England has to feel about one of its babies getting into the Hall of Fame today," Ortiz said. "I'm not even going to tell you about the Dominican Republic."

The left-handed hitter was signed by Seattle as a teenager and traded to Minnesota as a minor leaguer. He made his major league debut with the Twins in 1997 but hardly looked like a future Hall of Famer there. He was released in 2002, signed by Boston and slugged

31 homers the next season.

Ortiz said he joined the Red Sox to learn what made stars like Martinez, Manny Ramirez and Nomar Garciaparra great. Martinez helped pave the way, encouraging first-year general manager Theo Epstein to sign the 6-foot-3 slugger.

"Once I figured it out, it was going to be a wrap," Ortiz said. "That team was surrounded by so many superstars, and I went in there like a sponge ready to learn."

Martinez became a mentor for his countryman. Now, they share the honor of being first-ballot inductees.

"I feel so proud to have been your teammate, to have been your brother, to have been someone there for you when you needed me," Martinez said. "I'm so glad I have you in my life."

"Well deserved," he added. "Welcome to Cooperstown."

Ortiz batted .286 with 541 home runs with Boston and Minnesota while making 88% of his plate appearances as a designated hitter, the most by anyone in the Hall. He passes Ed-

gar Martinez, who was a DH for 71.7% of his plate appearances.

Ortiz also has performance-enhancing drug baggage, but enough voters looked past a reported positive test that came during survey testing in 2003 that was supposed to be anonymous. Ortiz has denied using steroids, and Commissioner Rob Manfred said in 2016 "I think it would be wrong" to exclude him from the Hall of Fame based on that lone test.

"I never failed a test, so what does that tell you?" Ortiz said.

Ortiz will be enshrined in Cooperstown, N.Y., on July 24 along with era committee selections Buck O'Neil, Minnie Miñoso, Gil Hodges, Tony Oliva, Jim Kaat and Bud Fowler.

Bonds, Clemens, Curt Schilling and Sammy Sosa were all rejected in their 10th and final year on the BBWAA ballot. Bonds is MLB's career home run leader and Clemens won a record seven Cy Young Awards, but voters denied them the game's highest honor over allegations they used PEDs. Bonds got 66% of the vote, and Clemens was at 65.2%.

## Payton steps down as coach of Saints after 16 years

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Before Sean Payton took his first head coaching job in New Orleans in 2006, the Saints had a grand total of one playoff victory since their founding in 1967.

The standard will be considerably higher for the next head coach in the Big Easy.

Payton, whose 16-year tenure with the club included its only Super Bowl championship and also a one-season suspension stemming from the NFL's bounty investigation, is leaving coaching — for now.

Payton informed the team on Tuesday that he is leaving his first and only NFL head coaching job with a 152-89 regular-

season record — and nine playoff appearances — in 15 seasons. The 2009 Saints won the NFL title.

"I don't like the word retirement," Payton said Tuesday afternoon at an announcement attended by owner Gayle Benson, top management and assistant coaches. "I still have a vision for doing things in football. And I'll be honest with you, that might be coaching again at some point. I don't think it's this year, I think maybe in the future. That's not where my heart is right now."

Payton is under contract with the Saints for three more seasons, and if he's hired by another NFL team before then, his

new team would have to provide compensation to New Orleans.

The Saints made the relatively risky decision to hire Payton as a rookie head coach in their first season back in New Orleans after being displaced from the city by Hurricane Katrina for the entire 2005 season, when they went 3-13 under Jim Haslett.

Payton oversaw an immediate storybook turnaround. The Saints won the NFC South, captured the NFC's second playoff seed, and advanced to the franchise's first NFC title game by beating Philadelphia in a divisional-round playoff in a rebuilt Superdome — the site of wide-

spread damage and suffering of stranded evacuees right after Katrina had flooded 80% of New Orleans.

Since then, Payton coached the Saints to the playoffs in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

New Orleans narrowly missed the playoffs this past season, going 9-8 in its first campaign since the retirement of Drew Brees. Payton had lured the quarterback to New Orleans as a free agent in 2006.

Payton said he urged the Saints to take a risk on Brees, who was coming off throwing-shoulder surgery, because "we weren't winning any jump balls" for talent.



# Kennard's surge helps Clippers stun Wizards

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Luke Kennard scored seven points inside the final 9 seconds, including a go-ahead four-point play with 1.9 seconds remaining, and the Los Angeles Clippers overcame a 35-point first-half deficit to stun the Washington Wizards 116-115 on Tuesday.

Kennard hit a 32-footer out of a timeout and then, after Washington committed a 5-second violation, sank another three running to his right while absorbing a foul from Bradley Beal. Kennard finished with 25 points.

Amir Coffey scored a career-high 29 points for depleted Los Angeles, which evened its record to 2-2 at the midpoint of a season-long eight game trip.

Terance Mann and Isaiah Hartenstein each had 16 points for the Clippers, who scored 80 points after halftime to improve to 7-10 since losing seven-time All-Star guard Paul George to a right elbow injury last month.

**Lakers 106, Nets 96:** LeBron James welcomed Anthony Davis back with a lob pass for the game's first basket, then turned to his own offense to score 33 points in Los Angeles' win at Brooklyn.

Davis had eight points in 25 minutes after missing 17 games with a sprained left knee

and the Lakers got good nights off the bench from Malik Monk and Carmelo Anthony.

James added seven rebounds and six assists, punctuating his performance with steals and dunks about 15 seconds apart midway through the fourth quarter.

**76ers 117, Pelicans 107:** Joel Embiid scored 12 of his 42 points in the fourth quarter as host Philadelphia pulled away from short-handed New Orleans.

Tobias Harris added 33 points for the 76ers, who opened a five-game homestand by winning the 12th of their last 15.

**Warriors 130, Mavericks 92:** Stephen Curry had 18 points, nine rebounds and seven assists, rookie Jonathan Kuminga scored 22, and host Golden State routed Dallas.

The Mavericks' Tim Hardaway Jr. suffered a broken bone in his left foot in the second quarter.

**Timberwolves 109, Trail Blazers 107:** Anthony Edwards scored 40 points and D'Angelo Russell got the winning basket for visiting Minnesota on a goaltending call against Portland's Anthony Simmons with 2.9 seconds left.

Russell finished with 22 points and Karl-Anthony Towns had 17 points and 17 rebounds for the Timberwolves, who improved to 24-23 and surpassed their win total from last season (23-49).

**Raptors 125, Hornets 113:** Pascal Siakam had 24 points and matched his career high with 12 assists, Gary Trent Jr. scored a season-best 32 and host Toronto beat Charlotte.

OG Anunoby scored 24 points, Chris Boucher had 12, Malachi Flynn 11 and Dalaño Banton 10 as the short-handed Raptors overcame the absences of starters Fred VanVleet and Scottie Barnes.

**Celtics 128, Kings 75:** Jayson Tatum scored 36 points and Jaylen Brown had 30 points and 10 rebounds before both rested the entire fourth quarter as host Boston routed Sacramento.

Robert Williams finished with 13 points and 17 rebounds for the Celtics, who got off to a torrid start and never let up on the Kings.

**Spurs 134, Rockets 104:** Dejounte Murray had 19 points and 10 assists, Jacob Poeltl had 18 points and nine rebounds, and both sat out the fourth quarter as San Antonio coasted to a win at Houston.

The Rockets led early in the first quarter, but the Spurs soon took over and were up by 15 at halftime. A 39-point third quarter put the game out of reach.

**Nuggets 110, Pistons 105:** Nikola Jokic had 28 points, 21 rebounds and nine assists, and host Denver beat Detroit.

# Auburn holds off Missouri in first game as No. 1

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Mo. — K.D. Johnson scored 17 points, including five straight within the final 90 seconds, and No. 1 Auburn survived a scare from Missouri, winning 55-54 on Tuesday night in the program's first game as the nation's top-ranked team.

Johnson converted a three-point play with 1:29 remaining to put Auburn ahead 53-51, then added a layup with 45 seconds left for a four-point advantage, and the Tigers (19-1, 8-0 Southeastern Conference) held on from there.

Javon Pickett led Missouri (8-11, 2-5) with 17 points, and Jaron Coleman added 10.

**No. 7 UCLA 75, No. 3 Arizona 59:** Johnny Juzang and Jules Bernard scored 15 points

each and host UCLA used gritty defense to Arizona its first loss in Pac-12 play.

The Bruins (14-2, 6-1) took the lead for good during a 12-0 run in the first half on the way to winning their fourth in a row.

**No. 4 Baylor 74, Kansas State 49:** Jonathan Tchamwa Tchatchoua and Kendall Brown each had a double-double as the host Bears won their third game in a row since rare consecutive losses.

Tchamwa Tchatchoua scored 13 points on 6-for-7 shooting, including a three-pointer from the top of the key, and the 6-foot-8 post player grabbed 12 rebounds. Brown had 10 points and 11 rebounds.

**No. 9 Duke 71, Clemson 69:** Paolo Banchero scored 19 points as the ninth-ranked Blue

Devils pulled away late from the visiting Tigers.

Wendell Moore Jr. scored 13 points for Duke (16-4, 6-2 Atlantic Coast Conference).

**Illinois 56, No. 10 Michigan State 55:** Trent Frazier scored a game-high 16 points, and the host Fighting Illini held on to take over sole possession of first place in the Big Ten.

Illinois (14-5, 7-2) was without two of its brightest stars: All-American center Kofi Cockburn (concussion) and guard Andre Curbelo (COVID-19 health and safety protocols).

**No. 12 Kentucky 82, Mississippi State 74 (OT):** Kellan Grady scored eight points in overtime, including consecutive three-pointers about a minute apart, and Sahvir Wheeler

added two free throws to lift the host Wildcats.

Grady finished with 18 points and Oscar Tshiebwe added 21 points with 22 rebounds for Kentucky (16-3, 6-1 Southeastern Conference), giving Wildcats coach John Calipari his 800th career victory.

**No. 14 Villanova 67, DePaul 43:** Justin Moore scored 16 points, Collin Gillespie had 14 and the host Wildcats beat the Blue Demons for the 22nd straight time.

**No. 20 UConn 96, Georgetown 73:** Adama Sanogo scored 19 points to lead the host Huskies to their fourth straight win with a rout of the Hoyas.

**Air Force 63, San Jose State 53:** A.J. Walker had 12 points as the Falcons ended their road losing streak at five games.

# Oilers score in OT to down Canucks

Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — Connor McDavid snapped a drought Tuesday in spectacular fashion.

With just 23.4 seconds left in overtime, the Edmonton Oilers' captain tapped in a Darnell Nurse pass from the top of the crease to secure a 3-2 comeback win over the Vancouver Canucks.

It was the superstar center's 20th goal of the season and his first in six games.

"I've been a bit snakebit," McDavid said. "I feel like I'm getting my chances but I haven't been able to put one away, so it was nice to be able to contribute and find a way to score a goal."

The Oilers outshot the Canucks 50-27, but struggled to get pucks past Vancouver goalie Spencer Martin until midway through the third period.

The 26-year-old netminder stopped 47 shots in just his second NHL game of the season and fifth of his career. He was pressed into action after both Canucks all-star Thatcher

Demko and backup Jaroslav Halak were added to the NHL's COVID-19 protocol.

Martin may not be a household name, but McDavid said he remembered playing against him in both the Greater Toronto Hockey League and junior hockey.

"He was kind of one of those guys where you're just waiting for him to make it to the NHL and for goalies, it takes a little while longer," McDavid said. "And it seems like he needed a bit of a break and with the COVID bug going around, it seemed like that's kind of his break and he's played well. He's played really well."

**Predators 4, Kraken 2:** Matias Ekholm scored the go-ahead goal late in the second period and Nashville won at Seattle.

The Predators also got goals from Filip Forsberg, Luke Kunin and Matt Duchene in their third straight win. Roman Josi added two assists, and Juuse Saros made 32 saves.

Jared McCann and Adam Larsson scored for the Kraken.

**Penguins 6, Coyotes 3:** Sidney Crosby and Kris Letang led a four-goal, third-period barrage to give host Pittsburgh a win over Arizona.

The Penguins trailed early in the third before their offensive show, when Letang scored twice and Crosby netted his 11th for Pittsburgh, which won its sixth straight game.

**Hurricanes 4, Golden Knights 3 (OT):** Sebastian Aho's second goal of the game 3:49 into overtime gave host Carolina a win over Vegas after blowing a two-goal lead late in regulation.

Nino Niederreiter and Vincent Trocheck scored 57 seconds apart in the second period, and Aho had a power-play goal in the third for Carolina.

**Panthers 5, Jets 3:** Mason Marchment scored twice and added an assist, and Florida won at Winnipeg.

Anton Lundell also had a goal and assist, and Carter Verhaeghe and Sam Bennett also scored for the Panthers. Sergei Bobrovsky made 32 saves for Florida, which ended a five-

game trip 3-2-0.

**Stars 5, Devils 1:** Joe Pavelski had two goals and two assists, and Dallas extended its winning streak to four games with a victory at New Jersey.

Roope Hintz scored for the fourth straight game and rookie Jacob Peterson got his eighth goal as the Stars swept their four-game road trip. Braden Holtby made 36 saves to improve his career mark against the Devils to 18-4-3.

**Senators 5, Sabres 0:** Tyler Ennis had a hat trick to lead host Ottawa over Buffalo.

Drake Batherson and Alex Formenton also scored for the Senators, while Matt Murray made 32 saves for his third win of the season and 14th career shutout.

**Islanders 4, Flyers 3:** Zach Parise scored the tiebreaking goal with just over eight minutes left in the third period, and Ilya Sorokin made 14 saves as host New York edged Philadelphia.

The reeling Flyers notched their franchise record 13th straight loss.

# Medvedev rallies, moves into Australian Open semis

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Daniil Medvedev rallied from two sets down and saved a match point before beating No. 9 Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-7 (4), 3-6, 7-6 (2), 7-5, 6-4 on Wednesday to move into the Australian Open semifinals.

The U.S. Open champion's bid to become the first man in the Open era to win his second Grand Slam title in the next major tournament is still on track after the 4-hour, 42-minute comeback victory.

Medvedev will play Friday against French Open runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas in a rematch of last year's semifinals at Melbourne Park. Medvedev

won at the same stage last year, but lost the final to Novak Djokovic.

Tsitsipas beat No. 11 Jannik Sinner 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

Facing defeat Wednesday, Medvedev got a break. A six-minute delay in the third-set tiebreaker for the roof on Rod Laver Arena to be closed during a rain shower swung the momentum mostly his way.

Auger-Aliassime won only one of the last six points in the tiebreaker after dominating for the first two sets. He missed a match point on Medvedev's serve in the 10th game of the fourth set.

Medvedev saved it with a big first serve out wide and

then held with an overhead winner.

"I was not playing my best, and Felix was playing unbelievable, serving unbelievable — he was all over me," Medvedev said. "I didn't know what to do so I (asked) myself, 'What would Novak do?'"

"And I just thought, OK, I'm going to make him work. If he wants to win it, he has to ... fight to the last point."

The 25-year-old Russian broke Auger-Aliassime's serve in the next game and held to level the match at two-sets all. He then got another service break when the 21-year-old Canadian double-faulted in the third game of the deciding set.

It still wasn't over yet.

Serving for the match, Medvedev had to save two break points before closing it out about an hour after saving a match point.

Auger-Aliassime had lost all three previous matches against the second-ranked Medvedev, including a straight-set loss in the U.S. Open semifinals last September.

But he was the aggressor in the first two sets, keeping Medvedev off balance with his forehand, up-tempo game and athleticism.

It forced Medvedev to play more inside the baseline to claw his way back in the third and fourth sets.