

## Ukrainians on front lines await their fate

*Associated Press*

In trenches dusted with snow and tinged with soot, men search for enough cellphone signal to hear the latest from the distant capitals that will decide their fate.

Moscow, Washington, London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna. Sometimes Kyiv. But only sometimes.

These Ukrainians are far from the Russian ships headed to a naval exercise off the coast of Ireland, from the American-built fighter jets streaming to the Baltics and from the U.S. aircraft carrier steadily sailing the Mediterranean.

As Western-supplied weapons land by the planeload in Kyiv, soldiers and civilians alike wait here with helpless anticipation for decisions made by people who know little about the lives of those on the eastern front lines — a battle-weary region near where Russia has massed tens of thousands of soldiers in a troop buildup that U.S. President Joe Biden said could mount the largest invasion since World War II.

The soldiers in Zolote 4 have been defending against Russian encroachment for years. They are just a few hundred meters from pro-Russia separatist fighters, who

are on the other side of a checkpoint that no one can safely cross. The soldiers assume that's where the snipers are, though they've never seen any gunmen.

After three days with no shooting, "all of a sudden they opened up with grenade launchers and firearms. One mortar shell flew over and fell in the field behind us. Two more hit between ours and the next position. In 15 minutes, everything was quiet again. Why? What for? Nobody knows. And that's how it is around here," said Oleh Surhov, a Ukrainian soldier who fled Crimea in 2014 after the Russians seized the peninsula. He joined the fight soon after he evacuated his wife, children and grandchildren to western Ukraine.

Zolote 1 through 5 got their names decades ago during the Soviet era — the name means "Golden" — when they were labeled as units of the local coal mining operation. Now 1 through 4 are in Ukraine and 5 sits less than a half-mile away, across the checkpoint.

The sense of waiting for someone else's decisions has also infected the nearby village of Katerynivka, which bears the scars of eight years of shelling. It has newer

trenches, which are heated by rough wood stoves whose warmth draws nearly as many dogs and cats as soldiers. The luckiest trench cats get taken back by soldiers when they rotate off the front.

"We joke that hope is the last thing to die. All of us are waiting for peace. Neither our children nor grandkids can visit us," said Liubov, a local woman who wouldn't give her last name. "We talk on the phone and that's enough. Let's wait until peace comes!"

If war comes instead, it is as likely as not to strike first in eastern Ukraine, where the pro-Russia separatists have been in control since 2014. In Russia, across the border, more than 100,000 troops are gathering, and thousands more are going into position for what Russia says are military exercises on Ukraine's border to the north with Belarus.

Moscow denies it is planning an assault, but the United States and its NATO allies are preparing for a possible war, bolstering their presence in the Baltics and putting 8,500 American troops on higher alert for potential deployment to Europe. Britain and the U.S. have sent multiple planeloads of weapons to Ukraine.

## Aid workers rush to save Afghans from freezing cold

*Associated Press*

PUL-E-ALAM, Afghanistan — A flickering flame of paper, rags and random twigs is the only heat Gulnaz has to keep her 18-month-old son warm, barely visible beneath his icy blanket as she begs on a bitterly cold highway on the road to Kabul.

The 45-mile stretch of highway is flanked by snow-swept hills. Occasionally a driver slows his car and shoves an Afghani note into the 28-year-old woman's bare, dirt-caked hand. She sits for hours on the highway median, positioned just beyond a bump in the road that slows traffic.

Her 16-year-old sister, Khalida, sits nearby. Both are hidden behind encompassing blue burqas. By day's end, Gulnaz, who gave just the one name, says they might make the Afghani equivalent of \$2.85. But most days it is less.

The Taliban's sweep to power in Afghanistan in August drove billions of dollars in inter-

national assistance out of the country and sent an already dirt-poor nation, ravaged by war, drought and floods, spiraling toward a humanitarian catastrophe.

But in recent weeks it is the bitter winter cold that is devastating the most vulnerable and has international aid organizations scrambling to save millions from starving or freezing because they have neither food nor fuel. For the poorest, the only heat or means of cooking is with the coal or wood they can scrounge from the snowy streets or that they receive from aid groups.

"The extent of the problem now in Afghanistan for people is dire," said Shelley Thakral, spokeswoman for the World Food Program in Afghanistan. "We're calling this a race against time. We need to get to families in very difficult, hard to reach areas. It's winter, it's cold, the snow."

The cost of the humanitarian effort is stag-

gering. Thakral said the WFP alone will need \$2.6 billion this year.

"Break that number down. That's \$220 million a month, that's 30 cents per person per day, and that's what we're asking for. . . We need the money because we need to reach people as quickly as we can," she said.

Earlier this month the United Nations launched its largest single country appeal for more than \$5 billion to help a devastated Afghanistan.

It's estimated that roughly 90% of Afghanistan's 38 million people are dependent on aid and the U.N. says nearly 3 million are displaced in their own country, driven from their homes by drought, war and famine.

In 2020 alone, 700,000 Afghans became displaced, many living in desperate conditions on the outskirts of cities, in parks and open spaces, wherever they could erect a makeshift shelter.

# Tucson base may deploy troops if Ukraine invaded

*Associated Press*

TUCSON, Ariz. — Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson is one of several military installations the Department of Defense has identified as having troops that could be deployed if Russian forces invade Ukraine.

Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby made the announcement during a news conference Thursday in Washington.

Some units from Davis-Monthan are among the 8,500 troops placed on heightened preparedness for deployment should Russia invade Ukraine.

Other military installations with units put on heightened preparedness include Fort Bragg in North Carolina, Fort Campbell in Kentucky, Fort Carson in Colorado, Fort Hood in Texas, Fort Polk in Louisiana, Robins Air Force Base and Fort Stewart in Georgia and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio.

Kirby said the units include medical support, aviation support, logistics support and combat formations.

Department of Defense officials said they are monitoring the buildup of forces in the western part of Russia and in Belarus.

# Jan. 6 committee subpoenas fake Trump electors in 7 states

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The House committee investigating the U.S. Capitol insurrection subpoenaed more than a dozen individuals Friday who it says falsely tried to declare Donald Trump the winner of the 2020 election in seven swing states.

The panel is demanding information and testimony from 14 people who it says allegedly met and submitted false Electoral College certificates declaring Trump the winner of Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, New Mexico, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, according to a letter from Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, the committee's Democratic chairman. President Joe Biden won all seven states.

"We believe the individuals we have subpoenaed today have information about how these so-called alternate electors met and who was behind that scheme," Thompson said in the letter. "We encourage them to cooperate with the Select Committee's investigation to get answers about January 6th for the American people and help ensure nothing like that day ever happens again."

The nine-member panel said it has obtained information that groups of individuals met on Dec. 14, 2020 — more than a

month after Election Day — in the seven states. The individuals, according to the congressional investigation, then submitted fake slates of Electoral College votes for Trump. Then "alternate electors" from those seven states sent those certificates to Congress, where several of Trump's advisers used them to justify delaying or blocking the certification of the election during the joint session of Congress on Jan. 6, 2021.

Lies about election fraud from the former president and his allies fueled the deadly insurrection at the Capitol building that day, as a violent mob interrupted the certification of the Electoral College results.

Last March, American Oversight, a watchdog group, obtained the certificates in question that were submitted by Republicans in the seven states. In two of them, New Mexico and Pennsylvania, the fake electors added a caveat saying the certificate was submitted in case they were later recognized as duly elected, qualified electors. That would only have been possible if Trump had won any of the several dozens of legal battles he waged against those states in the weeks after the election.

In the other five states, however, Republicans certified that they were their state's duly elected and qualified electors.

# Kansas woman led all-female ISIS battalion

*Associated Press*

FALLS CHURCH, Va. — A mother who once lived in Kansas has been arrested after federal prosecutors charged her with joining the Islamic State and leading an all-female battalion of AK-47 wielding militants.

The U.S. Attorney in Alexandria, Va., announced Saturday that Allison Fluke-Ekren, 42, has been charged with providing material support to a terrorist organization.

The criminal complaint was filed under seal back in 2019 but made public Saturday after Fluke-Ekren was brought back to the U.S. Friday to face charges. Her alleged participation in ISIS had not been publicly known before Saturday's announcement.

Prosecutors say Fluke-Ekren wanted to recruit operatives to attack a college campus in the U.S. and discussed a terrorist attack on a shopping mall.

An affidavit from FBI Special Agent David Robins also alleges that Fluke-Ekren became leader of an ISIS unit called "Khatiba Nusaybah" in the Syrian city of Raqqa in late 2016. The all-female unit was trained in the use of AK-47 rifles, grenades and suicide belts.

A detention memo filed Friday by First Assistant U.S. Attorney Raj Parekh states that Fluke-Ekren even trained children how to use assault rifles, and that at least one witness saw one of Fluke-Ekren's children, approximately 5 or 6 years old, holding a machine gun in the family's home in Syria.

"Fluke-Ekren has been a fervent believer in the radical terrorist ideology of ISIS for many years, having traveled to Syria to commit or support violent jihad. Fluke-Ekren translated her extremist beliefs into action by serving as the appointed leader and organizer of an ISIS military battalion, directly training women and children in the use of AK-47 assault rifles, grenades, and suicide belts to support the Islamic State's murderous aims," Parekh wrote.

Court papers do not indicate how she was captured, or how long she was in custody before being turned over to the FBI Friday.

She is scheduled to make an initial appearance at U.S. District Court in Alexandria on Monday, at which time she would likely be appointed an attorney.

# Storm hits East Coast with snow, wind

*Associated Press*

BOSTON — A winter storm lashed the Northeast with deep snow and wind gusts near hurricane force Saturday, causing coastal flooding and threatening widespread power outages while forecasters warned conditions would worsen as the day went on.

Parts of 10 states and some major population centers — including Philadelphia, New York and Boston — were pummeled by the storm. By late morning, more than a foot of snow had fallen on parts of New Jersey's shore and eastern Long Island.

Boston, in the nor'easter's crosshairs, could get as much as 2 feet of snow. Isolated pockets nearby could get as much as 3 feet, forecasters said. Winds gusted as high as 70 mph on Nantucket Island off Massachusetts and over 60 mph elsewhere in eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Most flights into and out of the airports serving New York, Boston and Philadelphia were canceled Saturday, according to FlightAware. More than 4,500 flights were canceled across the U.S. Amtrak canceled all of its high-speed Acela trains between Boston and Washington and canceled or limited other services in the region.

Across the region, residents hunkered down and avoided travel at the behest of government leaders, who warned of whiteout conditions. Businesses closed or opened

late.

In suburban Boston, a bundled-up Nicky Brown, 34, stood at the doors of Gordon's liquor store in Waltham, waiting for it to open. It was supposed to open at 8 a.m., and it was already well past that.

"My boyfriend is out driving a plow, and I had a bunch of cleaning to do at home, and I want a drink while I'm doing it," she said, as she called the store to find out if it planned to open at all. "It's a good day to stay inside and clean."

In the seaside town of Newburyport, north of Boston near the New Hampshire border, officials strongly encouraged residents living along the shore to move to higher ground.

Video posted on social media showed wind and waves battering North Weymouth, south of Boston, flooding streets with a slurry of frigid water. Other video showed a street underwater on Nantucket.

Tens of thousands of homes and businesses lost power in Massachusetts, with failures mounting. No other states reported widespread outages.

The storm had two saving graces: Dry snow less capable of snapping trees and tearing down power lines, and its timing on a weekend, when schools were closed and few people were commuting.

Officials from Virginia to Maine warned people to stay off the roads.

Rhode Island, all of which was under a

blizzard warning, banned all nonemergency road travel starting at 8 a.m. Fierce winds blew the snow sideways for hours in Providence.

In West Hartford, Conn., a tractor-trailer jackknifed on Interstate 84, closing several lanes. Massachusetts banned heavy trucks from interstate highways.

On New York's Long Island, East Hampton officials reported near-whiteout conditions, as much as 8 inches of snow by mid-morning and wind gusts of over 50 mph.

"There's a lot of drifting of snow, so of course we're urging people not to go out at all, allow the highway crews to do their job," Town Supervisor Peter Van Scoyoc said. "It's going to be challenging enough without people getting stuck in the roadway."

In Philadelphia, where 6 inches was reported by early Saturday, few drivers ventured onto streets covered in knee-high drifts.

Some parts of the Jersey Shore had more than 13 inches by midday, the National Weather Service reported.

Delaware allowed only essential personnel to drive in two of its three counties.

Many hardy New Englanders took the storm in stride.

"This is nothing," said Brown, who has lived in Waltham nearly her whole life, except for a brief stint in northern Maine. "I've seen way worse up there."

## Kyle Rittenhouse gun from shootings to be destroyed

*Associated Press*

KENOSHA, Wis. — A judge on Friday approved an agreement by lawyers to destroy the assault-style rifle that Kyle Rittenhouse used to kill two people and wound a third during a 2020 street protest in Wisconsin.

Assistant District Attorney Thomas Binger said the state crime lab would destroy the gun, probably in April. Judge Bruce Schroeder, the Kenosha County judge who presided over Rittenhouse's trial, approved the agreement. Rittenhouse was not in court for Friday's hearing.

The judge also ordered that Rittenhouse's \$2 million bail be divided among his attorney, a foundation that solicited donations for his defense and actor Ricky Schroder, who donated to the defense fund.

Rittenhouse shot the men during the protest in Kenosha in 2020. He killed Anthony Huber and Joseph Rosenbaum and wounded Gaige Grosskreutz in the arm. Rittenhouse

argued he fired in self-defense after each of the men attacked him. A jury last year acquitted him of multiple charges, including homicide.

Rittenhouse's attorney, Mark Richards, filed a motion Jan. 19 asking prosecutors to return Rittenhouse's rifle, his ammunition, his face mask and other clothing he was wearing the night of the shooting to him. Richards and David Hancock, a spokesman for Rittenhouse, said earlier this month that Rittenhouse, who is now 19, wanted to destroy the rifle and throw the rest of the items away so nothing can be used as a political symbol or trophy celebrating the shootings.

"We didn't think anyone should profit from it," Richards told reporters after the hearing. Asked if anyone had reached out about purchasing the gun, Richards responded: "Lots of people." He didn't elaborate.

Destruction of the gun will be recorded as part of the agreement that was approved Fri-

day. The rest of Rittenhouse's property has already been returned to him, Binger told the judge.

Conservatives across the nation have praised Rittenhouse, saying he was defending Kenosha from far-left militants. Liberals have painted him as a trigger-happy vigilante.

The judge on Friday also ordered county officials to return Rittenhouse's \$2 million bail. His attorneys raised the money through donations from conservatives across the country.

The judge approved an agreement that calls for splitting the money between Richards' law firm and the #Fightback Foundation. Attorneys Lin Wood and John Pierce, who were representing Rittenhouse in the early days of the case, formed the foundation to raise money for him. The agreement also calls for sending \$150,000 to Schroder, the former star of the 1980s television series "Silver Spoons."

# Daily US omicron deaths exceed delta's

Associated Press

Omicron, the highly contagious coronavirus variant sweeping across the country, is driving the daily American death toll higher than during last fall's delta wave, with deaths likely to keep rising for days or even weeks.

The seven-day rolling average for daily new COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. has been climbing since mid-November, reaching 2,267 on Thursday and surpassing a September peak of 2,100 when delta was the dominant variant.

Now omicron is estimated to account for nearly all the virus circulating in the nation. And even though it causes less severe disease for most people, the fact that it is more transmissible means more people are falling ill and dying.

"Omicron will push us over a million deaths," said Andrew Noymer, a public health

professor at the University of California, Irvine. "That will cause a lot of soul searching. There will be a lot of discussion about what we could have done differently, how many of the deaths were preventable."

The average daily death toll is now at the same level as it was last February, when the country was slowly coming off its all-time high of 3,300 a day.

More Americans are taking precautionary measures against the virus than before the omicron surge, according to an AP-NORC poll last week. But many people, fatigued by crisis, are returning to some level of normality with hopes that vaccinations or prior infections will protect them.

With more than 878,000 deaths, the United States has the largest COVID-19 toll of any nation.

During the coming week, almost every U.S. state will see a faster increase in deaths, although deaths have peaked in a few states, including New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Maryland, Alaska and Georgia, according to the COVID-19 Forecast Hub.

New hospital admissions have started to fall for all age groups, according to CDC data, and a drop in deaths is expected to follow.

"In a pre-pandemic world, during some flu seasons, we see 10,000 or 15,000 deaths. We see that in the course of a week sometimes with COVID," said Nicholas Reich, who aggregates coronavirus projections for the hub in collaboration with the CDC.

"The toll and the sadness and suffering is staggering and very humbling," said Reich, a professor of biostatistics at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

## Toyota developing cruiser to explore moon's surface

Associated Press

TOKYO—Toyota is working with Japan's space agency on a vehicle to explore the lunar surface, with ambitions to help people live on the moon by 2040 and then go live on Mars, company officials said Friday.

The vehicle being developed with the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency is called Lunar Cruiser, whose name pays homage to the Toyota Land Cruiser sport utility vehicle. Its launch is set for the late 2020s.

The vehicle is based on the idea that people eat, work, sleep and communicate with others safely in cars, and the same can be done in outer space, said Takao Sato, who

heads the Lunar Cruiser project at Toyota Motor Corp.

"We see space as an area for our once-in-a-century transformation. By going to space, we may be able to develop telecommunications and other technology that will prove valuable to human life," Sato told The Associated Press.

Gitai Japan Inc., a venture contracted with Toyota, has developed a robotic arm for the Lunar Cruiser, designed to perform tasks such as inspection and maintenance. Its "grapple fixture" allows the arm's end to be changed so it can work like different tools, scooping, lifting and sweeping.

Gitai Chief Executive Sho Nakanose said he felt the challenge of blasting off into space has basically been met but working in space entails big costs and hazards for astronauts. That's where robots would come in handy, he said.

Toyota engineer Shinichiro Noda said he is excited about the lunar project, an extension of the automaker's longtime mission to serve customers, and the moon may provide valuable resources for life on Earth.

"Sending our cars to the moon is our mission," he said. Toyota has vehicles almost everywhere. "But this is about taking our cars to somewhere we have never been."

## 'Tiger King' Joe Exotic resented to 21 years in prison

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY—A federal judge resented "Tiger King" Joe Exotic to 21 years in prison on Friday, reducing his punishment by just a year despite pleas from the former zoo-keeper for leniency as he begins treatment for early-stage cancer.

"Please don't make me die in prison waiting for a chance to be free," he tearfully told a federal judge who resented him on a murder-for-hire charge.

Joe Exotic — whose real

name is Joseph Maldonado-Passage — was convicted in a case involving animal welfare activist Carole Baskin. Both were featured in Netflix's "Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness."

Wearing an orange prison jumpsuit, Maldonado-Passage, 58, still had his trademark mullet hairstyle, but the bleach-blond had faded to brown and gray.

Baskin and her husband, Howard Baskin, also attended the proceedings, and she said she

was fearful that Maldonado-Passage could threaten her.

"He continues to harbor intense feelings of ill will toward me," she told the judge.

Baskin said even with Maldonado-Passage in prison, she has continued to receive "vile, abusive and threatening communications" over the last two years. She told the judge she believes Maldonado-Passage poses an even more serious threat to her now that he has a larger group of supporters because of the popularity of the Netflix series.

Maldonado-Passage's attorneys told the judge their client is suffering from stage-one prostate cancer, along with a disease that compromises his immune system, making him particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

Friday's court proceedings came about after a federal appeals court ruled last year that the prison term he's serving on a murder-for-hire conviction should be shortened.

His attorneys said they would appeal the resentencing and petition for a new trial.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Man surfed porn site before fatal crash**

**IN** CROWN POINT — An Illinois man was surfing a pornographic website moments before his tractor-trailer collided with a tar tanker near Lowell, killing the road construction worker who was driving it, prosecutors say.

Clark R. Johnson, 69, of Hoopston, Ill., was charged with reckless homicide, two counts of criminal recklessness and three counts of misdemeanor distracted driving, the Post-Tribune reported.

The crash occurred Aug. 25, 2020, on U.S. 41 in Lowell. Martin Knip, 63, of LaPorte and DeMotte, was killed.

The semitrailer struck the pickup's rear left corner and then the tanker, causing the tanker to roll over. At the time, Knip was spraying hot tar on the road shoulder, charges state.

Police later found the porn website on Johnson's cellphone, documents said.

**Museum to return art looted during WWII**

**MA** BOSTON — A work of art by a 17th century Dutch painter that was reported looted from a Hungarian bank during World War II is being returned to the heirs of its rightful owner, Boston's Museum of Fine Arts said.

"View of Beverwijk" by Salomon van Ruysdael has been in the museum's collection since 1982, when it was acquired from a London dealer with no information about its history other than that it had come from a Swiss collection, the museum said in a statement.

The landscape painted in 1646 was owned by Ferenc Chorin, a Jewish collector who had deposited the painting along with other works at the Hungarian Commercial Bank of Pest in 1943, before he and his family fled Hungary in 1944.

"View of Beverwijk" was listed in a 1988 publication of Hungarian war losses, but because it was published with an incorrect image and description, the MFA was not aware that it had belonged to Chorin or was considered missing.

**Ex-school cop charged with child sexual abuse**

**WA** NEWPORT — A former police officer who most recently worked as the school resource officer northeast of Spokane in Newport was charged with sexually abusing a child.

The Newport Police Department said Raul Lopez was charged with lewd conduct with a child younger than 16 and two counts of sexual abuse of a child younger than 16, KXLY-TV reported.

The police department said it was notified about the alleged crimes Jan. 18 by the Bonner County Sheriff's Office in Idaho, where Lopez lives. Investigators said the alleged crimes happened there.

Newport Police said Lopez was immediately put on administrative leave and his peace officer powers suspended pending an investigation.

**Man indicted after dynamite found at hotel**

**NV** LAS VEGAS — A motorist who noticed a pickup truck and trailer outside

a northern Nevada construction company the day before Christmas provided a key clue to the arrest of a California man accused of stealing explosives and driving them to suburban Las Vegas, federal authorities said.

Evan Ray Atkinson, 38, was indicted in U.S. District Court in Reno on multiple charges including theft, possession, improper storage and transport of explosive materials, according to prosecutors and court documents.

Prosecutors allege in court documents that Atkinson was found with about 100 pounds of dynamite and ignition materials, including items stolen from an explosives locker at the company in Kinkaid Mill, a mining district near Hawthorne, Nev.

Cellphone location records led investigators to Atkinson, court documents said.

**Police officer completes DoorDash delivery**

**SD** SIOUX FALLS — A Sioux Falls woman was surprised by the person who recently showed up on her doorstep to deliver her DoorDash order from Arby's.

Anastasia Elsinger didn't expect he'd be wearing a badge and carrying a gun.

Ring camera video showing a Sioux Falls police officer delivering the order has been viewed widely on social media.

The officer told Elsinger that he knew he wasn't the delivery driver she might be expecting, but that the DoorDash driver had been pulled over and arrested for some outstanding warrants after picking up the order, so he figured he'd complete the delivery.

**6 charged with bid to smuggle guns to cartel**

**CA** LOS ANGELES — Six men were charged with plotting to smuggle assault weapons and hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition, including .50-caliber armor piercing bullets, to one of Mexico's most violent drug cartels, authorities announced.

The alleged ringleader of the scheme, Marco Antonio Santillan Valencia, 51, of Whittier, Calif., and three other men were arrested while a fifth is in custody facing separate charges in North Carolina and the sixth is believed to be in Mexico, the U.S. attorney's office said in a statement.

The men are accused of conspiracy to violate federal export laws by smuggling weapons into Mexico for the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación.

**DMV worker took cash, concert tickets as bribe**

**SC** COLUMBIA — A South Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles employee faces three bribery counts after investigators said he took cash or concert tickets to let people pass various tests.

In one case, the worker took \$100 to give someone a beginner's driving permit. In another case, he took concert tickets to bypass a road test, according to arrest warrants.

The employee is charged with three counts of receiving anything of value to influence the action of a public employee, the State Law Enforcement Division said.

-From Associated Press



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# Young Bengals take on grizzled Chiefs

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Kansas City Chiefs have been in this position before. Walking across the cold Arrowhead Stadium parking lot, dressing in their revamped locker room, strolling through the narrow tunnel and spilling onto the field for the AFC title game.

In fact, the Chiefs have done it each of the last three years.

It will be a whole new experience for the Cincinnati Bengals, though, when they follow the same path Sunday with a trip to the Super Bowl on the line. Only a couple of special teams players were alive, and coach Zac Taylor was just starting elementary school, when they beat the Bills in January 1989 in their last trip to a conference championship game.

“I think it helps this time of year having a pretty good idea of what this is all about,” acknowledged Chiefs coach Andy Reid, who can tie Tom Landry for second in NFL history with his 20th playoff win. “They know how we go about our

business, the intensity, whether it’s practice or what we expect out of the game.”

That experience came in handy last Sunday, when the Chiefs went 44 yards in 13 seconds to kick a field goal and force overtime against Buffalo. Patrick Mahomes and Co. proceeded to win the coin toss, and ultimately the game, by marching right downfield for a touchdown without giving the Bills another chance with the ball.

It was the kind of unforgettable, heart-stopping victory that can give an NFL team plenty of momentum for the rest of the postseason — provided they get over it quickly enough to prepare for the next one.

“It was an awesome game and win that we’ll remember forever,” Mahomes said, “but we’re not done. We’re trying to get out there and win an AFC championship and try to get to the Super Bowl.”

The Bengals had a thriller in their own right to get past top-seeded Tennessee last week-

end. They blew a 16-6 second-half lead, then put rookie Evan McPherson in position to kick a winning 52-yard field goal as time expired.

It was the first road playoff win in franchise history. Now, they’re after another in Kansas City.

“We’re excited about the opportunity,” Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow said. “If you want to do the things that we want to do, that’s a team that you’re going to have to beat every single year. The AFC has run through them for four straight years.

“So, you know, we’re excited about the opportunity. We’re gonna have a great week of practice and be ready to go.”

## Familiar faces

The Bengals beat the Chiefs on Jan. 2 in Cincinnati in a back-and-forth thriller that ended when McPherson drilled a 20-yard field goal as time expired. Burrow threw for 446 yards and four touchdowns, most of it going to wide receiver

Ja’Marr Chase, while Mahomes threw for 259 yards and two scores against the lightly regarded Cincinnati secondary.

“The Chiefs do a good job of employing a variety of schemes to try to keep you off balance,” Taylor said. “I thought Joe and Ja’Marr did a good job of being on the same page in that game.”

## Star power

The two teams combined to send nine players to the Pro Bowl this season, six from Kansas City and three from Cincinnati, and there’s another half-dozen players from each team that probably had a good argument to make it.

As it stands, the Chiefs have Mahomes joining wide receiver Tyreek Hill, tight end Travis Kelce, defensive tackle Chris Jones and safety Tyrann Mathieu along with new left tackle Orlando Brown Jr. The Bengals are sending Chase along with running back Joe Mixon and defensive end Trey Hendrickson.

# Rams try to solve 49ers team that’s had their number

Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — Aaron Donald has been around long enough to know he might not get this chance again. The same goes for everybody in the Los Angeles Rams’ constellation of stars around him.

Late in his eighth NFL season as the best defensive lineman of his generation, Donald’s career is rich with individual honors, but lacking ultimate team success. The Rams (14-5) made several bold moves this season to build a team around Donald more capable of winning it all, and now they’re one step away from playing in a Super Bowl in their home stadium when they host the San Francisco 49ers

(12-7) in the NFC championship game on Sunday.

“I feel like I’ve accomplished a lot in a short amount of time in this league,” said Donald, the seven-time All-Pro and three-time Defensive Player of the Year. “The only thing I’m lacking now is being a world champion. To get to that point, we’ve got to win this week.”

After crying on the sideline last January when the Rams’ season slipped away in Green Bay, Donald is desperate to take that penultimate step toward his last career goal. So are Matthew Stafford, Jalen Ramsey, Andrew Whitworth, Odell Beckham Jr., Cooper Kupp and several other Rams whose otherwise impressive

careers don’t have that certain championship ring.

“So many teammates on my team, this is really all they need,” said linebacker Von Miller, the Super Bowl 50 MVP with Denver and midseason Rams acquisition. “Aaron Donald, this is all he needs, and he has the whole shebang, you know? Andrew Whitworth and Eric Weddle and all of these guys, I want to do it for them.”

These rivals match up superbly, with both offenses relying heavily on an All-Pro receiver (Kupp and Deebo Samuel) and both defenses built around elite, dynamic pass rushers.

But if the Rams (14-5) don’t overcome the 49ers’ madden-

ing mastery over them, all their big moves will end in checkmate.

San Francisco has won six consecutive meetings with Los Angeles, and not much in their first two meetings this season suggested Rams coach Sean McVay is close to clearing the monumental mental block separating him from his good friend, Kyle Shanahan.

## Chapter 11

Shanahan has won seven of his 10 meetings with McVay in their concurrent half-decade careers. Preparing for this showdown was no challenge for both coaches, and they say execution will win the NFC title, not trick plays or surprises.

# NBA-leading Suns win ninth straight

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Devin Booker scored 29 points, Chris Paul had a triple-double with 21 points, 14 assists and 10 rebounds and the NBA-leading Phoenix Suns won their ninth straight game, beating the Minnesota Timberwolves 134-124 on Friday night.

Cam Johnson — who has recently moved into a starting role with several key players injured — hit back-to-back three-pointers midway through the fourth to help push the Suns past the pesky Timberwolves. He finished with 23 points. The 6-foot-8 forward also had the assist on two more three-pointers in the closing minutes — one by Landry Shamet and another by Paul.

Phoenix played without starters Deandre Ayton (right ankle sprain) and Jae Crowder (left wrist contusion) and key backups JaVale McGee (left knee soreness) and Cameron Payne (right wrist sprain).

Anthony Edwards had 27 points and a career-high 10 assists for Minnesota. Malik Beasley added 26 points off the bench, and Karl-Anthony Towns had 23.

**Hornets 117, Lakers 114:** Miles Bridges had 26 points, Ish Smith provided a huge boost off the bench with 22 points on 10-for-12 shooting and host Charlotte held off short-handed Los Angeles.

Russell Westbrook scored 35 points for the Lakers, but missed a potential winning three-pointer with 0.7 seconds left.

**Bucks 123, Knicks 108:** Giannis Antetokounmpo had 38 points and 13 rebounds and made numerous big plays in the fourth quarter to help host Milwaukee beat New York.

The Bucks never trailed as they won for the fourth time in five games and bounced back from a 115-99 loss at Cleveland. The Knicks have lost six of seven.

**Grizzlies 119, Jazz 109:** Ja Morant had 30 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his fourth career triple-double and host Memphis pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat Utah.

Brandon Clarke added 22 points for Memphis, and Jaren Jackson Jr. finished with 18 points and matched his season high with six blocks. Desmond Bane added 17 for the Grizzlies.

**Nuggets 116, Pelicans 105:** Nikola Jokic scored 22 of his 29 points in the second half to go with 13 rebounds and 10 assists and visiting Denver held off short-handed New Orleans.

Jokic had just seven points during a closely contested first half, after which the Nuggets led 50-48. The reigning NBA MVP proceeded to score 16 points in the first 11 minutes of the second half, hitting three of the four three-point shots in that stretch.

**Heat 121, Clippers 114:** Jimmy Butler scored 26 points and host Miami withstood another furious comeback from Los Angeles.

Gabe Vincent finished with 23 points, and Bam Adebayo had 20 points and 12 rebounds for the Heat. They have won 10 of 12.

**Hawks 108, Celtics 92:** John Collins and Trae Young each scored 21 points and host Atlanta beat Boston for its sixth straight victory.

Bogdan Bogdanovic added 19 points, and Danilo Gallinari had 14 on 5-for-5 shooting from the field. The Hawks shot 46.1%, compared to 34.9% for the Cel-

tics.

Jaylen Brown had 26 points and 12 rebounds for Boston. Jayson Tatum scored 20 points.

**Pacers 113, Thunder 110 (OT):** Domantas Sabonis had 24 points, 18 rebounds and 10 assists and visiting Indiana outlasted Oklahoma City in overtime.

Sabonis had his fifth triple-double of the season and 18th overall.

Lu Dort scored 27 points, and Josh Giddey added 15 points and 10 rebounds for the Thunder. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, Oklahoma City's leading scorer this season, sprained his right ankle early in the third quarter and did not return.

**Spurs 131, Bulls 122:** Dejounte Murray had 29 points and 12 assists and host San Antonio beat Chicago in DeMar DeRozan's return to his former hometown.

**Magic 119, Pistons 103:** Franz Wagner scored 24 points and outplayed fellow rookie Cade Cunningham and host Orlando beat Detroit in a matchup of the NBA's worst teams.

The Magic improved to 10-40, two games behind the Pistons.

# Barty overcomes Collins to win Australian Open title

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Ash Barty will no longer need to overthink the 1970s when she prepares for the Australian Open.

The top-ranked Barty recovered from 5-1 down in the second set to beat Danielle Collins 6-3, 7-6 (2) in the final on Saturday night, ending a 44-year drought for Australians at their home Grand Slam.

The pressure is off the 25-year-old Aussie, who has made a remarkable career comeback after taking time off — missing every Grand Slam tournament in 2015 and '16 — and briefly

flirting with taking up a professional cricket career after three first-round exits at the majors in 2014.

The usually reserved Barty let out a yell of sheer delight when she finally ensured she was the first Australian singles champion here since Chris O'Neil won the women's title in 1978.

"Yeah, it was a little bit surreal," she said. "I didn't quite know what to do or what to feel, and I think just being able to let out a little bit of emotion, which is a little bit unusual for me, and being able to celebrate with everyone who was there in the

crowd; the energy was incredible tonight."

Barty now has Grand Slam singles titles on three surfaces, adding the hard court at Melbourne Park to her win on grass at Wimbledon last year and on clay at the 2019 French Open. She joins Serena Williams as the only active players on the women's tour with majors on all three surfaces.

"This is just a dream come true for me," she said. "I'm just so proud to be an Aussie."

Evonne Goolagong Cawley, a tennis icon with seven Grand Slam singles titles and a trailblazer for Indigenous athletes

from Australia, was a surprise guest to present the champion's trophy to Barty, who is part of a new generation of stars with Aboriginal heritage.

"Very lucky to be able to give her a hug in some of the biggest moments in my life," Barty said. "To be able to experience that together on such a big occasion, on such a beautiful court, and in a tournament that means so much to both of us — it was really nice to have her there just as someone to lean on when I wasn't really sure what to do."

The 28-year-old Collins was the fourth American to take on Barty in four consecutive

# Avs top Blackhawks, win ninth straight

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Gabriel Landeskog scored two power-play goals, and the Colorado Avalanche topped the Chicago Blackhawks 6-4 on Friday night for their ninth straight win.

Western Conference-leading Colorado extended its point streak to 15 games (14-0-1), surviving a wild finish. J.T. Compher and Alex Newhook also scored, and Nazem Kadri and Cale Makar added empty-netters. Pavel Francouz made 39 saves.

The Avalanche played without center Nathan MacKinnon, who missed the first of at least three games because of a concussion and facial fracture.

Patrick Kane and Brandon Hagel each scored twice for the Blackhawks, who trailed 3-0 early in the third period.

**Bruins 2, Coyotes 1:** Linus Ullmark stopped 30 shots, Da-

vid Pastrnak had two assists and visiting Boston beat Arizona for the 17th straight time.

Erik Haula and Charlie McAvoy each had goals to help the Bruins bounce back from blowing a two-goal lead in a loss to Colorado.

Nick Schmaltz scored and Scott Wedgewood had 36 saves for the Coyotes, who haven't beaten Boston since 2010 in the Czech Republic. Arizona has lost four straight.

**Wild 3, Rangers 2:** Frederic Gaudreau scored the tiebreaking goal early in the third period and visiting Minnesota beat New York following its jersey retirement ceremony for Henrik Lundqvist.

Kevin Fiala and Mats Zuccarella — a former Ranger — each had a goal and an assist to extend their point streaks to 10 games, and Cam Talbot — a backup to Lundqvist for two

seasons — stopped 25 shots for the Wild. Minnesota won for the seventh time in eight games (7-0-1).

Chris Kreider got his NHL-leading 31st goal and Barclay Goodrow also scored for New York, which led 2-0 after one period. Igor Shesterkin had 31 saves. The Rangers have lost two straight after winning nine of 12.

**Red Wings 3, Penguins 2 (SO):** Lucas Raymond scored the only goal of the shootout and visiting Detroit beat Pittsburgh.

Filip Zadina and Givani Smith scored in regulation for Detroit, and Calvin Pickard — making his second start of the season — stopped 36 shots through overtime and all three Pittsburgh skaters in the tiebreaker.

Jake Guentzel scored twice for the Penguins, who lost for the second time in two days fol-

lowing a six-game winning streak. Pittsburgh is 17-2-2 in its last 21 games dating back to Dec. 4. Casey DeSmith had 30 saves for the Penguins, who have points in eight straight games overall (6-0-2) and 10 consecutive at home.

**Capitals 5, Stars 0:** Nicklas Backstrom had a goal and two assists, Vitek Vanecek had 30 saves for his second shutout of the season, and visiting Washington beat former teammate Braden Holtby and Dallas.

Trevor van Riemsdyk, Tom Wilson, John Carlson and Connor McMichael also scored for the Capitals, who won in regulation for the first time since Jan. 15. Evgeny Kuznetsov also had two assists.

Holtby allowed all five goals and stopped 22 shots before being replaced after two periods by Jake Oettinger, who made two saves.

## Giants hire Bills offensive coordinator Daboll as coach

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — The co-owners of the New York Giants wanted a head coach who new general manager Joe Schoen could work well with.

In hiring Bills offensive coordinator Brian Daboll on Friday, co-owners John Mara and Steve Tisch got someone who Schoen has worked with well the last four years in Buffalo.

"In the end, it was obvious Brian has spent his career preparing for this moment," Tisch said. "He is creative, thoughtful, determined, and Joe and Brian are the perfect complement to each other. We will do everything we can to support their process as they build toward the 2022 season and well after that."

Daboll, 46, replaces Joe Judge, who was fired two days after the Giants finished a 4-13 season, their fifth straight double-digit losing season.

Daboll came to the Bills in 2018 after helping Alabama win its 17th national championship as the Crimson Tide's offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach.

The Giants interviewed six candidates for the vacant position, giving a second in-

terview to Bills defensive coordinator Leslie Frazier earlier Friday. They also spoke to former Miami Dolphins coach Brian Flores; defensive coordinators Lou Anarumo of Cincinnati, Dan Quinn of Dallas and the Giants' Patrick Graham.

### Wyoming edges Air Force

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Hunter Maldonado scored a season-high 31 points, including a layup at the buzzer, as Wyoming edged past Air Force 63-61 on Friday night.

Maldonado inbounded it with 7.2 seconds left, got it back and raced down the court for a game-winning basket.

Graham Ike had 10 points and nine rebounds for Wyoming (16-3, 5-1 Mountain West Conference). Jeremiah Oden added eight rebounds.

A.J. Walker had 18 points for the Falcons (10-9, 3-5). Jake Heidbreder added 14 points and Ethan Taylor had 12 points and six assists.

### Zalatoris and Day share lead

SAN DIEGO — Will Zalatoris and Jason Day charged past Jon Rahm and Justin

Thomas on Friday at Torrey Pines to share the third-round lead at the Farmers Insurance Open.

Zalatoris posted the day's best round with a 7-under 65, and two-time Farmers champion Day shot a 67. They were at 14 under heading to the final round of the tournament, which will finish Saturday to avoid a television conflict with the NFL's two conference championship games.

Rahm and Aaron Rai were 13 under, and Thomas, Sungjae Im and Cameron Tringale were another shot back. There were 24 players within five shots of the co-leaders after an eventful moving day.

Zalatoris surged from six shots back after two rounds and moved into contention for his first career PGA Tour victory, yet his round could have been several strokes better if his putter had kept up with the rest of his formidable play. The 25-year-old missed several birdie putts, including a pair inside 5 feet, but stayed in the lead alongside several more accomplished pros.

Day, who won a playoff in 2018 to claim the Farmers title, finished his third round superbly with four birdies on the final six holes.