

## China holds drills after strike group arrives

BY ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

A Chinese aircraft carrier held live-fire exercises in the South China Sea on Saturday, two days after a U.S. carrier strike group arrived in the region, according to Chinese and U.S. sources.

The Chinese carrier Shandong conducted target practice, J-15 jet fighter flight operations and damage control exercises, according to a news release Monday from the official China Military Online.

On Thursday, the USS Nimitz Carrier Strike Group entered the South China Sea for the first time on its 2022-23 deployment and carried out several exercises, including maritime strike training, and anti-submarine and flight operations, according to a U.S. 7th Fleet news release Friday.

There was no immediate indication that the ships were in proximity to each other.

The 7th Fleet routinely deploys warships

to the region for training and other operations.

The Shandong, China's first domestically built aircraft carrier, was accompanied by a Type 055 stealth guided-missile destroyer and three other guided-missile destroyers, the South China Morning Post reported Monday.

The Nimitz, homeported in Bremerton, Wash., was accompanied by the guided-missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill and guided-missile destroyers USS Decatur, USS Chung Hoon and USS Wayne E. Meyer, 7th Fleet said Friday.

Two Chinese ships reportedly began shadowing the strike group within a day of its arrival, CNN reported on Friday, citing an unnamed defense official.

A spokesperson for 7th Fleet did not respond to calls or emails requesting confirmation of the report and other questions.

The two carriers' operations coincided

with the conclusion of the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee, or 2+2 meeting, between State Secretary Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and their Japanese counterparts, Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada.

Blinken said both countries agree that Beijing is the "greatest shared strategic challenge" they face, according to a White House readout of the meeting. Hayashi echoed Blinken, adding that China's challenge is "unprecedented."

The Shandong's exercises follow a series of naval drills by China this month, including large-scale combat strike exercises Jan. 9 in the Taiwan Strait.

During those exercises, Chinese forces sent 57 aircraft and four ships into the strait toward Taiwan, according to a statement Monday from Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense.

## Turkey's top diplomat travels to US amid troubled ties

*Associated Press*

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey and the United States will aim to smooth out a series of disagreements between the NATO allies when the Turkish foreign minister visits Washington this week. But expectations that outstanding issues can be resolved are low.

Mevlut Cavusoglu was to depart Tuesday for a meeting on Wednesday with U.S. counterpart Antony Blinken on a rare visit by a top Turkish official. President Joe Biden's administration has kept its distance from Turkey because of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian direction and policies curbing rights and freedoms.

Positioned at the crossroads between East and West, Turkey remains strategically important for Washington. Last year, the

Turkish government helped broker a crucial agreement between Russia and Ukraine that allowed millions of tons of Ukrainian grain to be transported to world markets, averting a food crisis amid the war.

NATO allies, however, have frequently found themselves at odds over a number of issues, with the biggest disputes centering on Turkey's purchase of Russian-made missiles and American support for Kurdish militants in Syria.

The acquisition of the S-400 air defense system in 2017 led to sanctions and Turkey being removed from the development program for the next-generation F-35 fighter plane. After losing out on the F-35, Ankara is currently trying to restock its F-16 fleet. But the deal faces opposition in Congress.

Cavusoglu sounded confident

this week that the deal for the purchase of 40 F-16 jets as well as technology for the update of its existing fleet would overcome congressional hurdles.

"We have reached an agreement with the (Biden) administration, and it is important that the administration has emphasized that the agreement is not only important for Turkey but for NATO as well," Cavusoglu told reporters. "If the administration stands firm ... then there will be no problem."

U.S. State Department deputy spokesman Vedant Patel responded Friday to media reports that the Biden administration is also seeking congressional approval for shipping F-35s to Greece.

"Türkiye and Greece both are vital, vital NATO allies and we have a history of, of course, supporting their security appara-

tuses. But I'm just not going to get ahead of the process here," Patel said, using the preferred name for Turkey in Erdogan's government.

In Syria, U.S. support for the Kurdish militant group YPG since 2014 has angered Ankara because of links between the YPG and the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which has waged a 39-year insurgency against Turkey and is listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. and European Union.

U.S. concern over Ankara's cozy relationship with the Kremlin has been reinvigorated by the war in Ukraine. Despite Turkey's ties with Moscow producing breakthroughs such as the grain deal and prisoner swaps, Washington is worried about sanctions-busting as Turkish-Russian trade levels have risen over the last year.

# US troops train with new S. Korean unit

By DAVID CHOI  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — U.S. troops drilled for the first time with a new South Korean army brigade created to test new weapons and tactics.

More than 800 soldiers from the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division and the South Korean Tiger Demonstration Brigade wrapped up a two-week exercise on Sunday at the Mugeonri Training Field in Paju, roughly 15 miles north of Seoul, according to a news release Tuesday from the Ministry of National Defense.

The Tiger brigade was established in June to test new warfare concepts and equipment, such as unmanned vehicles, military officials told reporters in Seoul last year.

The brigade was equipped with K808 White Tiger infantry fighting vehicles, surveillance drones and the AT-1K Raybolt antitank guided missile, according to the ministry's news release.

The Army's 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., arrived in South Korea in October for a roughly nine-month deployment with 2nd ID. The brigade replaced the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team after the Army opted to use the more mobile Strykers in South Korea, rather than tracked vehicles like the M1A2 Abrams tank.

Photos of the exercise released by the ministry showed the Army's eight-wheeled Stryker vehicles operating in the mountainous terrain.

The Stryker brigade on Jan. 10 conducted its first live-fire exercise in South Korea using mounted, remote-controlled MK-19 grenade launchers and M-2 Browning machine guns.

The joint exercise boosted the "combined fighting power" of the United States and South Korea through the sharing of military techniques, South Korean army Lt. Col. Lee Jae Yong, the training commander, said in the release.

According to the ministry, the exercise enhances the South Korea-U.S. military alliance and shares combat skills among the troops amid threats from North Korea.

North Korea tested its first missile of the year on Jan. 1 after firing around 75 missiles on 36 separate days last year.

"In a situation where we are in need of firmer [South Korea]-U.S. joint readiness defense posture due to North Korea's recent consecutive provocations, this exercise has been planned in order to improve capabilities," the National Defense Ministry said.

The exercise was one of many planned by the U.S. and South Korean military this year. The two allied forces may train together in about 20 large-scale drills by June, according to a budget proposal submitted Jan. 11 to South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol.

"It's right for South Korea and the United States to cooperate because both of us are exposed to the North Korean nuclear threat," Yoon said in a report that day by The Associated Press.

## USAF sends Germany-based F-16 fighter jets to Okinawa

By JENNIFER H. SVAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

The only U.S. Air Force base in Germany with fighter jets is loaning some of its air combat power to Okinawa, where older aircraft are gradually being phased out and returned to the United States.

A contingent of F-16CM Fighting Falcons and airmen from the 52nd Fighter Wing at Spangdahlem Air Base arrived in Japan on Monday, the Air Force said.

They'll support operations at Kadena Air Base and the western Pacific region alongside F-22s that arrived earlier from Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska. About a dozen Raptors have been deployed to Okinawa since Nov. 4.

The Air Force didn't say how many F-16s deployed from Spangdahlem nor how long they'll stay on Okinawa. Within Europe, the service also bases fighter jets in England and Italy.

"We are excited to be here supporting our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region," Lt. Col. Shaun Loomis, 480th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron commander, said in a statement. "We look forward to training and operating in this uniquely complex and strategically vital region."

The first group of F-15 Eagles to permanently depart Kadena left in early December, bound for use by the National Guard or storage in the Air Force boneyard.

The Air Force in October announced plans to replace the two units of F-15 Eagles positioned on Okinawa — the 44th and 67th Fighter Squadrons — with rotating units of advanced Raptor stealth fighters for the foreseeable future. The phaseout of the 48 Eagle fighters based on Okinawa for 43 years is supposed to take place over two years with no gaps in fighter coverage, the Air Force has said.

## US, Ukraine military chiefs meet in person for 1st time

*Associated Press*

The top U.S. military officer, Army Gen. Mark Milley, traveled to a site near the Ukraine-Poland border on Tuesday and talked with his Ukrainian counterpart face to face for the first time — a meeting underscoring the growing ties between the two militaries and coming at a critical time as Russia's war with Ukraine nears the one-year mark.

Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, met for a couple of hours with Ukraine's chief military officer, Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, at an undisclosed location in southeastern Poland. The two leaders have talked frequently about Ukraine's military needs and the state of the war over the past year, but had never met in person.

The meeting comes as the international community ramps up the military assistance to Ukraine, including expanded train-

ing of Ukrainian troops by the United States and the provision of a Patriot missile battery, tanks and increased air defense and other weapons systems by the U.S. and a coalition of European and other nations.

It also marks a key time in the war. Ukraine's troops face fierce fighting in the eastern Donetsk province, where Russian forces — supplemented by thousands of private Wagner Group contractors — seek to turn the tide after a series of battlefield setbacks in recent months.

Army Col. Dave Butler, a spokesman for Milley, told two reporters traveling with the chairman that the two generals felt it was important to meet in person. The reporters did not accompany Milley to the meeting and, under conditions set by the military, agreed to not identify the military base in southeastern Poland where they were located.

# Yellen to meet with Chinese finance minister

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen will meet with her Chinese counterpart, Vice Premier Liu He, in Switzerland on Wednesday to discuss economic developments between the two nations.

The Zurich talks will be a follow-up to the November meeting between President Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in Bali, Indonesia. The two world leaders agreed to empower key senior officials to maintain communication.

Strains between the world's two leading economies have been growing despite their trade ties. The Biden administration has blocked the sale of advanced computer chips to China and is considering a ban on

investment in some Chinese tech companies, possibly undermining a key economic goal that Xi set for his country. Statements by the Democratic president that the United States will defend Taiwan against a Chinese invasion have also increased tensions.

The meeting comes ahead of Yellen's travel to Senegal, Zambia and South Africa this week in what will be the first in a string of visits by Biden administration officials to sub-Saharan Africa during the year.

Africa is crucial to the global economy due to its rapidly growing population and significant natural resources. China's deepening economic entrenchment in African nations, surpassing the U.S. in trade with the continent to become one of the world's

largest creditors, is also a motivator for the U.S. to deepen ties with African nations.

Yellen has spoken at length publicly about China's financing practices on the continent, calling them "economic practices that have disadvantaged all of us."

She has also called on China explicitly to end its relationship with Russia as the Kremlin continues its invasion of Ukraine. The U.S. and its European and Asian allies have imposed sanctions and an oil price cap on Russia in retaliation for the war, putting China in a difficult spot as it had promised a "no limits" friendship with Russia before the invasion began.

It will be Yellen's first in-person meeting with Liu since taking office and follows three virtual meetings between them.

# California weather calms after weeks of storms

*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — California's weather was calmer Tuesday after weeks of atmospheric rivers that drenched the state and covered its mountains in heavy snow.

Light rain and snow showers lingered in some areas, but skies were finally largely clear. A shot of precipitation from a quick system was predicted for Wednesday or Thursday, followed by a dry period, the National Weather Service said.

Forecasters cautioned that although the midweek rainfall will be light, it could be enough to cause problems because the state is so saturated.

Nine atmospheric rivers since late December have caused power outages, flooding, levee breaks, washouts and landslides.

At least 20 people have been killed.

The barrage of atmospheric river storms has dumped rain and snow on California, swamping roads, toppling trees, unleashing debris flows and triggering landslides. A system Monday was relatively weak compared with earlier storms, but flooding and mudslide risks remained due to lingering saturation, forecasters said.

President Joe Biden will travel to California's central coast Thursday to visit areas that have been impacted by the extreme weather. The White House said in a statement Monday that the president would visit with first responders and state and local officials, survey recovery efforts and assess what additional federal support is needed.

The sun came out Monday in San Francis-

co, where 20.3 inches of rain has fallen at the city's airport since Oct. 1, when California typically begins recording rainfall for the year. The average for the "water year" is 19.6 inches, "so we've surpassed the yearly total with 8 more months to go," the San Francisco weather service office tweeted.

Across the bay in Berkeley, 10 homes were evacuated Monday when a sodden hillside collapsed, sending mud onto properties. No injuries were reported.

In Monterey County, the swollen Salinas River swamped farmland over the weekend and officials said Monday that it was still rising. To the east, flood warnings were still in effect for Merced County in the agricultural Central Valley, where Gov. Gavin Newsom visited Saturday.

# Baby, teenage mom among at least 6 killed in shooting

*Associated Press*

VISALIA, Calif. — Six people — including a 17-year-old mother and her 6-month-old baby — were killed in a shooting early Monday at a home in central California, and authorities are searching for at least two suspects, sheriff's officials said.

Deputies responded around 3:30 a.m. to reports of multiple shots fired at the residence in unincorporated Goshen, just east of Visalia, the Tulare County Sheriff's Office said.

"Actually the report was that an active shooter was in the area because of the

number of shots that were being fired," Sheriff Mike Boudreaux told reporters.

Deputies found two victims dead in the street and a third person fatally shot in the doorway of the residence, Boudreaux said.

Three more victims were found inside the home, including a man who was still alive but later died at a hospital, he said.

The sheriff said investigators are searching for at least two suspects. They believe there is a gang connection to the killings. The sheriff's office conducted a narcotics-related search warrant at the

residence last week, Boudreaux said.

"We also believe this was not a random act of violence. We believe this was a targeted family," he said.

Two of the victims, the young mother and her child, were shot in the head, the sheriff said.

Samuel Pina said Monday that his teenage granddaughter, Alissa Parraz, and her baby, Nycholas Nolan Parraz, were among those killed.

"I can't wrap my head around what kind of monster would do this," he told The Associated Press.

# At least 45 dead in Russian missile strike

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The death toll from the Ukraine war's deadliest attack on civilians at one location since last spring, a weekend Russian missile strike on a southeastern apartment building, has reached 45, officials said Tuesday.

Those killed in the Saturday afternoon strike in Dnipro included six children, with 79 people injured, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wrote on the Telegram messaging app. The toll included two dozen people initially listed as missing at the multistory building, which housed about 1,700, according to Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of the

Ukrainian president's office.

Emergency crews cleared some 9.9 tons of rubble during a nonstop search and rescue operation, the Dnipro City Council said. Some 400 people lost their homes, with 72 apartments completely ruined and another 236 damaged beyond repair, it added.

The latest deadly Russian strike on a civilian target in the almost 11-month war triggered outrage. It also prompted the surprise resignation on Tuesday of a Ukrainian presidential adviser who said the Russian missile exploded and fell after the Ukrainian air defense system shot it down, a version that would take some of the blame off the Krem-

lin's forces.

Oleksii Arestovich's comments in a Saturday night interview caused an outcry. He said as he quit that his remarks were "a fundamental mistake." Ukraine's air force had stressed that the country's military did not possess a system capable of downing Russia's Kh-22 missiles, which it said was the type that hit the apartment building.

"Since the beginning of Russia's military aggression, more than 210 missiles of this type have been launched on the territory of Ukraine. Not one was shot down by means of anti-aircraft defense," the air force said Saturday.

Zelenskyy vowed to bring those responsible for the strike to justice, calling it "fundamental" for Ukraine and its Western allies.

"This strike at Dnipro, as well as other similar strikes, falls, in particular, under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court," he said in a video address late Monday.

"And we will use all available opportunities — both national and international — to ensure that all Russian murderers, everyone who gives and executes orders on missile terror against our people, face legal sentences. And to ensure that they serve their punishment," he said.

## Ukraine's first lady urges leaders to 'use influence'

Associated Press

DAVOS, Switzerland — Ukraine's first lady on Tuesday pressed world leaders and corporate executives at the World Economic Forum's annual gathering to do more to help her country at a time when Russia's invasion is leaving children dying and the world struggling with food insecurity.

As the anniversary of the war nears, Olena Zelenska said parents in Ukraine are in tears watching doctors trying to save their children, farmers are afraid to return to their fields filled with mines and "we cannot allow a new Chernobyl to happen," referring to the 1986 nuclear disaster as Russian missiles have pounded Ukrainian energy infrastructure for months.

"What you all have in common is that you are genuinely influential," Zelenska told attendees. "But there is something that separates you, namely that not all of you use this influence, or sometimes use it in a way that separates you even more."

She spoke as hundreds of government officials, corporate ti-

tans, academics and activists from around the world descended on the resort town. The week-long talkfest of big ideas and backroom deal-making prioritizes global problems such as hunger, climate change and the slowing economy, but it's never clear how much concrete action emerges to help reach the forum's stated ambition of "improving the state of the world."

"We are all internally convinced that there is no such global problem that humanity cannot solve," Zelenska said. "This is more important now when Russia's aggression in Europe poses various challenges."

The fighting has killed thousands of civilians, displaced millions and jolted food and fuel markets worldwide, raising inflation and expanding food insecurity in developing nations.

"There is a right to food that every human being has, and it's an insult for mankind and for human nature itself, that in the 21st century, it is possible for us to have mass starvation simply because there is a targeted aggression of some countries," she said.

## Nepal plane data box sent to France, bodies returned

Associated Press

POKHARA, Nepal — Nepalese authorities on Tuesday began returning the bodies of plane crash victims to families and were sending the aircraft's data recorder to France for analysis as they try to learn what caused the country's deadliest air disaster in 30 years.

The flight plummeted into a gorge on Sunday while on approach to the newly opened Pokhara International Airport in the foothills of the Himalayas, killing all 72 aboard. Searchers found cockpit voice and flight data recorders on Monday, and on Tuesday shut off a dam to ease efforts to retrieve the last remaining body from the 984-foot-deep ravine. Two more bodies were found earlier Tuesday.

The voice recorder would be analyzed locally, but the flight data recorder would be sent to France, said Jagannath Niraula, spokesperson for Nepal's Civil Aviation Authority. The aircraft's manufacturer, ATR, is headquartered in Toulouse.

The French air accident investigations agency confirmed taking part in the probe, and its rep-

resentatives were already on site.

The twin-engine ATR 72-500t, operated by Nepal's Yeti Airlines, was completing the 27-minute flight from the capital, Kathmandu, to the resort city of Pokhara, 125 miles west.

It's still not clear what caused the crash, less than a minute's flight from the airport in light wind and clear skies.

Aviation experts said it appears that the turboprop went into a stall at low altitude on approach to the airport, but it is not clear why.

From a smartphone video shot from the ground seconds before the aircraft crashed, one can see the ATR 72 "nose high, high angle of attack, with wings at a very high bank angle, close to the ground," said Bob Mann, an aviation analyst and consultant.

"Whether that was due to loss of power, or misjudging aircraft's energy, direction or the approach profile, and attempting to modify energy or approach, that aircraft attitude would likely have resulted in an aerodynamic stall and rapid loss of altitude, when already close to the ground," he said in an email.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Police: Man held women hostage, then arrested**

**MI** WELLSTON — A western Michigan man was arrested after holding two women hostage, state police said.

Troopers were called to the man's home, a shed in Wellston about 85 miles north of Grand Rapids.

One of the women told police she and a friend were visiting the suspect at his shed when he accused the women of stealing his methamphetamine. He assaulted them and brandished a handgun, telling them they could not leave, police said.

One of the women called her son and he went to the scene, confronted the suspect and was able to free his mother, police said.

A state police emergency support team went to the scene and discovered the suspect and his remaining hostage had left on foot. They were located by deputies from the Manistee County Sheriff's Office, police said.

**Man of cruise indicted on sexual assault charge**

**MA** BOSTON — A Minnesota man is facing a charge of abusive sexual contact while on a cruise ship from Iceland to Boston this past summer, according to federal prosecutors in Massachusetts.

The man is accused of sexually assaulting a male crewmember on Aug. 30, 2022, while aboard the Celebrity Summit Cruise Ship, according to the charging documents. The alleged assault happened in a men's restroom that the crew member had entered in the

early morning hours to clean, the documents said.

The passenger was indicted by a federal grand jury, the office of the U.S. attorney for Massachusetts said.

**Man arrested after boy seen playing with gun**

**IN** BEECH GROVE — An Indiana man faces criminal charges after a young boy was allegedly seen holding a handgun outside their apartment and pulling the trigger without firing any bullets.

Indianapolis TV station WXIN, citing a police report by the Beech Grove Police Department, said a 45-year-old man was arrested for felony neglect of a dependent.

It was not immediately clear what led police to the apartment, but a video of a young boy playing with the gun was recorded by a security camera and seized by police in their investigation, the station reported. The boy, who was not named, can be seen waving the gun and pulling its trigger. He did not appear to be harmed.

Police also seized a semiautomatic Smith & Wesson 9 mm pistol, the station reported.

**Man's murder conviction vacated in wife's death**

**MN** ST. PAUL — A Minnesota man who served nearly 25 years in connection with his wife's death walked out of prison after authorities vacated his murder convictions and allowed him to plead guilty to manslaughter, citing a problem with expert testimony from a doctor whose statements in other cases have also come under scrutiny.

Thomas Rhodes, who is now 63, was convicted in 1998 of first- and second-degree murder in the death of his 36-year-old wife, Jane Rhodes, who fell overboard and drowned on a night-time boat ride with her husband in 1996.

The murder conviction hinged on the testimony of Dr. Michael McGee, who said Rhodes grabbed his wife by the neck, threw her overboard and ran her over several times, the Attorney General's Office said in a statement. Rhodes told investigators his wife fell out of the boat and disappeared while he frantically searched for her.

The state's report, however, did not exonerate Rhodes. The Attorney General's Office said there was sufficient evidence to support a conviction of second-degree manslaughter, saying negligence led to his wife's death.

**Ex-trooper found guilty of assaulting 2 women**

**TX** HOUSTON — A former Texas trooper has been found guilty of assaulting two women while he was on duty in the Houston area in 2020, federal prosecutors said.

Prosecutors said a jury found that Lee Ray Boykin Jr., 33, deprived two separate victims of their right to bodily integrity while acting in his capacity as a Texas Department of Public Safety trooper by committing aggravated sexual abuse in one case and kidnapping in the other.

Prosecutors said that at trial, one victim said Boykin took her to a secluded parking lot after ordering her out of her friend's car following a traffic stop. She

said Boykin then falsely accused her of being a prostitute, threatened to take her to jail and forced her to perform oral sex on him before telling her to run while placing his hand on his gun.

The second victim testified that Boykin falsely told her she had outstanding traffic warrants and then ordered her out of her friend's car and took her to the same parking lot, prosecutors said. He was accused of demanding she perform oral sex, which she told investigators she did because she was scared.

Prosecutors said that days later, Boykin tried to get her into his vehicle again but she was able to escape.

**Man acquitted of slaying sentenced in later slaying**

**NJ** JERSEY CITY — A man has been sentenced to 25 years in prison in a New Jersey slaying that occurred less than a year after he was acquitted of a separate homicide a dozen years ago, prosecutors said.

Anthony Shuler, 31, of Jersey City, was sentenced to the term in the September 2019 shooting death of 26-year-old Diamond Robinson in Bayonne, Hudson County prosecutors said. He had pleaded guilty last summer to first-degree aggravated manslaughter in the slaying.

Assistant Prosecutor Kevin Roe said in a statement that officials hope the term "provides some comfort to the victim's loved ones."

He was acquitted in August 2018 of the 2010 slaying of Darren Edwards.

— From wire reports



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# Prescott shines as Cowboys rout Bucs

*Associated Press*

TAMPA, Fla. — So much for the notion Dak Prescott and the Dallas Cowboys might not be up to the challenge of beating Tom Brady.

Prescott played his best game in weeks, throwing for four touchdowns and running for another to answer critics of “America’s Team” with a 31-14 rout of Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in an NFC wild-card playoff game on Monday night.

“It just shows he’s resilient,” Cowboys linebacker Micah Parsons said. “The light’s different on Dak. I think the criticism is unfair and unjust sometimes. But the way he handles it, the way he comes back every time and shows who he truly is, it’s a credit to the work he puts in. It makes us keep believing every time.”

Prescott completed 25 of 33 passes for 305 yards and played turnover-free ball for the first time in eight games as the Cowboys (13-5) dominated the listless Bucs (8-10) in what may turn out to be Brady’s last game in a Tampa Bay uniform.

“Not the way we wanted to end it,” Brady said. “Kind of typical of the way we played all season.”

Dallas beat Brady for the first time in the seven-time Super Bowl champion’s career and won in the postseason on the road for the first time in 30 years to earn a trip to San Francisco to face the 49ers in the NFC divisional round next Sunday.

“You watched this team that had all the reasons in the world to have criticism — you can call it doubt, you can call it whatever you want — and they came back and they’re not the same team that came to town,” Cowboys owner Jerry Jones said. “They’re a better team having beaten Tampa and beaten a great player at quarterback.”

The Cowboys had dropped eight straight playoff games away from home since winning the NFC championship game in San Francisco on Jan. 17, 1993.

They were also coming off a poor performance in a lopsided regular season-ending loss to Washington.

“Didn’t listen,” Prescott said

about all the talk about the Cowboys not being ready for the playoffs.

“Simply just didn’t listen to anybody else’s opinions, anybody else’s thoughts. Made sure I was conscious of what I put in my own head,” Prescott added. “Got a great supporting cast in my team, people that believe in me. That’s all that really matters to me, and just stay focused on what I can do.”

About the only thing that went wrong for the Cowboys was kicker Brett Maher missing his first four extra points, becoming the first player in NFL history to miss that many in a game. Maher finally converted on his fifth attempt after coach Mike McCarthy decided against sending him out to try a field goal from roughly the same distance as a PAT.

Tampa Bay receiver Russell Gage was strapped to a backboard and carted off the field late in the fourth quarter. Gage slipped and fell to the turf while running a route and took a blow to the neck as he went down. He was unable to get to his feet and silence fell over the

stadium as players took a knee and medical personnel tended to him.

Coach Todd Bowles said Gage was taken to a hospital with a concussion and was being evaluated for a neck injury. Gage’s injury occurred two weeks after Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin went into cardiac arrest and had to be resuscitated on the field in a Monday night game at Cincinnati. Brady, who signed with Tampa Bay in 2020 and led the Bucs to a Super Bowl title two years ago, will be a free agent this winter. He retired briefly last February before changing his mind and returning for a 23rd season at age 45.

Brady threw a career-high 66 passes, completing 35 of them for 351 yards, including second-half touchdowns of 30 yards to Julio Jones and 8 yards to Cameron Brate. He was sacked twice and also threw a costly interception — a second-quarter, end-zone pick from the Dallas 5 that prevented the Bucs from potentially taking the lead when they were only trailing 6-0.

# Djokovic gets warm welcome Down Under, then wins

*Associated Press*

MELBOURNE, Australia — The supportive signs and dozens of Serbian flags and loud chants of Novak Djokovic’s nickname filled Rod Laver Arena, providing a warm welcome marking his return to the Australian Open — a tournament he has dominated in the past but one he could not enter a year ago.

Djokovic acknowledged the greeting with a quick wave of his left hand when he stepped out onto the court at 10:30 p.m. Tuesday, then got down to business by playing quite well and only briefly showing a hint of trouble from the balky left hamstring that was heavily taped.

With his parents and brother in the stands at Melbourne Park for the first time since he won his first Grand Slam title there 15 years ago, Djokovic began the first-round match

with an ace at 125 mph. He held at love there, took control of that set with a 12-point run and was on his way to a 6-3, 6-4, 6-0 victory over 75th-ranked Roberto Carballes Baena that finished after midnight.

“Unbelievable atmosphere. Thank you so much for staying this late, everybody. Also, thank you for giving me such a welcoming and a reception I can only dream of,” Djokovic told the crowd in an on-court interview. “I really feel very happy that I’m back in Australia and I’m back here on the court where I had the biggest success in my career.”

Earlier in the day Andy Murray produced his biggest victory in years.

Murray built a huge lead, let it disappear completely, then needed to save a match point against Matteo Berrettini — who is nearly a full decade younger and ranked more than 50 places higher — before manag-

ing to pull out a 6-3, 6-3, 4-6, 6-7 (7), 7-6 (10-6) triumph across more than 4½ epic hours.

“The last few years, I’ve certainly questioned myself at times. There’s certainly a lot of people [who] questioned me and my ability, whether I could still perform at the biggest events and the biggest matches,” said the 35-year-old Murray, a former No. 1 now ranked No. 66. “I felt very proud of myself after the match. That’s not something that I generally felt over the years at the end of tennis matches.”

This was the three-time major champion’s first defeat of a top-20 opponent at a Grand Slam tournament since 2017. That was before Murray thought he would need to retire — and even was given a career send-off at Melbourne Park in 2019, when he exited in the first round a year after his first hip operation.

# Lightning end Kraken's 8-game win streak

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Timely goals from two unexpected sources and another strong performance by Tampa Bay goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy finally cooled off the hottest team in the NHL.

Pierre-Edouard Bellemare scored in the first period, Nicholas Paul had a goal in the third and the Lightning beat Seattle 4-1 on Monday, snapping the Kraken's eight-game winning streak.

Brandon Hagel and Victor Hedman each added an empty-netter as Tampa Bay extended its winning streak to four games and handed Seattle its first loss of the calendar year.

"I'd say a pretty complete game. Didn't feel like we were in trouble all night," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "They're a very good hockey team and they got some chances. They pushed, that's to be expected. But we weathered it."

Bellemare redirected Ian Cole's shot from the point late in the first period for his second

goal of the season and just his third point in the past month. Early in the third period, Paul took advantage of a turnover by Vince Dunn behind Seattle's net and whipped a wrist shot over the shoulder of goaltender Philipp Grubauer.

Paul had only three goals in the previous 15 games. Hagel's 17th of the season and Hedman's second came in the final two minutes after Seattle pulled Grubauer.

"(Paul's) second goal was a big one for us. It was a tight-checking game. Special teams weren't a factor. It was just two good teams going at it," Cooper said.

**Stars 4, Golden Knights 0:** Jake Oettinger made 27 saves and visiting Dallas handed the Golden Knights their first shutout this season to give coach Pete DeBoer a victory in his return to Las Vegas.

It was DeBoer's first game back at T-Mobile Arena since he was fired by the Golden Knights when they failed to make the

playoffs last season. DeBoer went 98-50-12 in 2½ seasons with Vegas, made the playoffs twice and won the Pacific Division once.

**Bruins 6, Flyers 0:** David Pastrnak and Pavel Zacha scored two goals apiece, Jeremy Swayman earned his first shutout of the season and David Krejci had three assists in his 1,000th NHL game as NHL-leading Boston halted visiting Philadelphia's three-game winning streak.

Pastrnak scored the first goal in the first period and added another during a 4-on-3 power play to start the third to help Boston win for the sixth time in seven games. The Bruins are 21-1-3 at home this season and have the best overall record in the NHL.

**Capitals 4, Islanders 3 (OT):** Dmitry Orlov scored at 4:27 of overtime and visiting Washington rallied from three goals down to beat New York.

**Rangers 3, Blue Jackets 1:** Barclay Goodrow had a goal and

an assist to lead visiting New York over Columbus.

**Panthers 4, Sabres 1:** Carter Verhaeghe had a goal and an assist as visiting Florida beat Buffalo for its third win in four games.

**Penguins 4, Ducks 3 (OT):** Jake Guentzel scored 33 seconds into overtime and host Pittsburgh staged a late rally to beat Anaheim.

**Avalanche 6, Red Wings 3:** Cale Makar and Nathan MacKinnon each scored twice as host Colorado notched its ninth straight win over Detroit.

**Devils 4, Sharks 3 (SO):** Tomas Tatar scored the shootout winner, and visiting New Jersey beat San Jose.

**Blues 2, Senators 1:** Jake Neighbours and Noel Acciari scored first-period goals and Jordan Binnington made 31 saves to lead host St. Louis over Ottawa.

**Predators 2, Flames 1:** Juuse Saros made 38 saves, including 21 in the third period, and host Nashville held off Calgary.

# Harbaugh staying on as Michigan football coach

Associated Press

Jim Harbaugh is staying at Michigan, a decision he personally gave the school president to end another round of speculation that he would return to the NFL.

"I just got off the phone with coach Harbaugh and Jim shared with me the great news that he is going to remain as the head coach of the Michigan Wolverines," University of Michigan President Santa Ono shared on social media Monday. "That is fantastic news that I have communicated with our athletic director Warde Manuel."

One minute later, Michigan football shared a statement from Harbaugh on Twitter.

"My heart is at the University of Michigan," Harbaugh's statement read in the post. "I once

heard a wise man say, 'Don't try to out-happy, happy.'"

Harbaugh and the school have not reached an agreement on a contract extension, but both sides plan to work on a new deal this week, according to a person familiar with the situation. The person spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because details of the negotiations were not announced.

The Denver Broncos and Carolina Panthers spoke with Harbaugh about their head coaching vacancies this month and he was mentioned as a potential candidate for the Indianapolis Colts, one of four teams he played quarterback for in the league from 1987 to 2000 after being a star for the Wolverines.

After failing to beat rival Ohio State for years, he has helped

Michigan beat the Buckeyes and win the Big Ten title in two straight years.

The Wolverines have fallen short of winning their first national championship since 1997, though, with College Football Playoff semifinal losses to TCU and Georgia.

The 59-year-old Harbaugh has a 74-25 record in eight seasons with the Wolverines, who were 13-0 this season before getting beat in a sloppy game by the Horned Frogs. Harbaugh also spent four seasons as head coach of Stanford and three more at San Diego.

## Ohio State QB Stroud declares for NFL Draft

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud will give up a final year of eligi-

bility to enter the NFL Draft, where he is expected to be a top-five pick.

The two-year starter for the Buckeyes announced his decision, which had been expected, on social media on Monday, the last day eligible players can declare for the draft.

Stroud led the Buckeyes to back-to-back 11-2 seasons but lost to Michigan twice. Ohio State made it to the College Football Playoff last season but lost to eventual national champion Georgia 42-41 in a semifinal, a game in which Stroud threw four TD passes.

The 21-year-old was a Heisman Trophy finalist in both seasons. He amassed more than 8,000 passing yards and threw 85 touchdowns. He is the holder of 16 school offensive records.

# VanVleet, Raptors defeat Knicks in OT

Associated Press

NEW YORK — RJ Barrett's end-to-end driving dunk with 0.6 seconds left in regulation had the basket shaking.

The Toronto Raptors remained perfectly steady.

"It didn't matter. We've just got to keep fighting," forward Scottie Barnes said. "When he made the dunk, we were going to overtime. We were focused on winning the game."

That's what the Raptors did.

Fred VanVleet scored 33 points, Barnes had 26 and the Raptors recovered to beat the New York Knicks 123-121 on Monday.

Pascal Siakam had 20 points, nine assists and eight rebounds for the Raptors, but he was on the bench after fouling out when Toronto had to wait out Jalen Brunson's missed three-pointer in the final second before emerging with the victory.

"We've come out on the wrong side a few times so you've just got to learn from it," VanVleet said after Toronto's fourth win in five games. "I thought today we just kept pushing, we made some big plays and I

thought we just played well as a team."

O.G. Anunoby hit two three-pointers in overtime as Toronto built a six-point lead, but New York nearly erased that in the final minute.

**Lakers 140, Rockets 132:** LeBron James had a season-high 48 points, nine assists and eight rebounds in his third 40-point performance since turning 38 less than three weeks ago, and host Los Angeles snapped a three-game skid with a victory over struggling Houston.

James' brilliance in the 100th 40-point outing of his career — including the postseason — was just enough to hold off NBA-worst Houston, which has lost 16 of 17.

**Warriors 127, Wizards 118:** Stephen Curry scored 41 points and Jordan Poole added 32 points to help visiting Golden State beat Washington.

Kristaps Porzingis led Washington with 32 points.

**Grizzlies 136, Suns 106:** Ja Morant scored 29 points, Desmond Bane added 28 and host Memphis extended its season-high winning streak to 10 games

with a victory over injury-depleted Phoenix.

Chris Paul missed his fifth straight game with a right hip injury. Devin Booker has not played since Christmas Day because of a groin injury.

**Celtics 130, Hornets 118:** Jayson Tatum had 51 points, including seven three-pointers, and visiting Boston beat Charlotte for the second time in three days.

Tatum was 15-for-23 from the field and 14-for-14 from the foul line.

**Bucks 132, Pacers 119:** Jrue Holiday scored a season-high 35 points to go along with 11 assists and host Milwaukee beat Indiana without two-time MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo, who missed his third consecutive game.

Holiday shot 13-for-19 overall and 5-for-8 from the three-point range while collecting his third straight double-double.

**Cavaliers 113, Pelicans 103:** Darius Garland scored 30 points, Jarrett Allen added 24 and host Cleveland rallied in the fourth quarter with star Donovan Mitchell injured on the

bench to beat New Orleans.

Mitchell scored 11 points in 22 minutes before sitting out the fourth with a strained left groin.

The Pelicans were once again without stars Zion Williamson (strained hamstring) and Brandon Ingram (bruised toe).

C.J. McCollum scored 25 for the Pelicans.

**Hawks 121, Heat 113:** Dejounte Murray scored 12 of his 28 points in the final period as host Atlanta held off Miami's comeback attempt.

Trae Young added 24 points as the Hawks, who never trailed, moved back to .500 with the win.

Miami had its three-game winning streak end despite Jimmy Butler's 34 points.

**Jazz 126, Timberwolves 125:** Walker Kessler had career highs of 20 points and 21 rebounds, Jordan Clarkson added 21 points and visiting Utah rallied from a 10-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat Minnesota.

Collin Sexton added 19 points off the bench for Utah, which had seven players score in double digits in its third win in four games.

## Edey's late shot helps Purdue hold off Michigan State

Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. — Zach Edey made a go-ahead shot at the front of the rim with 2.2 seconds left and finished with a career-high 32 points and 17 rebounds to help No. 3 Purdue hold off Michigan State for a 64-63 win on Monday.

A 51-second sequence earlier in the second half, though, showed just how dominant the 7-foot-4 Edey can be at both ends of the floor.

Edey blocked a shot, had an alley-oop dunk, a defensive rebound and a layup to turn a one-point deficit into a three-point lead.

"He opens up a lot for us,"

Boilermakers coach Matt Painter said.

The Boilermakers (17-1, 6-1 Big Ten) have won 17 of their first 18 games, matching a school mark set during the 1987-88 season.

The Spartans (12-6, 4-3) dropped a second straight game after winning seven in a row.

Tyson Walker put Michigan State ahead with 11 seconds remaining with a mid-range jumper, giving him a season-high 30 points, and Edey scored the winner on the ensuing possession.

**No. 17 Miami 82, Syracuse 78:** Norchad Omier had 16 points and 16 rebounds and the

host Hurricanes overcame a double-digit deficit to beat the Orange.

Harlond Beverly also scored 16 points for Miami (15-3, 6-2 ACC).

Jesse Edwards scored a career-high 25 points for Syracuse (12-7, 5-3).

**No. 18 College Of Charleston 82, William & Mary 54:** Ante Brzovic scored 17 points and Dalton Bolon added 15 points as the host Cougars won their 18th straight.

Charleston (19-1, 7-0 Colonial), whose 19 wins are the most in Division I, extended the nation's longest winning streak.

Ben Burnham came off the

bench to chip in 13 points for the Cougars.

**No. 24 FAU 76, Western Kentucky 62:** Nicholas Boyd had 16 points, Alijah Martin added 15 off the bench and the visiting Owls used a second-half surge to earn their 16th consecutive victory.

Hours after becoming ranked for the first time in school history, Florida Atlantic (17-1, 7-0 C-USA) led 34-33 at halftime before shooting 54% to break open a close game. Johnell Davis came off the bench to add 14 points for the Owls.

Dayvion McKnight had 15 points for Western Kentucky (11-7, 3-4).