

Scanners to measure Marines' body fat

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps has begun shipping more than 250 biometric machines around the globe as part of a new policy to measure body composition standards more accurately before labeling a Marine overweight, according to the service's Training Command.

Under the policy that went into effect Jan. 1, Marines who exceed weight standards and fail a body fat assessment taken with a measuring tape will be evaluated with a body scan before being sent to the body composition program or being discharged, according to an August announcement.

The Marine Corps concluded after a yearlong study done in collaboration with the Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine that the scan, which is conducted on a bioelectrical impedance analysis ma-

chine, can detect the percentage of body fat more accurately than the tape test.

The study evaluated the Marines' body composition standards, which resulted in policy changes, and included allowing women to have one more percentage point of body fat than previous standards and allowing exemptions to weight standards based on physical fitness test scores.

Gen. David Berger, commandant of the Marine Corps, said the study was a "milestone in understanding the health and performance" of Marines.

"Ultimately, this is about warfighting. We need to find the most practical, accurate and unbiased method of measuring body composition to maintain a healthy, ready force," he said in a statement.

The Pentagon last year updated its policy on body composition standards, giving each ser-

vice more freedom to tailor weight and body fat requirements to its troops and mission.

While the Marine Corps is the first to use technology beyond a tape measure, the Army, Navy and Air Force also made changes.

The Army, too, allows soldiers with high enough fitness test scores to be exempt from weight standards.

The Air Force announced this month a new body composition program that is not part of the service's fitness test. The new program uses an airman's waist-to-height ratio to measure for excess body fat. The change also applies to the Space Force and assessments begin in April.

The Navy hasn't made any major changes to its physical fitness and weight standards in recent years, except reducing the number of assessments required of sailors each year from two to one.

The Marines' study found the tape test is only about 92% accurate, so the new body scans are to add a new layer of verification, said Col. Eric Quehl, director of the policy and standards division at the Marine Corps Training and Education Command.

"You've got that 8% of Marines, and it varies whether it's male or female, who are either underestimated or overestimated. The tape is still good for most Marines, but not everyone," he said. "We need to hold people accountable. These BIA machines, I think, give everyone much more confidence that the institution is looking at advanced methods and technology to ensure that we are being as fair as possible."

For the last two years, about 1% of Marines failed the service weight requirements and ended up in the program meant to get them back into regulation.

NATO vows to be ready as Russia preps for long war

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — Russia is preparing for an extended war so NATO must get ready "for the long haul" and support Ukraine for as long as it takes, the alliance's deputy secretary-general told top military chiefs from across Europe Wednesday.

Speaking at the opening of the military chiefs' meeting here, Mircea Geoana said NATO nations must invest more in defense, ramp up military industrial manufacturing and harness new technologies to prepare for future wars.

As Russia's war on Ukraine nears the one year mark, NATO chiefs are expected to discuss how allies can expand the delivery of weapons, training and support to

Ukraine in the coming months, and how they can further shore up their own defenses.

"We have no indication that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's goals have changed," said Geoana, adding that Russia has mobilized more than 200,000 additional troops. "So we must be prepared for the long haul. 2023 will be a difficult year and we need to support Ukraine for as long as it takes."

U.S. Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, met quietly on Tuesday with Ukraine's chief military officer, Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, at an undisclosed location in southeastern Poland, near the Ukrainian border. And he is expected to relay Zaluzhnyi's concerns to the other

military leaders at the meeting.

Milley's meeting with Zaluzhnyi was quickly arranged when it became clear Monday that the Ukraine chief would not be able to attend the NATO sessions in person. He's expected to attend by video conference on Thursday.

Army Col. Dave Butler, Milley's spokesman, said the chairman planned to describe to the NATO chiefs "the tactical and operational conditions on the battlefield and what the military needs are for that."

Adm. Rob Bauer, the chair of the NATO Military Committee, told the gathering of chiefs on Wednesday that the alliance must continue to transform to meet future fights.

"The war has also shown us that you have to be able to fight tomorrow's battles, as well as yesterday's battles, today," said Bauer, who is with the Royal Netherlands Navy. "Modern warfare is just as much about bits and bots as it is about mud and blood."

He noted that about a year ago, the NATO Russia Council held its last meeting.

"Back then we were still able to sit around the same table," he said, adding that now, after Russia's brutal invasion and war in Ukraine, "the world is a different place."

NATO, he said, has proven it can quickly increase and shift its military presence when and where needed.

Ukraine helo crash kills interior minister, others

Associated Press

BROVARY, Ukraine — A helicopter flying in the fog crashed Wednesday into a kindergarten in a residential suburb of the capital, Kyiv, killing Ukraine's interior minister and about a dozen other people, including a child on the ground, authorities said.

Interior Minister Denys Monastyrskyi, who oversaw the country's police and emergency services, is the most senior official killed since Russia invaded nearly 11 months ago. His death, along with two others from his ministry, was the second major calamity in four days to befall Ukraine, after a Russian missile struck an apartment building in the southeastern city of Dnipro, killing dozens of civilians.

There was no immediate word on whether the helicopter crash, which occurred on a foggy morning in Kyiv's eastern suburb of Brovary, was an accident or related to the war, but Ukrainian authorities immediately opened an investigation. No fighting has been reported recently in the capital region.

Ukraine's State Emergency Service said at least 14 people were killed, including nine aboard the helicopter, and a child on the ground. It said 25 people were injured, in-

cluding 11 children. Early official reports gave differing numbers of casualties.

Kyiv regional Gov. Oleksii Kuleba told Ukrainian television that emergency services were still identifying remains and that the death toll could rise.

The Ukraine National Police said the crash killed five Interior Ministry officials, one national police official and three crew members on the helicopter.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described the crash as "a terrible tragedy" on a "black morning."

British Home Secretary Suella Braverman called the 42-year-old Monastyrskyi "a leading light in supporting the Ukrainian people during (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's illegal invasion." She said she was "struck by his determination, optimism and patriotism."

Monastyrskyi was in charge of police and emergency services that dealt with the consequences of Russian strikes and demining, political analyst Volodymyr Fesenko said.

Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said Ihor Klymenko, the national police chief, has been appointed acting interior minister.

Army advocates: Funding isn't ample to improve

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The Army carries the lion's share of the U.S. military's operational burden but isn't funded well enough to keep up with the demand, according to a new report from Army advocates that argues the service hasn't been this squeezed since the early days of the Vietnam War.

During the past two years, the Army has been responsible for 75% of the U.S. joint force's support for Ukraine and 80% of the National Guard's COVID response and border security missions at home, former acting Army Secretary John E. Whitely wrote in a report released this month by the Association of the U.S. Army.

Meanwhile, the Army carried out more than half of U.S. Combatant Command's global requirements during the same period and represented two-thirds of the Joint Staff's readiness requirements.

The service did that with less than 50% of the total military force and 28% of the military's service department budget, according to Whitely's report, titled "Underfunding the Army has Risky Implications."

"The Army does not control these demands; they are external requirements placed on the Army," Whitely wrote. "These outsized, external requirements have significant implications for force levels, readiness, the Army budget and modernization."

The burden on Army forces has resulted in a budget that skews heavily toward supporting operations — about \$139 billion for 2023. That absorbs about 80% of Army spending, which means less is available to upgrade and modernize weaponry for future fights, the report says.

The gap between the Army's operational burden and its comparatively smaller budgetary share hasn't been as large since 1964, just before major U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, the report says.

"And the challenge is worse than these data suggest," wrote Whitely, saying overall buying power is declining while demand is increasing.

The report contends that some of the imbalance is connected to a view in Washington that ground forces will play a smaller role in future warfare.

Navy completes 'first-of-its-kind' repairs at sea to Super Hornet

Stars and Stripes

A Navy fighter jet seriously damaged by an engine fire during routine flight operations in the Mediterranean Sea should be back in service sooner than expected due to "first-of-its-kind" repairs at sea, according to the service.

Repairs to the F/A-18E Super Hornet assigned to the George H.W. Bush Carrier Strike Group included sections of the plane's exterior, a door, engine bay and other components damaged by a right-side engine fire in August, the Navy said in a statement on Saturday.

The replacements and repairs completed Jan. 9 mark an important milestone, according to the statement. It took 33 days to

do the work once parts and repair crews were flown aboard.

Normally, the plane would have been inoperable for the remainder of the deployment and repaired after returning home, the Navy said.

The in-flight fire occurred Aug. 31 with the pilot relying on a single engine to safely land the jet on the carrier, the Navy said.

The service didn't say if it had determined the cause of the fire or if there were any injuries. It also didn't say Wednesday if the jet is back in service.

The George H.W. Bush deployed to the Mediterranean in August, relieving USS Harry S. Truman, which had been in the region since December 2021.

California marked by wreckage after storms

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Key roads remained closed and officials estimated thousands of homes were seriously damaged in California as weeks of wild weather that flooded roads, collapsed hillsides and toppled countless trees finally became calm Tuesday.

Tallying the damage will take time, but the number of houses and other structures that will be red-tagged as uninhabitable could be in the “low thousands,” said Brian Ferguson, spokesperson for the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services.

The damage is spread across 41 of California’s 58 counties, Ferguson said.

In unincorporated Santa Barbara County, after more than 60 inspections at properties that

sustained damage from mudslides and downed trees, four homes were red-tagged and 32 were yellow-tagged as needing extensive repairs, said Kelsey Buttitta, the county’s communications manager.

“Also we’re seeing a lot — a lot — of damage when it comes to roads,” she said, estimating that more than a dozen are fully closed. “Some roads are completely washed away.”

There is no estimated reopening date for State Route 154, a key north-south artery in the county that is inundated with mud and rocks, Buttitta said.

Nine atmospheric rivers since late December caused power outages, flooding, levee breaks, washouts and landslides nearly statewide. At least 20 people have

been killed as a result.

Light rain and snow showers lingered Tuesday in some areas across California, but the 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.

Flood warnings remained in effect for the Salinas River in Monterey County and parts of Mariposa and Merced counties in the Central Valley.

Officials in Ventura County said it could take up to three weeks to clear the only road into

the remote canyon community of Matilija in the Los Padres National Forest near Ojai.

Repairs could take six months. More than 70 residents were evacuated by helicopter, but a handful have refused to leave, according to the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office.

To the north in Berkeley, eight homes were red-tagged after a sodden hillside collapse Monday, sending mud onto properties, including one belonging to Marjorie Cruz. No injuries were reported.

“You can’t describe what it’s like to wake up in the morning and look outside your door and see this horror come through,” Cruz told NBC Bay Area. “We’ve had enough rain for now and a long time to come.”

Pricing slowdown raises hopes of inflation relief

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Wholesale prices in the United States rose 6.2% in December from a year earlier, a sixth straight monthly slowdown and a hopeful sign that inflation pressures will continue to cool.

The latest year-over-year figure was down from 7.3% in November and from a recent peak of 11.7% in March. On a monthly basis, the government said Wednesday that its producer price index, which measures costs before they reach consumers, dropped 0.5% from November to December.

The producer price data can provide an early sign of where consumer inflation may be headed. The data reflects the prices that are charged by manufacturers, farmers and wholesalers, and it flows into an inflation gauge that the Federal Reserve closely tracks: The personal consumption expenditures price index.

Rising evidence has suggested that inflation across the economy is easing after having reached a

four-decade peak last summer. At the consumer level, inflation also cooled in December for a sixth straight month to 6.5% compared with a year earlier, from 7.1% in November.

An acceleration in workers’ wages has been slowing, too, which could further help control inflation. In December, average wage growth in the United States was up 4.6% from 12 months earlier, compared with a recent peak of 5.6% in March.

Over the past year, the Fed has rapidly raised its key interest rate in an aggressive drive to cool borrowing and spending and tame inflation, which began surging more than a year and a half ago.

The Fed’s rate hikes have, in turn, led to higher borrowing costs for consumers and businesses. The average mortgage rate is still nearly twice its level a year ago, though it has dipped in recent weeks. Loan costs for auto purchases, credit cards and a range of business borrowing are up sharply, too.

Microsoft lays off 10K workers amid more tech world job cuts

Associated Press

Microsoft is cutting 10,000 workers, almost 5% of its workforce, in response to what it described as “macroeconomic conditions and changing customer priorities.”

The company said in a regulatory filing Wednesday that it had just notified employees of the layoffs, some of which will begin immediately.

The company said it will also be making changes to its hardware portfolio and consolidating its leased office locations.

The layoffs represent “less than 5% of our total employee base, with some notifications happening today,” CEO Satya Nadella said in an email to employees.

“While we are eliminating roles in some areas, we will continue to hire in key strategic areas,” Nadella said. He emphasized the importance of building a “new computer platform” using advances in artificial intelligence.

He said customers that were

accelerating their spending on digital technology during the pandemic are now trying to “optimize their digital spend to do more with less.”

“We’re also seeing organizations in every industry and geography exercise caution as some parts of the world are in a recession and other parts are anticipating one,” Nadella wrote.

Other tech companies have also been trimming jobs amid concerns about an economic slowdown. Amazon and business software maker Salesforce earlier this month announced major job cuts as they prune payrolls that rapidly expanded during the pandemic lockdown.

Amazon said it will be cutting about 18,000 positions. It’s the largest set of layoffs in the Seattle company’s history, although just a fraction of its 1.5 million global workforce.

Facebook parent Meta is laying off 11,000 people, about 13% of its workforce. And Elon Musk, the new Twitter CEO, has slashed the company’s workforce.

US won't seek death penalty in El Paso massacre

Associated Press

Federal prosecutors will not seek the death penalty for a man accused of fatally shooting nearly two dozen people in a racist attack at a West Texas Walmart in 2019.

The U.S. Department of Justice disclosed the decision not to pursue capital punishment against Patrick Crusius in a one-sentence notice filed Tuesday with the federal court in El Paso.

Crusius, 24, is accused of targeting Mexicans during the Aug. 3 massacre that killed 23 people and left dozens wounded. The Dallas-area native is charged with federal hate crimes and firearms violations, as well as capital murder in state court. He

has pleaded not guilty.

Federal prosecutors did not explain in their court filing the reason for their decision, though Crusius still could face the death penalty if convicted in state court.

The prosecutors' decision could be a defining moment for the Justice Department, which has sent mixed signals on policies regarding the federal death penalty that President Joe Biden pledged to abolish during his presidential campaign. Biden is the first president to openly oppose the death penalty and his election raised the hopes of abolition advocates, who have since been frustrated by a lack of clarity on how the administration

might end federal executions or whether that's the objective.

The decision comes weeks after Jaime Esparza, the former district attorney in El Paso, took over as U.S. attorney for West Texas. Esparza said when he was district attorney that he would pursue the death penalty in Crusius' case. A spokesman for Esparza's office referred questions to the Justice Department in Washington, D.C., where another spokesman declined to comment.

Crusius surrendered to police after the attack, saying, "I'm the shooter," and that he was targeting Mexicans, according to an arrest warrant. Prosecutors have said he published a screed

online shortly before the shooting that said it was "in response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas."

Lawyers for Crusius did not immediately respond to requests for comment. His case is set for trial in federal court in January 2024.

Although the federal and state cases have progressed along parallel tracks, it is now unclear when Crusius might face trial on state charges.

The district attorney who had been leading the state case, Yvonne Rosales, resigned in November over accusations of incompetence involving hundreds of cases in El Paso and slowing down the case against Crusius.

Calif. shooter stood over mom and baby, killed both

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A shooter stood over a 16-year-old mother clutching her 10-month-old baby and pumped bullets into their heads in a brazen attack in a central California farming community that left six dead at a home linked to drugs and guns, a sheriff said Tuesday.

Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux said the teenager was fleeing the violence early Monday when the killers caught up to her outside the home in Goshen, a central California community of about 3,000 residents in the agricultural San Joaquin Valley, and shot the young mother and her child "assassination-style."

The other four victims ranged from 19 to 72 years old, including a grandmother who was shot as she slept.

Authorities said they were searching for two suspects and offered a \$10,000 reward for information leading to their arrests.

"None of this was by accident," Boudreaux said during a news conference Tuesday. "It was deliberate, intentional and horrific."

Boudreaux walked back his earlier comments that the attack was likely a cartel hit, saying that investigators are also looking into whether it was gang violence.

"I am not eliminating that possibility," the sheriff said. "These people were clearly shot in the head and they were also shot in places where the shooter would know that a quick death would occur ... This is also similar to high-ranking gang affiliation and the style of executions that they commit."

Law enforcement is familiar with the home, the sheriff said, citing gang activity there that "has routinely occurred in the past" without giving any specifics. He added that not everyone who was shot was a drug dealer or gang member — and said that among the victims believed to be innocent are the teen, her grandmother, and of course, the baby.

The sheriff's department on Tuesday identified the victims as: Rosa Parraz, 72; Eladio Parraz Jr., 52; Jennifer Analla, 49; Marcos Parraz, 19; Alissa Parraz, 16; and Nycholas Parraz, 10 months.

Utah man who killed family faced abuse investigation

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — A Utah man who police said fatally shot his wife, her mother and their five kids before turning the gun on himself had been investigated two years prior for child abuse, but local police and prosecutors decided not to criminally charge him, new records released Tuesday show.

Police records obtained by The Associated Press shed light on warning signs and a previous police investigation into a violent pattern of behavior Michael Haight exhibited toward his family.

Authorities said they were aware of previous problems in the home but didn't elaborate during a news conference following the Jan. 4 killings in the small town of Enoch, citing an ongoing investigation.

In a 2020 interview with authorities, Macie Haight, the family's eldest daughter, detailed multiple assaults, including one where she was choked by her father and "very afraid that he was going to keep her from breathing

and kill her."

The child abuse investigation followed an Aug. 27, 2020, police call from a non-family member reporting potential child abuse. Macie, then 14, told investigators that her father's violence started in 2017 and had included choking and shaking, including a recent incident where he grabbed her by the shoulders and banged her into a wooden piece along the back of the couch.

Two years later, police found eight bodies at the family's home, including Macie's. The murder-suicide rocked Enoch, an 8,000-person, southern Utah town on the outskirts of Cedar City where neighbors and members of the local Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints described the Haight family as a loving family.

Police believe Haight, 42, carried out the shootings two weeks after his wife had filed for divorce.

The Iron County Attorney's office said in a statement Tuesday that their office had been called in 2020 and determined there was insufficient evidence to pursue charges against Haight.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man sues over fingers lost during protest

NC CHARLOTTE — If Kyre Mitchell needs a reminder of the Charlotte protests arising from the 2020 murder of George Floyd, he need look no further than his right hand — specifically where his middle and ring fingers used to be. Mitchell has blamed police and the City of Charlotte for what’s missing.

Just before midnight on May 30, 2020, a “flashbang” grenade thrown by a police officer into an uptown bottleneck of Floyd protesters and bystanders detonated in Mitchell’s right hand as he attempted to throw it away, his new federal lawsuit claims.

The explosion blew off parts of two of his right fingers and severely burned the others as well as his palm.

Mitchell, a 29-year-old Charlotte-area artist, dancer and photographer, has said the pain from the injuries continues to this day. The complaint, filed in federal court this month, accuses police and the City of Charlotte of more than a dozen federal and state violations of Mitchell’s rights, including freedom of speech and assembly. It also accuses the defendants of assault and battery, unlawful seizure, excessive force and conspiracy, among other claims.

Lawmakers again propose moving primary

PA PHILADELPHIA — Pennsylvania is a hugely important political battleground, but it hasn’t traditionally mattered much in presidential primaries.

That’s because the state votes

so late. It holds its presidential primary on the fourth Tuesday in April, long after many states have voted. Despite being one of the biggest swing states in the nation, the nomination for the country’s biggest political office is largely decided before Pennsylvania voters go to the ballot box.

Legislation introduced last week in the state House and Senate would move Pennsylvania’s primary up a month to the third Tuesday in March from the fourth Tuesday in April. It would make the state’s primary date the same as Arizona, Florida, Illinois and Ohio. Pennsylvania currently votes the same day as Delaware, Maryland and Rhode Island.

If passed, Pennsylvanians in 2024 would vote on March 19 instead of April 23. The primary would revert to the third Tuesday in May every year without a presidential election.

Ex-teacher rejects plea in child porn case

MS OXFORD — A former high school teacher in northeast Mississippi has rejected a plea deal on charges that he sexually exploited children.

Federal court records show Toshemie Wilson, of Okolona, rejected a plea agreement last week and fired his defense attorneys. Court papers don’t reflect the nature of the plea agreement.

The 47-year-old Wilson was indicted in July on 10 counts of sexual exploitation of children, all of which took place when he was teaching at Amory High School. Wilson is accused of photographing or making vid-

eos of nine minors between 2006 and 2016. Officials have said he targeted students in the high school’s technology club, giving them cash or drugs to perform sex acts alone or with a blow-up doll.

U.S. District Judge Debra Brown on Friday gave Wilson 30 days to hire a new lawyer or request a public defender.

School district to use dogs to detect guns

NV RENO — Washoe County School District students will start seeing new additions to security on campuses this spring — including a gun-detecting dog.

A dog being trained to sniff out firearms will join school police officers in a few months, the Reno Gazette-Journal reported.

The urgent need for new safety measures was magnified this month when a first-grader in Newport News, Va., shot his teacher. The wounded teacher reportedly remains hospitalized in stable condition.

“We can all say after seeing what happened in Virginia [on Jan. 6] that it has never been more important to keep our focus on gun safety,” Superintendent Susan Enfield said at a recent board meeting.

The funding to cover the gun-detecting canine came from a grant, said school district Police Chief Jason Trevino. Officials are currently searching for dog handlers.

Remains of man missing in Hurricane Ian found

FL FORT MYERS — The remains of a man who was reported missing after Hur-

ricane Ian hit Florida’s Gulf Coast last year have been recovered from a sunken sailboat, sheriff’s officials said.

The Lee County Sheriff’s Office said Sunday that the remains were identified as James “Denny” Hurst, 72, who was last known to be aboard the sailboat “Good Girl” as the category 4 storm hit the region in late September.

The boat was recovered Friday afternoon in the Matanzas Pass area of Fort Myers Beach, Sheriff Carmine Marceno said in a social media post.

Hurst had told his family he planned to ride out the storm on the boat, officials said.

Driver plows through patio, 2 sent to hospital

NC CHARLOTTE — At least three people were injured when a man plowed through a restaurant patio with a pickup truck, North Carolina police said.

Fayetteville police said they responded just after midnight on Sunday to Mikotos after a truck drove through the restaurant’s outdoor seating area and shots were fired.

Officers learned there had been an “altercation” among customers, the department said in a Facebook post. One man, who appeared to be impaired, then left the patio and entered a pickup truck, police said.

Police said the driver then intentionally drove the truck into the seating area, hitting several diners. The driver then reversed, striking the patrons a second time.

Shots were fired at the truck, and the driver fled, police said.

— From wire reports

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Healthy Chiefs back to work before facing Jags

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Kansas City Chiefs spent more than five months battering their bodies in an attempt to not only make the playoffs, but also ensure they would get the AFC's top seed and the first weekend to rest and recover.

The reward comes now: They're about as healthy as possible as the Jaguars prepare to visit in Saturday's divisional round.

The only Chiefs player that didn't practice Tuesday was wide receiver Mecole Hardman, who spent time on injured reserve because of an abdominal issue but was activated for the final week of the regular season.

Otherwise, everyone was on the field — including defensive end Frank Clark, who was banged up two weeks ago — as the Chiefs got back to work.

"We took a week off and it felt like forever," Chiefs linebacker Nick Bolton said. "I'm ready to

get back out there."

The Chiefs even got a surprise Tuesday when running back Clyde Edwards-Helaire, who has been on injured reserve with a high ankle sprain, and tight end Jody Fortson, who has been on the list with an elbow issue, joined them on the practice field.

Neither is expected to play against Jacksonville, but it increases the chances they will be available later in the playoffs should Kansas City win. Edwards-Helaire started the first six games and was a key part of the offense when the 2020 first-round pick got hurt Nov. 20, and Fortson had been a red zone option before getting hurt Dec. 18.

"Any time you get talented players back, it helps the whole team. Not just the offense, but everybody," said Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, who acknowledged the week off did wonders for his own bruised body.

"Both of those guys are spe-

cial players," Mahomes said. "Having as many healthy guys as possible is great for us."

It's not as if the Chiefs, who lead the league in total offense and scoring, have suffered in their absence.

Seventh-round pick Isiah Pacheco averaged more than 5 yards per carry while rushing for 633 yards and four touchdowns over the last nine weeks of the regular season, and Jerick McKinnon has caught at least one touchdown pass in six straight games while reaching the end zone nine times total over that span.

In the weeks since Fortson went down, the Chiefs returned Blake Bell from injured reserve. And along with Noah Gray, the duo has played well alongside Travis Kelce while also giving the All-Pro tight end a break when he needs it.

"I don't know much about the situation," McKinnon said, "but getting all the weapons back is going to be amazing."

Well, almost all the playmakers.

The Chiefs thought they'd have Hardman back weeks ago. But after returning to practice in mid-December, the speedy wide receiver has experienced a series of setbacks that kept him off the field for the rest of the regular season — he has not played since Nov. 6 against Tennessee — and they now threaten to keep him out against the Jaguars.

Asked whether he expects Hardman to play in the postseason, Chiefs coach Andy Reid replied: "He does and we do, yeah."

"You just want to try to not take steps back," Reid added. "And it's not that we've taken steps back, it's just not getting to where it needs to be where he can go. The feeling is if we just back off on it, let it rest here, do his rehab, and he'll have a chance to get better. We don't want to put him out there in a bad situation where he can't play."

Hurts 'full go' for Eagles in divisional playoffs against Giants

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — As the Eagles weathered a smidgen of adversity with a late-season losing streak, 76ers coach Doc Rivers stepped in to steady unease that Jalen Hurts & Co. were spiraling toward an early postseason exit.

"They're going to be in the Super Bowl. Relax," Rivers told reporters. "It's a guarantee."

Bold statement, Doc.

Rivers laughed as he made the prediction "with my limited football knowledge," but he knew enough to understand the team with the best record in the NFL played across the street.

But how far the Eagles go — and no one in the organization would be so foolish as to make such a bold prognostication as guaranteeing a Super Bowl berth — depends predominantly on Hurts.

And Hurts knows all eyes — and maybe a few rough shots on his banged-up shoulder — are on him.

"I've got a bounty on me every week I go out there," Hurts said Tuesday. "I'm going to go out there and just play my game."

Fans are clamoring to know if Hurts has recovered enough from a sprained right shoulder to play at full strength in an NFC divisional round game Saturday night at Lincoln Financial Field against the New York Giants.

"Full go," coach Nick Sirianni said Tuesday.

Hurts was not even listed on the Eagles' injury report.

Hurts and the Eagles (14-3) enjoyed the spoils of earning the No. 1 seed in the NFC and spent the week scouting — and snacking — while the Giants edged out a 31-24 win over the Minnesota Vikings.

The Giants were one of four potential opponents the Eagles could have played this week, and their game last weekend was on the big screen at Philadelphia's complex while Sirianni reviewed a potential game plan against their NFC East rival.

"We were preparing for the games and did a lot of work on the Giants that day," Sirianni said. "We got it right there."

The Giants should know as well as any team how often Sirianni and the Eagles seemingly had everything go right. The NFC East champion Eagles already defeated the Giants twice, 48-22 on Dec. 11 at MetLife Stadium and 22-16 on Jan. 8 in the regular-season finale in Philly. Hurts, who returned for the finale after missing two games because of his bad shoulder, mostly ran a vanilla offense

against the Giants' second-teamers.

Make it 3-0, and the Eagles will host the NFC championship game.

The Eagles went 14-1 in games Hurts started.

"He's better today than he was two weeks ago," Sirianni said. "He's continuing to get better and he feels good."

Hurts could have added protection against the Giants, with All-Pro right tackle Lane Johnson expected to return for the first time since he suffered a torn adductor in a Dec. 24 loss at Dallas. The only starter who might miss a playoff game is cornerback Avonte Maddox (toe), who has not played since he was hurt in the Dallas game.

Johnson was a limited participant in a walkthrough practice Tuesday and Maddox did not participate.

Johnson, K-State defeat No. 2 Kansas

Associated Press

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Kansas State coach Jerome Tang grabbed a microphone and stood amid a sea of purple, moments after delirious fans had flooded the floor to celebrate the No. 13 Wildcats' 83-82 overtime win over second-ranked Kansas on Tuesday night.

"You have one court-storming," the Wildcats' first-year coach told them over the din. "After this, we expect to win."

Expectations are sure to soar in the Little Apple now.

After blowing a 14-point first-half lead, the Wildcats responded to every haymaker Kansas threw down the stretch. And when their game went to overtime, and players kept fouling out, Keyontae Johnson delivered for Kansas State, throwing down a go-ahead alley-oop dunk with 25 seconds left that ultimately proved to be the difference.

"In order to elevate," Johnson said later, "we have to beat teams like Kansas."

Johnson and Desi Sills fin-

ished with 24 points apiece, and Nae'Qwan Tomlin had 15 points and 10 boards, as the Wildcats (16-2, 5-1 Big 12) bounced back from a blowout loss to TCU by beating the Jayhawks for the first time since Feb 5, 2019.

Jalen Wilson tried to take over in overtime for Kansas, converting a three-point play, knocking down a three-pointer and making a pair of free throws for an 82-80 lead with just over a minute to go. But after Johnson made a free throw at the other end, Wilson missed a deep three-pointer as the shot-clock expired to give the Wildcats another chance.

After a timeout, Markquis Nowell threw the lob that Johnson slammed down for an 83-82 advantage.

Kansas (16-2, 5-1) also called a timeout to set up its own finishing play, but normally sure-handed Dajuan Harris Jr. lost the ball in traffic, and the Jayhawks never got a chance to put up a potentially winning shot.

No. 1 Houston 80, Tulane 60: Marcus Sasser highlighted

a 23-point performance with seven three-pointers, and the visiting Cougars earned their ninth straight victory.

J'Wan Roberts scored 15, Jamal Shead added 14 points and Tramon Mark had 12 for Houston (18-1, 6-0 American Athletic Conference), which led for all but a short span in the first half.

No. 4 Alabama 78, Vanderbilt 66: Freshman Brandon Miller scored 30 points as Alabama beat Vanderbilt for their seventh straight victory.

Jaden Bradley and Noah Gurley each added 12 points for Alabama (16-2, 6-0 SEC). Gurley capped the win with a dunk in the final seconds.

No. 12 Iowa State 78, No. 7 Texas 67: Jaren Holmes scored 21 points and the host Cyclones defeated the Longhorns.

Holmes hit seven of 13 shots, including two three-pointers, and Gabe Kalscheur added 16 points for Iowa State (14-3, 5-1 Big 12).

Christian Bishop scored 12 points to lead Texas (15-3, 4-2), which was undone by a second-

half scoring drought that lasted nearly 4½ minutes.

No. 9 Tennessee 70, Mississippi State 59: Zakai Zeigler had 24 points and the visiting Vols made eight of nine three-pointers in the second half to pull away late to defeat the Bulldogs.

Julian Phillips had 18 points and 11 rebounds for Tennessee (15-3, 5-1 SEC).

Wake Forest 87, No. 19 Clemson 77: Tyree Appleby scored 24 points to help the visiting Demon Deacons end the Tigers' perfect start in Atlantic Coast Conference play.

Wake Forest (14-5, 6-2 ACC) won its fourth straight game.

PJ Hall had 22 points and nine rebounds to lead Clemson (15-4, 7-1).

No. 21 Baylor 81, Texas Tech 74: Keyonte George scored 27 points to lead the visiting Bears to their third win in a row.

LJ Cryer added 18 points for Baylor (13-5, 3-3 Big 12), which returned to the AP Top 25 this week.

Holiday scores 37, Bucks win without Antetokounmpo

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Jrue Holiday scored a season-high 37 points and the Milwaukee Bucks beat the Toronto Raptors 130-122 on Tuesday night.

The Bucks, playing without Giannis Antetokounmpo for the fourth consecutive game, shot 19-for-39 (49%) from three-point range.

Fred VanVleet led Toronto with 39 points. Gary Trent Jr. added 28 points and Pascal Siakam had 23.

Play got chippy and action was halted at 6:40 of the fourth quarter with Milwaukee leading 113-110 because of an altercation involving several players near the Bucks' basket. Milwaukee's Brook Lopez was whistled for

two technical fouls and ejected. Technicals were also called on Toronto's O.G. Anunoby and Jamaal Magloire on the play.

Lopez scored 15 of his 19 points in the third quarter before being ejected.

76ers 120, Clippers 110: Joel Embiid scored 41 points and visiting Philadelphia recovered after blowing a 14-point, first-half lead to beat Los Angeles for its third straight win.

Embiid had nine rebounds and made 15 of 18 free throws before leaving the game with 2:53 remaining. Philadelphia fans chanted "MVP! MVP!" as he encouraged the cheers.

Tyrese Maxey added 22 points off the bench. Tobias Harris had 20 points as the

76ers closed out a Los Angeles sweep, having edged the Lakers by one point two nights earlier.

After getting outscored 37-27 in the third, the Sixers dominated the fourth. They outscored the Clippers 30-21 in a reversal of the third when LA rallied from 11 points down.

Kawhi Leonard scored 27 points to lead the Clippers.

Nuggets 122, Trail Blazers 113: Nikola Jokic had 36 points as part of his 13th triple-double of the season to offset a 44-point performance from Damian Lillard, and host Denver won its 14th straight home game by topping Portland.

Jokic, who was 13-for-14 from the floor, finished with 12 rebounds and 10 assists. Michael

Porter Jr. had 23 points and Jamal Murray added 17.

The Nuggets were without head coach Michael Malone, who missed the game after entering the league's health and safety protocols.

Lillard had his 214th career game with 30 or more points as the Trail Blazers dropped their eighth straight road game.

Spurs 106, Nets 98: Keldon Johnson had a career-high 36 points and 11 rebounds and host San Antonio snapped a five-game skid with a win over injury-slowed Brooklyn.

Jeremy Sochan added 16 points for San Antonio. Johnson was 11-for-26 from the field, including two key baskets in the fourth quarter.

Spurgeon scores twice, Wild beat Capitals

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Filip Gustavsson made the save of the game by seeing the puck out of the corner of his eye just before it went into the net. His Minnesota teammates scored three goals by making sure Washington goaltender Charlie Lindgren couldn't see the puck at all.

Captain Jared Spurgeon scored twice, fellow defenseman Jonas Brodin also had a goal with traffic in front of the net and the Wild beat the Capitals 4-2 on Tuesday night to extend their winning streak to three games. All three came with a big forward setting a screen in front of Lindgren: 6-foot-6 Jordan Greenway on Spurgeon's first goal, 6-2 Ryan Reaves on Brodin's and 6-2 Brandon Duhaime on Spurgeon's second.

"We had a lot of great

screens, guys going to the net and creating havoc down there," Spurgeon said. "They're great screens. The goalie can't get out of the net and you cut the angles down and you can't see them as well. It's something we preach all the time."

As Gustavsson pointed out, it's hard for a goaltender to stop a shot he can't see. He made the highlight of the night on Marcus Johansson with under four minutes left, kicking the puck from one heel to the other with his skate blades while it was on the goal line and preventing it from crossing.

"I don't know how it didn't go in, but that's how it goes sometimes, I guess," Johansson said.

Gustavsson, who finished with 34 saves, did not do it accidentally.

"You need to stop it somehow," he said. "You just try and figure out how to move that part of your body."

Maple Leafs 5, Panthers 4 (OT): William Nylander scored his second goal of the game at 1:53 of overtime to lift host Toronto past Florida.

Nylander added an assist for a three-point performance and Auston Matthews, Dryden Hunt and Alexander Kerfoot also scored for Toronto.

Oilers 5, Kraken 2: Zach Hyman had a goal and two assists and host Edmonton beat Seattle for its fourth consecutive victory.

Connor McDavid, Derek Ryan, Warren Foegele and Ryan McLeod also scored for the Oilers. Jack Campbell made 29 saves.

Coyotes 4, Red Wings 3 (SO): Nick Schmaltz and Nick Bjugstad scored on host Ari-

zona's first two shootout attempts and the Coyotes beat Detroit to end a nine-game losing streak.

Predators 2, Blue Jackets 1: Kevin Lankinen made 39 saves and host Nashville beat Columbus.

Canadiens 4, Jets 1: Evgenii Dadonov scored twice and Samuel Montembeault made 24 saves to help host Montreal beat Central Division-leading Winnipeg.

Flyers 5, Ducks 2: Kevin Hayes had his first career hat trick, Rasmus Ristolainen and Morgan Frost also scored and host Philadelphia rebounded from its worst loss of the season to beat Anaheim.

Blackhawks 4, Sabres 3 (OT): Seth Jones tied it with 56 seconds left in regulation and scored again 2:24 into overtime to lift host Chicago past Buffalo.

Slowed by bad hip, Nadal ousted from Australian Open

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Rafael Nadal bowed his head during changeovers and rested his elbows on his knees, the very picture of resignation.

What was already a poor start to 2023, following a year marred by all manner of health issues, reached a low point at the Australian Open on Wednesday.

The defending champion and No. 1 seed at Melbourne Park, Nadal injured his left hip and lost to Mackenzie McDonald 6-4, 6-4, 7-5 in the second round, abruptly ending his bid for a record-extending 23rd Grand Slam trophy.

"It's a tough moment. It's a tough day," said Nadal, a 36-year-old Spaniard. "I can't say that I am not destroyed mentally at this moment, because I would be lying."

He pulled up awkwardly at the end of a point late in the sec-

ond set against the 65th-ranked McDonald.

Nadal was visited by a trainer on the sideline, then left the court for a medical timeout. Up in the stands, his wife wiped away tears. Nadal returned to play, but was clearly compromised and not his usual indefatigable self, saying afterward that he could not hit his backhand properly and could not run much, either.

But Nadal added that, as the reigning champion of the tournament, he did not want to leave the court via a mid-match retirement.

He said the hip had been bothering him for a couple of days, but it was never as bad as it became on Wednesday. Nadal was not sure exactly what the nature of the injury was, saying that he will have medical tests to determine if it has to do with a muscle, joint or cartilage.

"It's never over until it's

over' type thing. He didn't even want to roll over and quit. He kept fighting until basically the end, even though he maybe didn't have all his game," said McDonald, a 27-year-old who won NCAA championships in singles and doubles for UCLA in 2016.

"I was in the locker room," McDonald said about the aftermath of the match, "and I was like, 'Hey, that's actually really big for me, because I haven't beaten someone of that caliber.'"

This is Nadal's earliest exit at any Grand Slam tournament since bowing out in the first round in Melbourne in 2016 against No. 45 Fernando Verdasco. That also made Verdasco the lowest-ranked player to defeat Nadal in Australia — until, of course, McDonald on Wednesday.

This result overshadowed everything else going on in Mel-

bourne, of course, on a day that persistent rain pushed back the start of play on all but the three courts with retractable roofs until after 5 p.m. local time.

That meant some players — most notably, No. 1 Iga Swiatek, No. 3 Jessica Pegula and No. 6 Maria Sakkari — won matches that put them in the third round before more than a dozen others even had contested a single point in the first round.

At night, 2022 French Open runner-up Coco Gauff got past 2021 U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu 6-3, 7-6 (4) in the first head-to-head meeting between two of the sport's young stars.

Seeded men who won included No. 3 Stefanos Tsitsipas, No. 6 Felix Auger-Aliassime, No. 7 Daniil Medvedev — the runner-up to Nadal last year and to Novak Djokovic in 2021 — No. 15 Jannik Sinner and No. 16 Frances Tiafoe.