

Poland pushes for more tanks in Kyiv

Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland — Poland said Monday that it would ask Berlin for permission to send German-built Leopard tanks to Ukraine as the government in Warsaw pushes its Western allies to move faster on supplying Kyiv with more military hardware to thwart Russia's invasion.

Germany has hesitated over sending tanks to Ukraine. But Polish officials took heart from remarks Sunday by German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock that Berlin wouldn't seek to stop Poland from providing Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki didn't specify when the request to Germany will be made. He said that Poland is building a coalition of nations ready to send Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine.

Poland needs the consent of Germany, which builds the tanks, to send them to a non-NATO country.

But even if there is no permission from Germany, Warsaw will make its own deci-

sions, Morawiecki said at a conference.

Poland has become a leading advocate in the European Union for giving Ukraine the military aid that could help it prevail over the Kremlin's invading forces 11 months after the war began. Germany's hesitation has drawn criticism, particularly from Poland and the Baltic countries on NATO's eastern flank that feel especially threatened by Russia's renewed aggression.

Although Berlin has provided substantial aid, it has been criticized for dragging its feet on providing military hardware.

German government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit said it was important for Germany not to take a "reckless" step it might regret, adding that a decision will not be rushed.

"These are hard questions of life and death," he added. "We have to ask what this means for the defense of our own country."

Pressed on how long a decision on sending tanks might take, Hebestreit said: "I assume that it's not a question of months now."

The Ukrainian government has said that

tanks, and especially the Leopards, are vital to Kyiv.

Morawiecki said that while Poland intends to ask Germany for permission to send Leopard tanks to Ukraine, the request is "a secondary matter" as a group of EU countries look at how to help Kyiv.

"Even if, eventually, we do not get this permission, we — within this small coalition — even if Germany is not in this coalition, we will hand over our tanks, together with the others, to Ukraine," he said.

Morawiecki said talks have also been held "with our partners in Brussels" on the subject, referring to the 27-nation EU.

"Naturally, these are not easy talks, but we will be taking efforts to break this barrier of unwillingness in various countries," he said.

Baerbock, Germany's top diplomat, told French television channel LCI on Sunday that Poland hasn't formally asked for Berlin's approval to share some of its Leopards, but added "if we were asked, we would not stand in the way."

Military probing if cancers linked to nuclear silo work

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Nine military officers who had worked decades ago at a nuclear missile base in Montana have been diagnosed with blood cancer and there are "indications" the disease may be linked to their service, according to military briefing slides obtained by The Associated Press. One of the officers has died.

All of the officers, known as missileers, were assigned as many as 25 years ago to Malmstrom Air Force Base, home to a vast field of 150 Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile silos. The nine officers were diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma, according to a January briefing by U.S.

Space Force Lt. Col. Daniel Sebeck.

Missileers ride caged elevators deep underground into a small operations bunker encased in a thick wall of concrete and steel. They remain there sometimes for days, ready to turn the launch keys if ordered to by the president.

"There are indications of a possible association between cancer and missile combat crew service at Malmstrom AFB," Sebeck said in slides presented to his Space Force unit this month. The "disproportionate number of missileers presenting with cancer, specifically lymphoma" was concerning, he said.

Sebeck declined to comment

when contacted by email by the AP on Saturday, saying the slides were "predecisional." In the slides, he said the issue was important to the Space Force because as many as 455 former missileers are now serving as Space Force officers, including at least four of the nine identified in the slides.

In a statement to the AP, Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek said that "senior leaders are aware of the concerns raised about the possible association of cancer related to missile combat crew members at Malmstrom AFB."

Stefanek added: "The information in this briefing has been shared with the Department of the Air Force surgeon general

and our medical professionals are working to gather data and understand more."

The median age for adult non-Hodgkin lymphoma is 67, according to the National Institutes of Health. The former missileers affected are far younger. Officers are often in their 20s when they are assigned duty watch; the officer who died, who was not identified, was a Space Force officer assigned to Schriever Space Force Base in Colorado with the rank of major, a rank typically achieved in a service member's 30s. Two of the others are in the same Space Force unit with the rank of lieutenant colonel, which is typically reached in a service member's early 40s.

AFN Now app 'likely' to livestream pro sports

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

Professional sports are now available on the American Forces Network's new video on demand and livestreaming app, a little over two months after its worldwide launch.

The network is hoping to livestream next weekend's NFC and AFC championship games and the Super Bowl on Feb. 12 after successfully testing the live function last weekend, AFN spokesman John Clearwater said Monday.

Feedback from AFN Now audiences surprised to find the NFL games live reported "good video and clean audio" during the streams, he said.

"Based on the success of this weekend's testing, live stream-

ing of the Championship games on AFN Now appears feasible and likely," Clearwater said in an email.

The weekend's games were also transmitted as video on demand, as were the wild card games. The format allows viewers to watch prerecorded events.

The first NFL postseason games on wild card weekend, Jan. 14-16, were up about 10 to 13 hours after they aired on AFN television, said Kimberly Antos, the network's chief of digital media and AFN Now.

Most feedback so far on the new app has been from people wanting to watch those sports live, Antos said, adding that the network is "working toward a live solution."

The NFL playoffs and the Aus-

tralian Open tennis tournament debuted on AFN Now earlier this month, shortly after AFN acquired the digital rights for the programming, executives told Stars and Stripes.

That includes rights to air the Super Bowl on the app, said Mike Drumheller, chief of the AFN broadcast center in Riverside, Calif.

The wild card games were still on the app as of early Monday, but likely won't be for long. The games disappear after seven days as part of AFN's rights agreement, Antos said.

The three out of four divisional playoff games this past weekend appeared on the app Monday afternoon Central European Time.

The network aims to resolve some technical issues with the

app in time to livestream the Super Bowl on Feb. 12, Drumheller said.

The first major hurdle in putting professional sports up on the app was acquiring the digital rights to the games, a process that went down to the wire and involved negotiations across different regions and time zones for the NFL postseason games, Drumheller said.

"We had the rights agreement in hand on Friday and we were up on video on demand on Saturday," he said of wild card weekend.

AFN Now is free to download from the Apple and Google app stores. It's compatible with most devices and in-home media, including Apple TV, Roku and Amazon Fire.

DOD officials to discuss civilian health care plans

By ALEX WILSON
AND KELLY AGE
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Two Pentagon officials will visit two of the largest U.S. bases in Japan next week to address ongoing concerns over a lack of health care for Defense Department civilian employees and their families, according to spokesmen at both installations.

Gilbert Cisneros Jr., undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, and Seileen Mullen, acting assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, will host town hall meetings at Yokota Air Base on Monday and at Yokosuka Naval Base the following day, Jan. 31.

News of the two officials' visit follows months of confusion and concern as DOD civilian employees scrambled to under-

stand changes imposed by the Defense Health Agency that abruptly limited on-base health care options for anyone other than those covered by the military's Tricare Prime medical plan.

The town hall at Yokota, a key airlift hub in western Tokyo, is scheduled for 4 to 5 p.m. in the base theater, Tech Sgt. Chris Hubenthal told Stars and Stripes by email Monday. Questions can be emailed ahead of time at 374AW.PA.CommandersActionLine@us.af.mil until noon Wednesday.

The town hall at Yokosuka, homeport of the U.S. 7th Fleet, is scheduled for noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Fleet Theater, base spokesman Randall Baucom told Stars and Stripes by phone Monday. Questions can be submitted until 4 p.m. Tuesday at yokosukareport@gmail.com.

US, partner forces capture 2 ISIS militants in eastern Syria

Stars and Stripes

U.S. Central Command forces captured two Islamic State militants during a partnered helicopter and ground assault raid in eastern Syria on Saturday, CENTCOM said in a news release.

One civilian received minor injuries in the raid that led to the capture of Abdallah Hamid Muslih al-Maddad, aka Abu Hamza al-Suri, an ISIS facilitator; and Husam Hamid al-Muslih al-Maddad, al-Khayr, an ISIS facilitator and logistician.

"The injured civilian was escorted by our partner forces to a nearby medical care facility along with an accompanying family member," CENTCOM spokesman Col. Joe Buccino said in the release. "He received care and was released back to his family."

ISIS sleeper cells continue to carry out deadly attacks in Syria

and Iraq. The militant group once ruled large swaths of both countries but lost its last stronghold in 2019. In late December, U.S.-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces announced "Operation Al-Jazeera Thunderbolt," citing a surge in ISIS attacks, to target sleeper cells in the areas of al-Hol and Tal Hamis in the country's east, The Associated Press previously reported.

Roughly 900 U.S. troops are deployed to Syria. CENTCOM reported conducting some 313 operations against ISIS in 2022 in Syria and Iraq, mostly in cooperation with the Syrian Democratic Forces forces.

"ISIS represents a threat to our partners, and to the people of Iraq and Syria and beyond," Buccino said in the release. "Our mission to defeat ISIS alongside our partners continues."

Durbin, Manchin criticize Biden for docs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senior Democrats, dismayed by a steady stream of startling disclosures, expressed criticism Sunday of how President Joe Biden handled classified material after leaving office as vice president and disappointment that the White House has not been more forthcoming with the public.

Lawmakers who might have anticipated questions focusing on the debt limit or Ukraine aid when they were booked last week for the Sunday news shows found themselves quizzed about the latest development over the weekend in the document drama that has put Biden's presidency on the defensive: During a search Friday of Biden's home in Wilmington, Del., the FBI found additional documents with classified markings and took possession of some of his handwritten notes, the president's lawyer said Saturday.

Biden should be "embarrassed by the situation," said Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin, the second-ranking Democrat in the Senate, adding that the president had ceded the moral high ground on an issue that has already entangled former President Donald Trump. Special counsels appointed by At-

torney General Merrick Garland are investigating both cases.

"Well, of course. Let's be honest about it. When that information is found, it diminishes the stature of any person who is in possession of it because it's not supposed to happen. ... The elected official bears ultimate responsibility," Durbin said.

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., said Biden "should have a lot of regrets. ... You just might as well say, 'Listen, it's irresponsible.'" The president told reporters on Thursday that he had "no regrets" over how and when the public learned about the documents and that there was "no there there."

Despite their criticism, Biden's fellow Democrats defended what they said was his cooperation with the Justice Department as the search for additional classified material unfolds. They contrasted it with Trump's resistance to efforts to recover hundreds of documents after he left office.

"It is outrageous that either occurred," Durbin said. "But the reaction by the former president and the current president could not be in sharper contrast."

Biden voluntarily allowed the FBI into his home on Friday, but the lack of a warrant did not dim the extraordinary nature of the

search. It compounded the embarrassment to Biden that started earlier in January with the disclosure that the president's lawyers had found a "small number" of classified records at a former office at the Penn Biden Center in Washington shortly before the Nov. 8 elections.

The White House has disclosed that Biden's team found classified documents and official records on three other occasions in recent months — in follow-up searches on Dec. 20 in the garage of his Wilmington home, and on Jan. 11 and 12 in his home library. The discoveries have become a political liability as Biden prepares to kick off his 2024 reelection bid, and they undercut his efforts to portray an image of propriety to the American public after the tumultuous presidency of his predecessor, Trump.

Manchin excoriated both men for their handling of sensitive security documents. "It's just hard to believe that in the United States of America, we have a former president and a current president that are basically in the same situation," he said. "How does this happen?"

Durbin appeared on CNN's "State of the Union." Manchin was on CNN and NBC's "Meet the Press."

Enticing green buying seen as climate hurdle for Biden

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden persuaded Democrats in Congress to provide hundreds of billions of dollars to fight climate change. Now comes another formidable task: enticing Americans to buy millions of electric cars, heat pumps, solar panels and more efficient appliances.

It's a public relations challenge that could determine whether the country meets Biden's ambitious goal to cut greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030.

Relying on tax credits and rebates made the climate legislation — it was approved in August with only Democratic votes — more politically palatable than regulations that force wholesale changes in polluting industries.

But it also means the administration's battle against global warming will be waged "one household at a time," said Shannon Baker-Branstetter, who works on energy issues at the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank closely aligned with the White House.

"It is very incremental," she said. "So it requires a very sophisticated communications strategy."

Biden acknowledged the hurdle during a recent Cabinet meeting as he talked about the incentives that are becoming available this year.

"Folks need to know how to take advantage of these benefits that we passed. That's on all of us around the table here to make sure we get that message out clearly," he said.

Russia, Estonia expel envoys amid 'destroyed' relations

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russia and Estonia on Monday were expelling the ambassadors from each other's countries in a tit-for-tat move, saying that their diplomatic missions will be headed by charges d'affaires.

The Russian Foreign Ministry summoned Estonian Ambassador Margus Laidre and ordered him to leave the country by Feb. 7. The statement issued by the ministry said that Estonia's diplomatic representation from now on will be downgraded to a charge d'affaires that heads the European Union country's mission in Moscow.

The ministry said the move was made in retaliation for Estonia's "new unfriendly step to radically reduce the size of the Russian Embassy in Tallinn."

In response, Estonian For-

eign Minister Urmas Reinsalu said that the Russian ambassador will leave on Feb. 7 too, in accordance with "the principle of parity."

The Estonian Foreign Ministry earlier this month ordered Russia to reduce the number of its embassy staff to eight diplomats and 15 administrative, technical and service staff members to "reach parity in embassy staff" by Feb. 1.

Estonia has reduced its bilateral relations with Moscow "to the absolute minimum" since the Kremlin sent troops into Ukraine, Reinsalu said in a statement on Jan. 11. "Now we are setting a limit to the number of Russian diplomats working in Estonia in order to achieve parity. Today's step is in correlation with the low point of our relations in general," he said.

Gunman in Calif. massacre found dead

Associated Press

MONTEREY PARK, Calif. — Authorities searched for a motive for the gunman who killed 10 people at a Los Angeles-area ballroom dance club during Lunar New Year celebrations, slayings that sent a wave of fear through Asian American communities and cast a shadow over festivities nationwide.

The suspect, 72-year-old Huu Can Tran, was found dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound on Sunday in the van that authorities say he used to flee after being prevented from attacking another dance hall. The mayor of Monterey Park said Tran may have frequented the dance hall he attacked.

The massacre was the nation's fifth mass killing this month — and it struck on one of California's largest celebrations of a holiday

observed in many Asian cultures.

It was also the deadliest attack since May 24, when 21 people were killed in an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas. Authorities said Saturday's assault could have been even more deadly. A man whose family runs the second venue confronted the assailant in the lobby and wrested the gun from him, *The New York Times* reported.

Authorities have shared very little about Tran.

"We do understand that he may have had a history of visiting this dance hall and perhaps the motivation has to do with some personal relationships, but that's something that I think investigators are still uncovering and investigating and we'll probably find out more in the hours ahead or even days ahead," said Monterey Park Mayor Henry Lo. Public records

show Tran once had addresses in the city and neighboring ones.

But Lo and Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna stressed that the motive remained unclear for the attack, which also wounded 10 people.

The suspect was carrying what Luna described as a semi-automatic pistol with an extended magazine, and a second handgun was discovered in the van where Tran died.

Monterey Park Police Chief Scott Wiese said Sunday evening that within three minutes of receiving the call, officers arrived at the Star Ballroom Dance Studio in Monterey Park. There, they found carnage inside and people trying to flee through all the doors.

"When they came into the parking lot, it was chaos," Wiese said.

About 20 minutes after the first attack, the gunman entered the Lai Lai Ballroom in the nearby city of Alhambra.

Brandon Tsay was in the lobby at the time, and he told ABC's "Good Morning America" that he thought he was going to die.

"Something came over me. I realized I needed to get the weapon away from him, I needed to take this weapon, disarm him or else everybody would have died," Tsay said. "When I got the courage, I lunged at him with both my hands, grabbed the weapon and we had a struggle."

Once Tsay seized the gun, he pointed it at the man and shouted: "Get the hell out of here, I'll shoot, get away, go!"

The assailant paused, but then headed back to his van, and Tsay called the police, the gun still in his hand.

Rare swift firings of police could become more common

Associated Press

BOSTON — The speed with which five Memphis, Tenn., police officers were fired following the traffic stop of a man who later died in a hospital is unusual but could become more common, according to those studying police and criminal justice issues.

The five Memphis Police Department officers were fired Friday, less than two weeks after the Jan. 7 arrest of Tyre Nichols, 29. Officials said the five were dismissed for excessive use of force, failure to intervene and failure to render aid.

It's rare for a police department to act so quickly, said David Thomas, a professor of forensic studies at Florida Gulf Coast University. Investigations can sometimes go on for up to a year, he said.

The decision to fire the officers followed a probe by the Memphis Police Department. Nichols died

three days after the traffic stop.

One recent turning point has been the advent of police body cameras, which can be quickly reviewed, along with cellphone video taken by passersby, said Thomas, who served 20 years as a police officer in Michigan and Florida.

"Law enforcement can no longer act with impunity," he said. "Absolutely, officers will be let go more quickly."

Typically before a firing, officials will determine if an officer has violated a department's general orders, which set out the procedures and regulations officers are meant to follow, said Patrick Oliver, director of the criminal justice program at Cedarville University in Ohio.

"The seriousness of the job action is based on the severity of the violation," said Oliver, who spent 28 years in law enforcement, 16 of them as a police chief.

New pill treats diabetic cats without daily insulin shots

Associated Press

When Mark Winternheimer's 12-year-old tabby cat was diagnosed with diabetes last year, the treatment was daunting: twice-daily injections of insulin, an implanted monitor and frequent visits to the vet.

Despite their qualms, Winternheimer and his wife, Courtnee, of New Albany, Ind., learned to give Oliver his shots.

"For us, they're part of the family," Winternheimer said of Oliver and their two other cats, Ella and Theo. "You wouldn't deny another family member care if it's available."

Now, a new, once-daily pill promises to make treating feline diabetes easier in newly diagnosed animals, without the shots.

"A pill is a huge step forward from a needle," said Dr. Audrey Cook, a cat veterinarian at Texas A&M University.

One caveat: The pill called Bex-

acat can't be used in cats like Oliver, who had previously received insulin.

The biggest benefit may be the ease of use, experts said. While many cat owners successfully treat their cats with twice-daily insulin, often for years, others struggle. Research shows that owners put down 1 in 10 cats with a new diabetes diagnosis. Another 10% are euthanized within a year, in part because of the difficulties of treatment.

Made by Elanco Animal Health Inc., Bexacat was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in December and is expected to be available in the U.S. in the next several weeks.

In studies involving more than 300 diabetic cats, Bexacat improved glucose control and decreased at least one symptom of diabetes in more than 80% of newly diagnosed, healthy animals, company documents show.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Fire damages oldest building at university

CT STORRS — A fire early Friday heavily damaged the University of Connecticut's oldest building, a colonial-style house built in 1769 that is part of the school's historic district. No injuries were reported.

Firefighters were called to the Whitney House at about 6 a.m. and the building was almost fully engulfed in flames at one point, UConn officials said. The fire was deemed under control about an hour later, but firefighters remained at the scene to put out hot spots.

The Whitney House, which was not currently in use, is one of several private residences in Storrs that predate the founding of the school and were acquired by the university, whose historic district is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Police seek suspect in off-Strip casino heists

NV LAS VEGAS — Police have gone public with pleas to identify a man believed to be responsible for several recent robberies of cashiers at casinos in neighborhoods off the Las Vegas Strip.

Las Vegas police on Wednesday released a media statement tracing the series of heists to November 2022, and posted video on the internet showing surveillance camera clips of two vehicles and a person wearing hooded sweatshirts, gloves, masks and sneakers.

Details were not provided about where and when the videos were recorded. Investigators

have not disclosed details about robberies reported: Nov. 16 at the Gold Coast casino several blocks west of the Strip; Dec. 12 at Green Valley Ranch in Henderson; Dec. 20 at the Silverton, south of the Strip; and Dec. 24 at the Rampart Casino in northwest Las Vegas.

The police statement described the man detectives are looking for as about 25 to 35 years old and between 6-foot-1 and 6-foot-3 tall. They said he was seen driving two vehicles that had been reported stolen: a dark gray Chevrolet Cruze and a silver Mazda 6.

Ex-cop tried in case that sank drug convictions

NY NEW YORK — A former New York City narcotics detective went on trial Thursday on charges that he lied about witnessing drug deals — allegations that prompted the dismissals of hundreds of drug convictions.

Prosecutors have said video contradicted several of Joseph Franco's claims to have seen illegal drug sales. His lawyer, Howard Tanner, has claimed the former detective might have muffed some details about where he saw the alleged transactions but didn't deliberately lie, and Tanner has maintained the video doesn't prove otherwise.

Franco worked for the New York Police Department for about 20 years, until 2020. He was charged in Manhattan in 2019 with perjury and other offenses and has pleaded not guilty.

The charges involve a handful of cases, but the allegations prompted prosecutors in Brook-

lyn, Manhattan and the Bronx to disavow hundreds of convictions in cases involving Franco. The prosecutors didn't say they had found evidence that he lied in those cases, but they said they couldn't stand by his work.

3rd dead whale washes up on coast in a week

OR WARRENTON — A baby gray whale washed up on the northern Oregon coast on Wednesday, making it the third dead whale to beach on the state's coastline over the past week.

The 12-foot-long calf washed ashore at Fort Stevens State Park, KGW reported, only 100 yards from the site where a dead sperm whale beached over the weekend.

The baby whale appeared to be a stillborn, Michael Milstein, spokesperson for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's fisheries agency, told the news outlet. There were no indications that it was struck by a ship or that it died from human interaction.

Federal biologists determined that the 40-foot sperm whale that washed ashore nearby died after a ship hit it. The whale had a large gash in its side.

Panel advances bill to restrict drag shows

AR LITTLE ROCK — Drag performances would be classified as adult-oriented businesses under an bill in Arkansas that a legislative panel endorsed Thursday. It's the latest in a growing number of Republican-backed proposals nationwide to restrict or ban the shows.

The state Senate City, County

and Local Affairs Committee advanced the proposal, which would also prohibit drag shows from public property.

It next goes to the Republican-controlled Senate.

The proposed restrictions would classify places that show drag performances along with other adult businesses such as adult theaters and strip clubs. The designation would prohibit them from being within 1,000 feet of churches, schools, parks and libraries. It would also prohibit such shows from public property.

Critics warned the restriction was overly broad and could affect theatrical performances that include actors or actresses performing as members of the opposite sex.

Stolen hot dog statue returned to restaurant

WV CHARLESTON — The owner of a West Virginia restaurant that was heavily damaged by fire has his coveted hot dog statue back.

The "Wienerman" statue was stolen from the Dairy Winkle in Campbells Creek during a break-in sometime after the Jan. 11 fire, the Kanawha County Sheriff's Office said in a news release.

A tip led deputies to a location where the statue was found undamaged. It was returned to restaurant owner Kerry Ellison, the statement said.

Investigators have not identified a suspect and are seeking information about the theft.

The short statue depicts a hot dog licking its lips and holding a bottle of mustard while pouring a bottle of ketchup on its head.

— From wire reports

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Bengals rout Bills, back in AFC championship

Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Joe Burrow and the Cincinnati Bengals threw a big wrench into the highly anticipated travel plans of the Buffalo Bills, their fans and perhaps even the NFL offices.

Burrow threw two touchdown passes and Cincinnati's defense swarmed Josh Allen on a snow-slicked field in a 27-10 win Sunday to send the Bengals to the AFC championship game for the second straight year.

And it'll be in Kansas City again — instead of in Atlanta, the neutral site where the game would've been played if Buffalo had beaten Cincinnati.

"Better send those refunds," Burrow said, referring to the 50,000 or so tickets already sold for a game that will never be played.

"See y'all in Atlanta," one Bengals player was heard yelling sarcastically while the team made its way to the locker room, where cornerback Eli Apple and a couple of teammates conducted interviews smoking cigars.

The Bengals entered the game

already feeling disrespected when the NFL began selling tickets for a would-be game at Atlanta, that was dependent on the Bills and Chiefs winning this weekend.

The league decided on the first-of-its-kind conference championship neutral site setting because the Bills (13-3) finished the season a half-game behind the Chiefs (14-3) after their game at Cincinnati was canceled on Jan. 2 when Bills safety Damar Hamlin went into cardiac arrest and had to be resuscitated on the field.

Hamlin's inspirational presence while watching the game from an end-zone suite was not enough to spark the Bills.

Instead, it was "Joe Cool" showing poise while playing in a persistent snowfall.

Burrow completed his first nine passes for 105 yards as Cincinnati raced to a 14-0 lead after its first two possessions. Ja'Marr Chase opened the scoring with a 28-yard TD catch 3:20 into the game, followed by Burrow's 15-yard TD throw to Hayden Hurst

eight minutes later. Joe Mixon scored on a 1-yard run, and Evan McPherson made field goals from 20 and 28 yards in a game the Bengals never trailed.

"The bigger the moment gets, the calmer he gets," Bengals coach Zac Taylor said of Burrow, who improved his playoff record to 5-1. "Our guys believe. They walk on the field ready to attack."

Cincinnati advanced to consecutive AFC championship games for the first time in franchise history and will prepare for a rematch of last year's title game. The Bengals defeated Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs 27-24 to advance to last year's Super Bowl, which they lost to the Los Angeles Rams.

"It's going to be a fun one," said Burrow, who went 23-for-36 for 242 yards Sunday. "Two of the top guys in the league, two of the top teams in the league, great defenses, great overall teams, great coaches."

Cincinnati has won the last three meetings against Kansas City, including a 27-24 win last month. The Chiefs are making

their fifth straight appearance in the AFC championship game after a 27-20 win over Jacksonville on Saturday.

The Bills' playoff run ended in the divisional round for a second straight season, including a 42-36 overtime loss to Kansas City last year.

It was a dud of an outing for the Bills, who opened the season with Super Bowl aspirations, and eventually ran out of emotional and physical gas. Aside from the shocking sight of Hamlin's collapse, the Bills had their schedule twice disrupted by severe winter storms.

Injuries also played an issue. The Bills' pass rush, missing Von Miller since he sustained a season-ending knee injury in November, generated very little pressure against a Bengals offensive line missing three starters due to injuries.

"We were expecting their best punch and they came out and punched us," said Allen, who finished 25-for-42 for 265 yards, and scored on a 1-yard plunge. "We just didn't have it today."

49ers headed back to NFC title game with win over Cowboys

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Brock Purdy rolled to his left and saw his first few options covered. At the last second, George Kittle broke free running deep, Purdy threw across his body and Kittle made a juggling catch that sparked San Francisco's only touchdown drive.

That one big play proved to be enough to send the 49ers to their second straight NFC title game, thanks to a suffocating defensive performance.

Christian McCaffrey capped that drive with a go-ahead 2-yard run and the defense buckled down from there, sealing a 19-12 victory over the Dallas Cowboys on Sunday.

"Man, we're just excited that we won," said Purdy, the 49ers' unbeaten rookie quarterback. "Everyone did their part. It's playoff football, it's never easy, but we're moving on."

The 49ers (15-4) used back-to-back long scoring drives in the second half to wear down the Cowboys (13-6) and win their 12th

straight game. San Francisco advanced to play the Eagles in the NFC title game next Sunday in Philadelphia after losing in that round to the Rams a year ago.

The Cowboys lost for the record seventh straight time in the divisional round and have failed to make it to the NFC title game since winning their fifth Super Bowl title following the 1995 season.

Dak Prescott threw two interceptions and Brett Maher missed his fifth extra point of the postseason when his attempt was blocked. He later made two field goals.

"Just disappointment," Prescott said. "Defense gave us an opportunity to win this game. They played hard against a really, really good offense, a really good team. For us to only put up the points that we did, that's unacceptable. It starts with me. I've got to be better. There's no other way to sugarcoat it."

The key play came on the second play of the drive late in the third quarter with the game tied at 9. Purdy ran a bootleg that Dallas covered perfectly.

But he waited long enough for Kittle to improvise and turn upfield. Purdy then delivered a strike.

"We needed something," Purdy said. "We needed a spark to get the ball rolling."

Kittle bobbled the ball a few times before finally corraling it for a 30-yard gain, giving credit to his rookie QB for delivering it.

"I'm not even in the read, so I just kind of saw a space and he hadn't thrown it yet so I was just going up the field," Kittle said. "He gave me a catchable ball and I was just trying to be dramatic. Just for TV."

McCaffrey capped the 91-yard drive with his TD run.

The Cowboys still had a shot late when they took over at their own 18 with 2:59 remaining, trailing 19-12 after Robbie Gould's fourth field goal of the game capped a nearly eight-minute drive.

But Prescott threw two straight incompletions and was sacked on third down. Coach Mike McCarthy opted to punt on fourth-and-10 with all three timeouts left.

Thunder halt Nuggets' winning streak

Associated Press

DENVER — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander banked in a decisive 8-foot jumper with 9.2 seconds remaining and finished with 34 points as the Oklahoma City Thunder snapped Denver's league-leading nine-game winning streak and beat the Nuggets 101-99 Sunday night.

After Denver's Zeke Nnaji hit two free throws to tie the game at 99 with 30 seconds left, Gilgeous-Alexander got the ball out of a timeout and hit the mid-range jumper to give the Thunder the lead. The Nuggets' Jamal Murray missed a fadeaway 14-foot shot in the final seconds.

"He's got some poise in those situations," Thunder head coach Mark Daigneault said of Gilgeous-Alexander. "The game slows down for him. He's got great confidence and he's always at his pace, even in the most pressure situations."

Oklahoma City's victory ended the Nuggets' 16-game home winning streak — the franchise's longest run in 10 years.

Josh Giddey had 18 points and a team-high nine rebounds for the Thunder, who earned their seventh win in nine games.

Denver center Nikola Jokic missed his second straight game while dealing with tightness in his left hamstring. The two-time reigning NBA MVP had recorded a triple-double in five of his last six games. Nuggets acting head coach David Adelman said he expects Jokic's return is "going to be very soon."

"I think it's much easier to switch one through five with us," Adelman said. "When Nikola is on the floor, it's virtually impossible to do that and it's virtually impossible to zone us. They did those two things and they're smart things to do."

Forward Michael Porter Jr. also missed the game for "personal reasons," leaving Denver without two of its top four scorers. Porter's younger brother, Coban, a sophomore guard at the University of Denver, was arrested Sunday on suspicion of vehicular homicide and reck-

less driving after he was involved in a fatal crash.

Suns 112, Grizzlies 110: Chris Paul had 22 points and 11 assists in his return after missing seven games with a hip injury, leading host Phoenix over Memphis.

Mikal Bridges led the Suns with 24 points, while Torrey Craig added a season high 20. Ja Morant scored 27 for the Grizzlies, while Desmond Bane added 24.

Lakers 121, Trail Blazers 112: LeBron James had 37 points and 11 rebounds, and visiting Los Angeles rallied in the second half to beat Portland.

Anfernee Simons had 31 points for the Blazers, who have lost three straight. Damian Lillard added 24 points and 10 assists.

Nets 120, Warriors 116: Royce O'Neale hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 28.5 seconds left, and visiting Brooklyn capitalized on Golden State's third straight game squandering a double-digit lead.

Stephen Curry had 26 points, seven assists and six rebounds and Jordan Poole added 17 points for the Warriors.

Heat 100, Pelicans 96: Tyler Herro scored 26 points, Kyle Lowry had nine straight for Miami in the final 1:42 and the host Heat rallied to beat New Orleans.

Trey Murphy III had 17 for New Orleans.

Clippers 112, Mavericks 98: Kawhi Leonard scored a game-high 30 points, Paul George had 21 and Norman Powell added 19 off the bench to lead visiting Los Angeles past Dallas.

Luka Doncic led the Mavericks with 29 points and 10 rebounds.

Raptors 125, Knicks 116: Fred VanVleet scored 28 points, Gary Trent Jr. had 24 before fouling out and host Toronto beat New York to end a three-game losing streak.

RJ Barrett scored 30 points and Julius Randle had 23 points and 19 rebounds as the Knicks lost their fourth straight.

Dunn helps lead Temple past top-ranked Houston

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Temple coach Aaron McKie got a wet welcome into his team's locker room following the Owls' win over No. 1 Houston.

He didn't mind.

Damian Dunn scored 16 points and made the go-ahead free throw, Kur Jongkuch blocked Houston's go-ahead attempt in the final seconds and Temple held on to defeat the top-ranked Cougars 56-55 on Sunday.

"It was a cold celebration for me because the guys threw a lot of cold water on me, so it was pretty good," McKie said. "It's just always fun to see guys just so excited about a win and just enjoying this game of basketball."

Temple improved to 3-18 against No. 1-ranked teams. The Owls (12-9, 6-2 American Athletic Conference) earned their first win over a No. 1-ranked team since a 77-69 win at No. 1 Cincinnati on Feb. 20, 2000.

Zach Hicks added 12 points for Temple, which snapped a six-game losing streak to Houston. The Owls shot 31% but were 20-for-22 from the free-throw line.

No. 3 Purdue 58, Maryland 55: Zach Edey had 24 points and 16 rebounds and Braden Smith's two free throws with 3.9 seconds left helped the host Boilermakers fend off a furious second-half charge from the Terrapins.

Purdue is off to the best start in school history (19-1, 8-1 Big

Ten). The Boilermakers have won six straight and are the fifth conference team since 2000 to win 19 of their first 20 games. Edey had his 16th double-double this season.

Julian Reese scored 19 points to help Maryland (12-7, 3-5) overcome a 14-point halftime deficit to have a chance to force it to overtime.

No. 15 UConn 86, Butler 56: Jordan Hawkins scored 20 points and the host Huskies snapped a three-game losing streak in resounding fashion by routing the Bulldogs.

Adama Sanogo added 17 points and 14 rebounds for UConn (16-5, 5-5 Big East), which won its first 14 games this season but dropped five of six coming into the game. Alex Ka-

raban added 15 points and Tristen Newton scored 11 points for the Huskies.

Chuck Harris had 16 points and Simas Lukosius added 12 for Butler (11-10, 3-7), which was playing its third straight game without center Manny Bates, who is still recovering from a knee injury suffered earlier this month against St. John's.

Indiana 82, Michigan St. 69: Trayce Jackson-Davis finished with 31 points and 15 rebounds for his 40th career double-double and the host Hoosiers pulled away in the second half to beat the Spartans.

Jackson-Davis sank 10 of 20 shots from the floor and 11 of 13 from the free-throw line for Indiana (13-6, 4-4 Big Ten Conference).

3 American men reach Aussie quarters

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Ben Shelton's concerns leading into his first Australian Open had less to do with playing tennis and more to do with everything else associated with the trip.

His first time outside of the United States. His first time using a passport. The jet lag. The time difference. The food. The driving on the left side of the road. And, oh, yeah, the whole part about keeping up with online classwork as he begins a new semester this week while pursuing a business degree.

Shelton is still just 20. A year ago at this time, he was attending classes and competing in college tennis at the University of Florida, where his dad, a former pro himself, coaches the men's team. As of Monday, when he edged J.J. Wolf 6-7 (5), 6-2, 6-7 (4), 7-6 (4), 6-2 at John Cain Arena, Shelton is, suddenly and stunningly, a Grand Slam quarterfinalist — one of three American men to make it that far at Melbourne Park, the most for the country since 2000.

"Definitely a surprise. I got on the plane with no expectations," Shelton, who won the 2022 NCAA singles championship, said of his performance at the second major tournament of his nascent professional career. "It maybe has helped me a little bit, kind of not having that expectation or the feeling that I have to perform, but being able to just go out there, be myself and play free. I think that's been a big contribution to my success."

Now the 89th-ranked Shelton meets yet another unseeded American, 35th-ranked Tommy Paul, who eliminated No. 24 seed Roberto Bautista Agut of Spain 6-2, 4-6, 6-2, 7-5.

Their matchup will be the first Slam quarterfinal between two men from the U.S. since 2007, when Andy Roddick beat Mardy Fish in Melbourne. Roddick's title at the U.S. Open 20 years ago remains the last major singles championship for a man from the country.

"It's like every person's dream when they start playing tennis to play the big matches at the Slams," said Paul, a 25-

year-old from New Jersey. "I'm really excited to get out there on Wednesday. We know there's going to be an American in the semis, so I'm really excited about that, too."

Completing the trio is Sebastian Korda, who plays his quarterfinal Tuesday against No. 18 Karen Khachanov of Russia. Like Shelton and Paul, Korda has made it this far at a major for the first time. And like Shelton, Korda's Dad played tennis: Petr Korda won the 1998 Australian Open.

There is nothing new about all of this, of course, for Novak Djokovic, the 21-time Grand Slam champion who looked indomitable during a 6-2, 6-1, 6-2 win over No. 22 seed Alex de Minaur of Australia and declared that his bothersome left hamstring is no longer an issue.

"I didn't feel anything today," Djokovic said, noting that he has been taking "a lot of" anti-inflammatory pills.

Djokovic, who couldn't play in last year's Australian Open because he wasn't vaccinated against COVID-19, moved a step closer to a record-extend-

ing 10th championship in Melbourne by never facing a break point and by claiming a half-dozen of de Minaur's service games.

Djokovic moves on to a matchup against No. 5 seed Andrey Rublev. The Russian kept coming back — from down 5-2 in the fifth set, from facing a pair of match points while trailing 6-5, from deficits of 5-0 and 7-2 in the first-to-10 concluding tiebreaker — before finally putting away No. 9 Holger Rune 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (11-9).

Rublev won it when his backhand return slipped off the net cord and barely, just barely, made it over onto Rune's side of the court, impossible to reach. Rublev dropped to his back at the baseline and raised both arms as if to say, "Sorry!" — or perhaps "Sorry. Not sorry!" — while Rune also flung away his racket.

"I have no words, man. I'm shaking," said Rublev, who is 0-6 in Grand Slam quarterfinals for his career. "That ball was exactly on my side and I don't know how (it) went over."

Ullmark shuts out Sharks as Bruins extend streak

Associated Press

BOSTON — Defensemen Hampus Lindholm and Charlie McAvoy scored highlight-reel goals, Linus Ullmark made 17 saves and the NHL-leading Boston Bruins beat the San Jose Sharks for the 11th straight time, 4-0 on Sunday night.

The Bruins won their fifth straight game and improved to 22-1-3 at home this season, including a victory at Fenway Park as the "home" team in the Winter Classic.

"Our bench was really motivated by it," Boston's first-year coach Jim Montgomery said of the McAvoy and Lindholm goals. "When those two guys, you have two studs out there

that are making plays like that, not only what it does for our bench, but it deflates the other team."

Ullmark, named a first-time All Star, improved to 25-2-1. He had a relatively easy game before leaving 8:01 into the period with a skate-blade issue, and backup Jeremy Swayman made one stop in relief before Ullmark returned 2:28 later.

David Pastrnak had his team-leading 36th goal and Nick Foligno also scored for Boston.

Devils 2, Penguins 1 (OT): Dougie Hamilton scored a power-play goal 2:07 into overtime as host New Jersey extended its point streak to seven games (6-0-1).

Jack Hughes had a goal and an assist and Vitek Vanecsek stopped 25 shots for the Devils, who have won two straight at home in overtime.

Sidney Crosby scored for the Penguins, who fell to 2-0-2 in their last four games.

Kings 2, Blackhawks 1: Jaret Anderson-Dolan scored twice and visiting Los Angeles snapped a four-game losing streak.

Kevin Fiala had two assists and Pheonix Copley stopped 18 shots for the Kings.

Defenseman Ian Mitchell scored his first goal of the season for Chicago, spoiling Copley's shutout bid with 3:15 remaining.

Jets 5, Flyers 3: Axel Jonsson-Fjällby, Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele gave visiting Winnipeg an early three-goal lead, and the Jets held on to beat Philadelphia.

David Rittich made 28 saves for the Jets.

Kevin Hayes tallied twice while playing in his 600th career game, and Ivan Provorov added a goal for Philadelphia.

Coyotes 4, Golden Knights 1: Clayton Keller had his second hat trick of the season and host Arizona got its second victory in the last 13 games.

Dylan Guenther scored and Karel Vejmelka had 35 saves for the Coyotes, who had been shut out in their last two games.