

## Iran dispatches warship to Red Sea

*From staff and wire reports*

Iran dispatched a warship to the Red Sea after the U.S. Navy destroyed three Houthi boats, a move that risks ratcheting up tensions and complicates Washington's goal of securing a waterway that's vital to global trade.

The Alborz destroyer traversed the Bab El-Mandeb strait, a narrow choke point between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, on Monday, Iranian state media said without providing further information on the vessel's mission.

Iran's foray into the Red Sea a day after the U.S. action compounds a highly volatile situation in the channel that handles about 12% of the world's commerce. The move could be seen as a challenge to the U.S.-led maritime task force established last month to halt attacks on ships by the Tehran-backed Houthi rebels who control a swath of Yemen's northwest, including the capital Sanaa and

the Red Sea port of Al-Hudaydah.

The Houthis, in November, began attacking vessels they claimed were headed to or owned by entities in Israel in a bid to end an Israeli offensive in Gaza, after Hamas, a U.S.-designated terrorist group, staged a shock attack inside Israel on Oct. 7.

In one month, the Houthis hijacked one container ship and launched more than 100 drone and ballistic missile attacks, targeting 10 merchant vessels involving more than 35 different nations, according to the Pentagon.

Operation Prosperity Guardian, involving the navies of the U.S. and nine other nations, swung into action from Dec. 19 and had a fierce encounter with the militants on Sunday.

Four small boats belonging to the Houthis from Yemen fired small arms and crew-served weapons at the Maersk Hangzhou, at about 6:30 a.m., a CENTCOM statement said.

The Maersk Hangzhou issued a distress call as the Houthi vessels came within 20 yards and attempted to forcibly board the cargo ship, the statement said. Contractors aboard the container ship fired back at the Houthi fighters, CENTCOM said.

U.S. helicopters flew to the cargo ship's aid and issued verbal warnings to the Houthi boats, which then opened fire on the helicopters, the statement said. The U.S. helicopters returned fire, sinking three boats and killing their crews, CENTCOM said.

The fourth boat fled the area, according to the statement. The helicopters are from the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and the destroyer USS Gravely. Military officials said there was no damage to the aircraft or their crew.

The incident occurred northwest of Al Hudaydah, Yemen,

the official account for United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations said Sunday morning in a post on X, formerly Twitter. The post said the organization also received reports of an attack by small boats on a merchant vessel, with U.S. warships responding.

The Houthis said 10 members of their naval forces were killed in the incident, via a statement on X.

The fight on Sunday was the second incident in the past 24 hours involving the cargo ship. USS Gravely shot down two missiles fired from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen after responding with the destroyer USS Laboon to an assistance call at 8:30 a.m. Saturday from the Maersk Hangzhou.

The Maersk Hangzhou had reported being struck by a missile in what the U.S. military said was the 23rd attack on shipping by Houthi militants since Nov. 19.

take several more months. At the same time, Israeli officials have increasingly warned in recent days of stepped-up action against Hezbollah unless its cross-border fire stops. Netanyahu and other Israeli officials have repeatedly threatened to kill Hamas leaders wherever they are. The group's Oct. 7 attack from Gaza on southern Israel killed around 1,200 people, and some 240 others were taken hostage.

Israel claims to have killed a number of mid-level Hamas leaders in Gaza, but this would be the first time it has reached into another country to target the upper leaders.

## Apparent Israeli strike kills Hamas leader in Beirut

*Associated Press*

TEL AVIV, Israel — An apparent Israeli strike in the Lebanese capital of Beirut killed Hamas' second-highest ranking political leader Tuesday, marking a potential escalation of Israel's war against the militant group and heightening the risk of a wider Middle East conflict.

Saleh Arouri, who was the most senior Hamas figure killed since the war with Israel began, was also a founder of the group's military wing. His death could provoke major retaliation by Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah militia.

The strike hit an apartment in a building in a Shiite district of Bei-

rut that is a Hezbollah stronghold, and Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has vowed to strike back against any Israeli targeting of Palestinian officials in Lebanon.

Hezbollah and the Israeli military have been exchanging fire almost daily over the Israeli-Lebanese border since Israel's military campaign in Gaza began nearly three months ago. But so far the Lebanese group has appeared reluctant to dramatically escalate the fighting. A significant response now could send the conflict spiraling into all-out war on Israel's northern border.

Israeli officials declined to

comment. Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said the strike was carried out by an Israeli drone.

The killing comes ahead of a visit to the region by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, even as the United States has tried to prevent a spread of the conflict, repeatedly warning Hezbollah — and its regional supporter, Iran — not to escalate the violence.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead with the assault in Gaza until Hamas is crushed and the more than 100 hostages still held by the militant group in Gaza are freed, which he has said could

# USAF officer to vie for Miss America

By JENNIFER H. SVAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

Madison Marsh was shooting for the stars four years ago when she entered the Air Force Academy, as a cadet with a pilot's license and the dream of becoming an astronaut.

These days, Marsh is a second lieutenant pursuing graduate studies in public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School through a special Air Force partnership program. Oh, and she's also a Miss America contestant.

After being named Miss Colorado in May on her third try, she became the first active-duty officer to vie for the Miss America crown, an Air Force Academy spokesman said. The competition will be held Jan. 6-14 at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla.

"I feel it's good nerves," she said. "I'm very excited. We've never had a member of the armed forces win before. I just think it's a tremendous opportunity."

As Miss Colorado, Marsh, 22, enjoys talking with young girls about military service and being a pilot, she said. It was during her first year of undergraduate school that Marsh followed in her cousin's footsteps and decided to compete in pageants.

Cadets struggle to find their identity in a new and challenging environment, she said, and she saw it as a chance to pursue an extracurricular activity that emphasized community service and public speaking.

Through the process, she became equally comfortable in a flight suit or a glittery gown.

While juggling her coursework in physics and astronomy, Marsh prepared for competition by practicing mock interviews

and honing her pageant walk and "talent."

She can't sing or dance, but a new option allows contestants to do a monologue.

Marsh created one about her first solo flight, at age 16. For 90 seconds, she goes through what it's like in the cockpit, from making radio calls to landing the plane, and talks about how the experience strengthened her leadership skills.

Pageant contestants must also use their platform to promote a community service project. Marsh is advocating for an issue that hits home: pancreatic cancer research and education.

On Nov. 1, 2018, a day after Marsh found out she would attend the academy, her mother, Whitney, died of the disease at the age of 41, just 10 months after her diagnosis.

A high school senior in Fort Smith, Ark., at the time, Marsh didn't feel like doing much of anything in the weeks following her mother's death.

"I think I was sitting in the sauna when I started to have this idea: I need to use this bad energy and experience and try to turn it into something positive or I'm going to go crazy," she said. "And so I ended up doing a run."

Whitney Marsh was an avid runner. Even during chemotherapy, she would run 10 miles daily, her daughter said.

In 2019, the family started the Whitney Marsh Foundation to raise money and awareness, with the ultimate goal of finding a cure.

The foundation also seeks to provide opportunities for early detection and screening for the disease, which was misdiagnosed for two years in Whitney Marsh's case.

# 1st rabbi in decades takes post at US base in Japan

By ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Chaplain (Lt. j.g.) Alex Hamilton arrived last year at the home of the U.S. 7th Fleet to revitalize a community that's been without a leader for 33 years.

Less than two months later, war broke out in October between Israel and its longtime foe, Hamas.

Judaism, Hamilton said, is both a religion and a culture, and armed conflict involving Israel can affect everyone in the Jewish community.

Newly commissioned and fresh from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, Hamilton on his first assignment discovered that at least one member of his congregation at Yokosuka Naval Base has family in harm's way.

"One of my congregants is from Israel and she's definitely losing people and has family

members — nieces and nephews — that are also engaged in combat zones," Hamilton said.

"Watching that happen is very, very hard; watching people that you love and care about go through combat is very, very hard and challenging — emotionally and spiritually," he said.

Hamilton, of Oklahoma City, arrived at Yokosuka on Aug. 25, weeks ahead of major Jewish holidays between September and October, including Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

Hamilton's arrival has enlivened the Jewish community, according to Kourtney Metcalf-Ray, a military spouse and community coordinator that works closely with Hamilton.

"I feel like a whole person again," she said. "Half of myself wasn't able to be me without a Jewish community."

# USS Ford going home after extended Middle East trip

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — After months of extra duty at sea, the USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier strike group will be heading home, the Navy announced Monday.

The Ford and its accompanying warships will be replaced by the amphibious assault ship the USS Bataan and its accompanying warships, the USS Mesa Verde and the USS Carter Hall. The three vessels had been in the Red Sea and have been transiting toward the Eastern Mediterranean over the last few days.

The Ford will sail for home "in the coming days," the U.S.

6th Fleet, the European-based U.S. naval command that's responsible for ships sailing in the Mediterranean, said in a statement.

The Ford was sent to the Eastern Mediterranean to be within striking distance of Israel since the day after Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks.

The carrier stayed in the Eastern Mediterranean while its accompanying warships had sailed into the Red Sea, where they repeatedly intercepted incoming ballistic missiles and attack drones fired from Houthi-controlled Yemen. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visited the Ford last month.

# Russian missiles hit Ukraine's 2 biggest cities

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's two largest cities came under attack Tuesday from Russian missiles that killed five people and injured more than 100, officials said, as the war approached its two-year mark and the Kremlin stepped up its winter bombardment of urban areas.

The Ukrainian Interior Ministry said Tuesday evening that the attack killed five civilians and injured 127 as air defenses downed Russian Kinzhal missiles that can fly at 10 times the speed of sound. The Kremlin's forces targeted Kyiv, the capital, and the northeastern Kharkiv region whose provincial capital is also called Kharkiv, authorities said.

There was some confusion over the death toll as Kharkiv Gov. Oleh Syniehubov initially reported one death there, but later said the injured woman thought to

have been killed was in a coma. He said 52 people were wounded in Kharkiv.

Air defenses shot down all 10 of the hypersonic missiles, out of about 100 of various types that were launched, Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi claimed. It was the most Kinzhals used by Russia in one attack since the start of the war, air force spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat said.

The barrage extended Russian attacks that began Friday with its largest single assault on Ukraine since the war started, as fighting along the 620-mile front line has subsided into grinding attrition amid winter. At least 41 civilians have been killed since the week-end.

At a nine-story Kyiv apartment building where two people were killed, 48-year-old Inna Luhina was getting ready for work when

a blast shattered her windows and she and other family members, including her 80-year-old mother, were struck by flying glass.

More than 100 survivors gathered at a school set up as a temporary shelter.

Iryna Dzyhil, a 55-year-old resident of the same building, said the explosion threw her and her husband from their chairs, and a subsequent fire trapped them on the top floor until emergency crews rescued them via the roof.

"They say they're hitting military targets, but they're hitting people, killing our children and our loved ones," Dzyhil said of the Russians.

Russia fired almost 100 missiles of various types in the attacks, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on X, formerly Twitter. He claimed at least 70 were shot down, almost all of them in the Kyiv area, noting that West-

ern-supplied air defense systems had saved hundreds of lives.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it had launched missile and drone strikes on military industrial facilities in and around Kyiv. Depots storing missiles and munitions supplied by the West also were targeted, it said.

"The goal of the strike has been achieved, all the targets have been hit," it said without elaborating.

It was not possible to independently verify either side's claims.

Zelenskyy said that since Sunday, Russian forces have launched about 170 Shahed drones and dozens of missiles, with most aimed at civilian areas.

The Kh-47M2 Kinzhal is an air-launched hypersonic ballistic missile. Russian forces rarely use such expensive missiles against Ukraine, due to their limited stocks.

## N. Korea's Kim scraps plans to unify peninsula, blames South

By DAVID CHOI  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea will scrap its efforts to reunify the Korean Peninsula due to South Korea's "collusion with foreign forces," the country's state-run news agency reported Sunday.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un during the five-day, end-of-year ruling party plenary meeting in Pyongyang last week made a "decisive policy change" toward South Korea, according to a Korean Central News Agency report published Sunday. Kim said Pyongyang will abandon its efforts to reunify the peninsula because of Seoul's insistence on the "collapse of the [North Korean] regime" and "absorbing" the North, KCNA reported.

North Korean media frequently claim that efforts to peacefully reunite the peninsula following the 1950-53 Korean War is stymied by U.S.-South Korean mili-

tary drills and economic sanctions.

"It is not suitable to ... [North Korea] to discuss the issue of reunification with the strange clan, who is no more than a colonial stooge of the [United States]," the report said.

North Korea's Foreign Affairs Minister Choe Son-hui met with government officials Monday to "abolish and readjust organizations" relating to South Korean affairs, according to a news release from the ministry that day.

South Korea's Ministry of Unification, the government agency tasked with promoting inter-Korean dialogue and reunification of the peninsula, said it "strongly condemns" Kim's remarks, according to an emailed statement Monday. Seoul will continue to "overwhelmingly suppress North Korea's threats" with the U.S. and "pursue the normalization of inter-Korean relations," the ministry said.

## 5 killed when planes collide on runway at Tokyo airport

*Associated Press*

TOKYO — A passenger plane collided with a Japanese coast guard aircraft and burst into flames on the runway of Tokyo's Haneda Airport on Tuesday, officials said.

All 379 people on Japan Airlines flight JAL-516 from Shin Chitose airport near Sapporo got out safely before the A350 was engulfed in flames, Transport Minister Tetsuo Saito confirmed. The pilot of the coast guard plane escaped but the five crew members died, Saito said.

Local TV video showed a large eruption of fire and smoke from the side of the Japan Airlines plane as it taxied on a runway. The area around the wing then caught fire. Footage an hour later showed the plane fully on fire.

Shigenori Hiraoka, head of the Transport Ministry Civil Aviation Bureau, said the collision occurred when the JAL plane land-

ed on one of Haneda's four runways where the coast guard aircraft was preparing to take off.

Coast guard spokesperson Yoshinori Yanagishima said its Bombardier Dash-8 plane, based at Haneda, had been due to head to Niigata to deliver relief goods to residents affected by a deadly earthquake on Monday.

Swede Anton Deibe, 17, who was a passenger on the Japan Airlines plane, told Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet that "the entire cabin was filled with smoke within a few minutes. We threw ourselves down on the floor. Then the emergency doors were opened and we threw ourselves at them.

"The smoke in the cabin stung like hell. It was a hell. We have no idea where we are going so we just run out into the field. It was chaos," added Deibe, who was traveling with his parents and sister.



# Mayor: Migrant buses skirt NYC rule, stop in NJ

Associated Press

SECAUCUS, N.J. — A New Jersey mayor says buses of migrants bound for New York City have been stopping at the train station in his town and others in an apparent effort to evade an executive order by New York's mayor trying to regulate how and when migrants can be dropped off in the city.

Secaucus Mayor Michael Gonnelli said Sunday that Secaucus police and town officials had been told by Hudson County officials about the arrival of buses at the train station in Secaucus Junction beginning Saturday. He said four buses were believed to have arrived and dropped off migrants who then took trains into New York City.

Gonnelli said the executive order signed recently by Mayor Eric Adams of New York requires bus operators to provide at least 32 hours' advance notice of arrivals and to limit the hours of drop-off times.

"It seems quite clear the bus operators are finding a way to thwart the requirements of the executive order by dropping

migrants at the train station in Secaucus and having them continue to their final destination," Gonnelli said in a statement. He suggested that the order may be "too stringent" and is resulting in "unexpected consequences."

Gonnelli called the tactic a "loophole" bus operators have found to allow migrants to reach New York City, and added that state police have reported that "this is now happening at train stations throughout the state." Gonnelli vowed to work with state and county officials and to "continue to monitor this situation closely."

A message posted on a social media account for Jersey City said the city's emergency management agency reports that "approximately 10 buses from various locations in Texas and one from Louisiana have arrived at various transit stations throughout the state, including Secaucus, Fanwood, Edison, Trenton." About 397 migrants had arrived at those locations since Saturday, the post Sunday said.

"This is clearly going to be a

statewide conversation so it is important that we wait for some guidance from the governor here on next steps" as buses continue, the post said.

Tyler Jones, a spokesperson for New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, told lehighvalleylive.com that New Jersey is being used as a transit point for migrants, almost all of whom continued on to New York City. Jones said New Jersey officials are "closely coordinating with federal and local officials, including our colleagues across the Hudson."

In New York City, a spokesperson for City Hall said Monday that the city had "led the nation in responding to this national humanitarian crisis, providing compassion, care, shelter, and vital services to more than 161,000 migrants" since spring 2022. The spokesperson characterized the executive order as "part of that effort, ensuring the safety and well-being of both migrants and city staff."

The Texas governor, the spokesperson said, was treating asylum seekers "like political pawns."

# Firearms law takes effect as fight evolves

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A California law that bans people from carrying firearms in most public places took effect on New Year's Day, even as a court case continues to challenge the law.

A U.S. district judge issued a ruling Dec. 20 to block the law from taking effect, saying it violates the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and deprives people of their ability to defend themselves and their loved ones.

But on Saturday, a federal appeals court put a temporary hold on the district judge's ruling. The appeals court decision allows the law to go into effect as the legal fight continues. Attorneys are scheduled to file arguments to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in January and in February.

The law, signed by Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, prohibits people from carrying concealed guns in 26 places including public parks and playgrounds, churches, banks and zoos.

The ban applies regardless of whether the person has a permit to carry a concealed weapon. One exception is for privately owned businesses that put up signs saying people are allowed to bring guns on their premises.

"This ruling will allow our common-sense gun laws to remain in place while we appeal the district court's dangerous ruling," Newsom posted to X, formerly Twitter, after the appeals court acted Saturday. "Californians overwhelmingly support efforts to ensure that places like hospitals, libraries and children's playgrounds remain safe and free from guns."

# \$842 million Powerball ticket sold in Michigan for 1st New Year's Day win

Associated Press

JOHNSTON, Iowa — Someone in Michigan has won an \$842.4 million Powerball jackpot on the first day of 2024, the first time it has been won on New Year's Day since the game's start in 1992.

The winning numbers drawn were: 12, 21, 42, 44, 49 and red Powerball: 1.

Final ticket sales pushed the jackpot beyond its earlier estimate of \$810 million to

\$842.4 million at the time of the drawing, making it the fifth-largest Powerball jackpot and 10th-largest U.S. lottery jackpot ever won.

Before the big win on New Year's, the jackpot had been growing since mid-October.

The chance of winning the Powerball jackpot is 1 in 292.2 million.

The lucky ticket holder will have the choice between an annuitized prize of \$842.4 million, payable over 30

years, or a lump sum payment of \$425.2 million.

Both prize options are before taxes.

Other top-winning tickets include four sold in California, Connecticut, Florida and Maryland, that matched all five white balls to win \$1 million prizes. Two tickets, from Florida and Texas, matched all five white balls and won \$2 million prizes by including the Power Play option for an additional \$1 per play.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Redrawn congressional, legislative districts OK'd**

**GA** ATLANTA — A federal judge accepted new Georgia congressional and legislative voting districts that protect Republican partisan advantages, saying the creation of new majority-Black voting districts solved the illegal minority vote dilution that led him to order maps to be redrawn.

U.S. District Judge Steve Jones, in three separate but similarly worded orders, rejected claims that the new maps didn't do enough to help Black voters. Jones said he couldn't interfere with legislative choices, even if Republicans moved to protect their power.

The maps were redrawn in a recent special legislative session after Jones in October ruled that a prior set of maps illegally harmed Black voters.

The approval of the maps sets the stage for them to be used in 2024 elections. They're likely to reproduce the current 9-5 Republican majority among Georgia's 14 congressional seats, while retaining GOP majorities in the state Senate and House.

The maps added Black-majority districts that Jones ordered, including one in Congress, two in the state Senate and five in the state House.

**School board to reinstate Black history classes**

**MO** ST. LOUIS — Students at a suburban St. Louis school district can continue to take elective Black history courses, school leaders announced in a reversal of a vote by the conservative-led

school board to end the classes.

But the Francis Howell School District board first must approve a new curriculum "that is rigorous and largely politically neutral," the board president and superintendent said in a statement to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

The Francis Howell School District board voted 5-2 to stop offering Black History and Black Literature courses that had been offered at the district's three high schools since 2021. A little over 100 students took the courses this semester in the predominantly white suburban area of St. Louis.

**Slaying suspect flees, guns down bystander**

**NV** LAS VEGAS — A man who authorities say fatally shot his mother two days after Christmas led police officers on a chase through the suburbs of Las Vegas and, along the way, stole a police vehicle and carjacked bystanders at gunpoint, shooting and killing one of them.

The victim killed in what Las Vegas police say was the final carjacking was 39-year-old Jerry Lopez, a married father of seven children between the ages of 3 and 11.

According to police, the deadly crime spree began before dawn on Dec. 27, when Justin Davidson, 36, shot his mother near his childhood home in southeastern Las Vegas. When officers arrived to investigate that shooting, they heard more gunfire and took cover.

At the same time, police said, the suspect stole an unoccupied patrol car and fled toward the

southwestern edge of the city.

About 8 miles west of his parents' home, police said, the suspect abandoned the patrol car and carjacked two more bystanders before crossing paths with Lopez.

At a news conference Friday, Clark County Assistant Sheriff Yasenya Yatomi provided photos of evidence collected by investigators that suggests Davidson could have been planning for a large-scale attack.

**Regulations to reuse fracking wastewater eyed**

**NM** SANTA FE — New Mexico environmental officials have proposed a new regulatory framework for reusing wastewater with a focus on the used, salty byproducts of oil and natural gas drilling in a major U.S. production zone.

The Environment Department announced its petition to the Water Quality Control Commission to begin deliberations on the proposed rules.

New Mexico is looking to its energy sector and water-intensive fracking as a potential source of treated water for industrial applications — and to offset water demands that are depleting freshwater aquifers amid drought.

**\$4.9M bid for campus of a bankrupt university**

**WV** CHARLESTON — A federal bankruptcy court in West Virginia has set a hearing for this month on the potential sale of a defunct private university's campus.

A court-appointed trustee filed a motion to sell the former Alderson Broaddus Universi-

ty's land, furnishings, equipment and supplies in Philippi to DACK Investments LLC for \$4.9 million.

If any competing bid is submitted by Jan. 26, an auction will be held.

Otherwise, the court will conduct a Jan. 31 hearing to approve the sale.

**Court asked to weigh redistricting ruling**

**WI** MADISON — Republican lawmakers have asked the Wisconsin Supreme Court to stay and reconsider its finding that the state's legislative district boundaries are unconstitutional.

Attorneys representing a host of Republican state senators filed a motion with the court saying they can't meet the court's Jan. 12 deadline for new maps.

They also argue the court didn't listen to their arguments in the case and didn't give them a chance to respond to the deadline for new boundaries.

They asked the court to stay all proceedings until it decides on the motion.

The legislative electoral maps drawn by the Republican-controlled Legislature in 2011 cemented the party's majorities, which now stand at 64-35 in the Assembly and a 22-11 supermajority in the Senate.

Democrats filed a lawsuit in August arguing the maps are unconstitutional and give the GOP an unfair advantage.

They filed the action a day after liberal Justice Janet Protasiewicz was sworn in, flipping the court's majority to 4-3 liberal control.

— From wire reports



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**Reporting World, National and Military News**

# Washington tops Texas to get in CFP title game

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — The remarkable comeback story of Michael Penix Jr. is a victory away from a perfect ending for Washington.

Penix passed for 430 yards and two touchdowns, and the Huskies held off Texas 37-31 in the Sugar Bowl on Monday night to advance to the College Football Playoff title game, earning both the sixth-year quarterback with two surgically repaired knees and the beleaguered Pac-12 a chance to go out a champion.

The second-ranked Huskies (14-0) will face No. 1 Michigan next Monday night in Houston with a 21-game winning streak, looking for their first national championship since 1991 and the Pac-12's first since Southern California in 2004.

Washington is one of 10 schools fleeing the Pac-12 for other Power Five conferences next season, with the Huskies headed to join Michigan in the

Big Ten. The conference is not going away, but its days as a potential football power are likely done.

But first, the final season of the four-team playoff before expansion to 12 in 2024 comes down to a Pac-12-Big Ten matchup, just like the first when Ohio State beat Oregon.

"Huskie Nation stand up," Penix told the UW crowd in the postgame trophy ceremony. "We goin' to the natty!"

No. 3 Texas (12-2) had four shots at the end zone after getting to the Washington 12 with 15 seconds left, but Quinn Ewers missed on the last three passes. The final throw was a fade to Adonai Mitchell that was knocked away by Washington's Elijah Jackson.

"Those guys are the most resilient guys I have ever been around," Washington coach Kalen DeBoer said.

In Texas' first CFP appearance and final football game as a member of the Big 12 before it goes to the Southeastern

Conference, Ewers passed for 318 yards and a touchdown. But it wasn't enough against Penix and his array of talented receivers.

"They were a second away from playing for a national championship," Texas coach Steve Sarkisian said. "They should be proud of themselves. Penix got hot and (Washington) made some big plays down the field."

Penix spent his first four college seasons at Indiana, suffering three season-ending injuries, one to each knee and one to his throwing shoulder.

When DeBoer, his former offensive coordinator at Indiana, took over at Washington, Penix didn't think twice before moving to Seattle, and then decided to take advantage of an extra year of eligibility and returned for a second year.

"He's been on a mission since he chose to come back, and a lot of the other guys followed his lead," DeBoer said.

The left-hander stayed

healthy and blossomed into a star, the Heisman Trophy runner-up this year, and now has a chance to win a national championship after another brilliant performance.

"It was the tough times. I feel like everything I've been through built me for this," Penix said.

Penix went 29-for-38 with no turnovers. He completed 12 straight at one point, the longest on-target streak in the CFP's 10-year history.

And he did it attacking down field as usual. He completed six passes of at least 20 yards, connecting with Rome Odunze six times for 125 yards and Ja'Lynn Polk five times for 122.

The Huskies' last 10 victories have all been decided by 10 points or fewer. The close games have brought doubters.

"We're always disrespected, always made the underdogs," said defensive end Bralen Trice, another upperclassman who returned this season to make a title run.

## Michigan outlasts Alabama in overtime to win semifinal

Associated Press

PASADENA, Calif. — Jalen Milroe caught a low snap on fourth down in overtime at the Rose Bowl and ran straight ahead into a wall of blue and maize.

That wall of Michigan defenders had been hardened by the Wolverines' violent practice drills. Toughened by two previous College Football Playoff losses. Made impenetrable by months of turmoil that battered the program and its beloved head coach, Jim Harbaugh.

Alabama's quarterback went nowhere.

The Wolverines are going to Houston.

Blake Corum rushed for a 17-yard touchdown on the second snap of overtime, and top-seeded Michigan advanced to its first CFP championship game with a 27-20 victory over fourth-seeded Alabama in the Rose Bowl on Monday night.

Harbaugh's Wolverines (14-0) will play for their school's first national title since 1997 against Washington on Jan. 8 — but only after a fourth-quarter comeback and a

hair-raising finish when the two winningest programs in college football history played just the second overtime game in the 110 editions of the Granddaddy of Them All.

"Glorious. That was glorious," Harbaugh said. "It was a tremendous football game."

Roman Wilson made a 4-yard TD catch with 1:34 left in regulation for the Wolverines, who hadn't scored in the second half until that gritty 75-yard drive led by J.J. McCarthy.

Corum, who caught an early TD pass and rushed for 83 yards, needed only two snaps to score in the first overtime period, breaking tackles and spinning wildly into the end zone.

After Milroe was stopped 2 yards short of the end zone on the final snap, the Wolverines' entire sideline sprinted onto the field, throwing a few helmets in the air while fireworks soared from behind the Rose Bowl scoreboard.

"Everything that we went through this entire year made us unbreakable, and in the biggest moments, we were going to show up," said McCarthy, who passed for 221 yards and three touchdowns to win the Offensive Player of the Game award.

Jase McClellan rushed for 87 yards and two touchdowns for Alabama (12-2), which fell heartbreakingly short of the chance to play for Nick Saban's seventh national title at the school. The Tide led 20-13 on Will Reichard's 52-yard field goal with 4:41 to play, but their defense couldn't preserve it.

"We just didn't finish the last four minutes of the game like we would like to, and we're all very disappointed," Saban said. "But one thing I told them in the locker room, this is one of the most amazing seasons in Alabama football history in terms of where this team came from and what they were able to accomplish."

Milroe passed for 116 yards and rushed for 63 for the Tide, whose 11-game winning streak ended.



# Pistons fall again following losing streak

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Two nights after their NBA record-tying 28-game losing streak ended, the Detroit Pistons were blown out 136-113 on Monday night by the Houston Rockets, who got 26 points and nine assists from Alperen Sengun and 22 points from Jalen Green.

Detroit (3-30), which beat Toronto 129-127 on Saturday, failed to win consecutive games for the second time this season.

Pistons coach Monty Williams said he had thought about how his team would respond after the win.

“I thought about it the last day,” Williams said. “When you’re fighting for a win like we were for so long and you get one, I’m sure there’s emotional stuff that I can’t explain, but when you’re in our situation, you got to recover quickly.”

Green and Sengun combined to score 37 points in the third quarter as the Rockets outscored the Pistons 47-25 in the period to take a 106-80 lead into

the fourth.

“It wasn’t the best feeling going in at halftime up four when we felt like we played well enough to be up double digits,” Houston coach Ime Udoka said. “Gave a few leads up, but came out with the right mindset, focused and had a big quarter. (We) kind of put it away there.”

Sengun shot 9-for-13 from the field and Green made five 3-pointers as the Rockets snapped a three-game skid.

**Pacers 122, Bucks 113:** Tyrese Haliburton had 26 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds, and Indiana snapped Milwaukee’s 15-game home winning streak.

Benedict Mathurin added 25 points and a career-high 13 rebounds for the Pacers.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 30 points, 18 rebounds and 11 assists for his 38th career triple-double, and third this season.

**Raptors 124, Cavaliers 121:** Pascal Siakam scored 36 points, Jakob Poeltl had 14

points and 11 rebounds and new-look Toronto recovered after squandering a 19-point lead to beat visiting Cleveland.

RJ Barrett had 19 points and nine rebounds and Immanuel Quickley added 14 in the players’ first start for the Raptors. Barrett and Quickley were acquired from the Knicks on Saturday.

**Clippers 121, Heat 104:** Kawhi Leonard scored 24 points in his return from injury, Paul George added 23 and host Los Angeles got its third straight win.

The Clippers opened the new year where they left off after going 11-2 in December for the West’s best record during the month. Norman Powell added 22 points off the bench and James Harden had 15 points and 10 assists.

**Nuggets 111, Hornets 93:** Jamal Murray scored 25 points and Michael Porter Jr. added 22 as host Denver handed short-handed Charlotte its 11th straight loss.

Nikola Jokic had 13 points, 11

rebounds and six assists for the Nuggets. Two of the Hornets’ losses during the streak have come against the Nuggets in the last 1½ weeks.

**Suns 109, Trail Blazers 88:** Bradley Beal scored 21 points and host Phoenix beat Portland for its fourth straight win.

Phoenix star Devin Booker was held to 10 points on 4-for-16 shooting, but contributed eight rebounds and six assists.

**Knicks 112, Timberwolves 106:** Julius Randle scored 39 points, OG Anunoby had 17 in a strong debut with his new team and host New York beat Minnesota.

Jalen Brunson added 16 points and a career-high 14 assists for the Knicks, who snapped a three-game losing streak after putting Anunoby into the starting lineup.

**Jazz 127, Mavericks 90:** Jordan Clarkson came off the bench to get 20 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds for the franchise’s first regular-season triple-double since 2008, leading host Utah past Dallas.

# Record-setting Nix, Oregon whip Liberty in Fiesta Bowl

Associated Press

GLENDALE, Ariz. — Oregon’s expectations for a national championship in its final Pac-12 season fell six points short.

Behind a record-setting quarterback, the Ducks will head east to the Big Ten with a big trophy in tow.

Bo Nix threw for 363 yards and five touchdowns to cap a stellar career, and No. 8 Oregon closed out its Pac-12 era by rolling over No. 18 Liberty 45-6 in the Fiesta Bowl on Monday.

“Really, this game is about unfinished business and we said we’re wrapping up the last chapter of our book,” Oregon coach Dan Lanning said. “I thought our guys were a phenomenal chapter.”

Nix played like a Heisman

Trophy finalist after opting to join his teammates on the field one last time, throwing for 257 yards and four touchdowns as the Ducks built a 31-6 halftime lead. Nix finished 28-for-35 in just over three quarters and completed 77.44% of his passes this season, breaking the NCAA record of 77.36%, set by Alabama’s Mac Jones in 2020.

Tez Johnson had 11 catches for 172 yards and a touchdown, part of a 584-yard afternoon by the Ducks (12-2).

Considered a national title contender at the start of the season, Oregon missed the College Football Playoff with a pair of three-point losses to No. 2 Washington.

Liberty (13-1) overcame the death of freshman offensive

lineman Tajh Boyd early in camp with the best season in the program’s short FBS history.

Liberty got off to a fast start in its first New Year’s Six bowl, moving 75 yards in six plays in an opening drive capped by Keidon Salter’s 17-yard touchdown pass to Bentley Hanshaw.

The Flames ran into waves of Ducks after that.

## Citrus Bowl

**No. 25 Tennessee 35, No. 20 Iowa 0:** At Orlando, Fla., freshman quarterback Nico Iamaleava ran for three touchdowns and threw for one in his first career start, and the Volunteers shut down the Hawkeyes’ Division I-worst offense in the largest shutout in Citrus Bowl history.

Iamaleava, a prized recruit for Tennessee, stepped in for senior Joe Milton, who opted out of the game to prepare for the NFL Draft. The 19-year-old threw for 151 yards, and his 27 rushing yards included three scores.

## ReliaQuest Bowl

**No. 13 LSU 35, Wisconsin 31:** At Tampa, Fla., Garrett Nussmeier threw for 395 yards and three touchdowns, helping the Tigers launch their post-Jayden Daniels era with a come-from-behind victory over the Badgers.

Making his first college start after Daniels, the 2023 Heisman Trophy winner, opted out to begin preparing for the NFL Draft, Nussmeier completed 31 of 45 passes and tossed 3 TD passes.

# Daccord, Kraken blank Golden Knights

Associated Press

SEATTLE — As the last one on the ice, Joey Daccord skated in a circle with his goalie stick in the air and the home fans chanting his name in unison.

The reaction from the crowd was deserved after the young Seattle Kraken goaltender shut out the defending Stanley Cup champions on one of the NHL's biggest stages.

"It's truly the coolest thing in the world to have that support from them," Daccord said.

Daccord made 35 saves in his second career shutout, Eeli Tolvanen had a goal and an assist, and the Kraken beat the Vegas Golden Knights 3-0 on Monday in the Winter Classic.

A crowd of 47,313 at T-Mobile Park watched the Kraken dominate the reigning Stanley Cup champions in a matchup of the league's last two expansion franchises. Seattle improved to 7-0-2 in its past nine games and continued its climb into playoff contention after a

disappointing start.

"To have the opportunity to do this in this ballpark, in front of our home fans, get the result that everybody wanted makes it pretty special and that's the best way to remember this event," Seattle coach Dave Hakstol said.

Tolvanen scored his 10th of the season, redirecting Vince Dunn's shot from the blue line early in the first period. Tolvanen picked up the assist on Will Borgen's slap shot that beat Vegas goalie Logan Thompson early in the second.

Yanni Gourde gave Seattle a 3-0 lead 2:10 into the third on an effort play, stealing the puck from Paul Cotter at the blue line and poking it into the net after Thompson whiffed trying to sweep the puck aside.

But the biggest development for Seattle in this game and for the past few weeks has been Daccord, who seems to be establishing himself as Seattle's No. 1 option in net.

"You always talk about goa-

lies and what a really good goalie is and the best way to describe it is he saves the ones he needs to and then he saves one or two more that he shouldn't save. And that's what he's done for us basically every game," Seattle center Matty Beniers said.

Daccord posted the first shutout in a Winter Classic and fifth shutout overall in the NHL's 39 outdoor games since 2003. The Kraken are 6-0-2 in Daccord's past eight starts, and he posted his second shutout in the last three weeks after blanking Florida on Dec. 12.

Daccord made the easy saves look easy and stood strong when the Golden Knights threatened. Jack Eichel had a great opportunity late in the first period off a turnover by Brian Dumoulin, but Daccord made a solid save with his left pad.

Mark Stone hit the post with a redirected shot late in the second. Eichel hit the crossbar with seven minutes left and a

few minutes later was robbed on a glove save by Daccord.

Since he didn't get a chance at shooting toward the empty Vegas net in the closing seconds, the glove save was the moment that stood out the most for Daccord.

Played in almost perfect conditions with party cloudy skies, temperatures in the 40s and most importantly the retractable roof of T-Mobile Park wide open, the Kraken rewarded a sellout crowd with one of their more complete performances of the season.

After Tolvanen put Seattle in front, Borgen made it 2-0 with his first goal since Game 4 of last season's first-round playoff series against Colorado.

Seattle's nine-game point streak is the longest in franchise history, topping an eight-game winning streak last season.

Vegas lost for the fifth time in six games and struggled to generate many good scoring chances against Seattle.

## Abmas, No. 20 Texas pull away from UT Arlington

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Max Abmas had 18 points and seven assists, Kadin Shedrick scored 17 and No. 20 Texas defeated UT Arlington 79-62 on Monday.

Abmas, a senior who transferred to Texas from Oral Roberts this season, passed former Duke All-American J.J. Redick for 21st place on the NCAA career scoring list with 2,785 points.

Kade Douglas led UT Arlington (6-7) with 17 points, including five 3-point baskets. Makail Williams scored 12, and Phillip Russell added 11.

Tyrese Hunter missed the game for Texas (11-2) with a fever. Hunter had perhaps his best game of the season against UNC Greensboro on Friday, with 23

points, six rebounds and seven assists against one turnover.

Ithiel Horton replaced Hunter in Texas' starting lineup and took advantage, with 13 points and a career-high 10 rebounds for his first double-double.

Horton played 36 minutes, 16 more than his average, hitting 3 of 7 3-pointers. He went 2-for-13 from behind the arc in his previous five games.

"I thought I was that guy that would just come in off the bench and be a gunner, but sometimes I gotta play longer just to establish a rhythm, and that's all right," Horton said. "When I get my opportunities, I'm gonna step in and show what I could do."

Brock Cunningham matched his career best with 11 rebounds for Texas and had a career-high

three blocks. Shedrick had seven rebounds.

Twelve of the Mavericks' 23 baskets were 3-pointers. They attempted 27.

UT Arlington, which shot 3-pointers with 32.5% accuracy before Monday, hit 7 of 14 in the first half to keep the game close. Douglas made three of them. UT Arlington trailed 39-32 at the break.

"We can't fall asleep on defense and lose the shooters and give up open 3s," Shedrick said. "I felt like we were there on a few of the 3s and they still made them."

### Big picture

**UT Arlington:** Newcomer Russell could provide an offensive spark as the the Mavs begin

Western Athletic Conference play. Russell has been eligible for four games since transferring from Southwest Missouri. He averaged 18 points there last season, making 82 3-pointers. Russell averages 16 a game for UT Arlington so far.

**Texas:** How good are the Longhorns? Is Texas a contender in the Big 12? Hard to tell. It begins Big 12 competition without a marquee win. Texas faced two AP Top 25 teams, losing handily to UConn in New York and at Marquette. The Longhorns beat Power Five teams LSU and Louisville. Texas faced UConn and Marquette without 6-foot-9 Dylan Disu, who has appeared in four games since returning from offseason foot surgery, averaging 11.5 points a game.