

## Hezbollah leader vows retaliation on Israel

*Associated Press*

BEIRUT — The leader of the Lebanese militia Hezbollah said Friday that his group must retaliate after a presumed Israeli strike hit a Beirut neighborhood this week, killing a senior Hamas official, or else all of Lebanon would be vulnerable to Israeli attack.

Hassan Nasrallah appeared to be making the case for a response to the Lebanese public, even at the risk of escalating the fighting between Hezbollah and Israel. But he gave no indication of how or when the militants would act.

The strike that killed Hamas' deputy political leader, Saleh Arouri, threatened months of efforts by the United States to prevent the war in Gaza from spiraling into a regional conflict.

Nasrallah said it was the first strike by Israel in the Lebanese capital since 2006.

"We cannot keep silent about

a violation of this seriousness," he said, "because this means that all of our people will be exposed (to targeting). All of our cities, villages and public figures will be exposed."

The repercussions of silence are "far greater" than the risks of retaliating, he added.

Tensions are rising on multiple fronts as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrives in the region. Iraqis are furious after an American airstrike killed a militia leader in Baghdad. At the same time, the U.S. is struggling to deter attacks by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels on commercial Red Sea shipping.

In Gaza, Israel is moving to scale down its military assault in the north of the territory and pressing its heavy offensive in the south, vowing to crush Hamas. In the south, most of Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians are being squeezed into smaller areas in a humanitarian disaster,

while still being pounded by Israeli airstrikes.

Since the start of the Gaza war, Hezbollah has fired rockets and missiles into northern Israel, bringing a return bombardment from the Israeli military in near daily cross-border exchanges.

After the strike Tuesday in Beirut, the Lebanon-Israel front appeared to be at a critical juncture, with the potential to veer into an all-out war.

But Hezbollah has held back from a dramatic escalation, wary of a repeat of the two sides' 2006 war in which Israeli bombardment wreaked extensive destruction in Lebanon.

Nasrallah said Friday that the details of Hezbollah's response "will be decided on the battlefield." He did not elaborate.

The Beirut strike is not the only thing threatening a wider fight between Israel and Lebanon.

Israeli officials have threatened greater military action against Hezbollah unless it withdraws its fighters from Lebanese territory near their shared border.

A pullback — called for under a 2006 U.N. truce but never implemented — is necessary to stop barrages and allow the return of tens of thousands of Israelis to homes they evacuated near the border, Israel says.

Nasrallah boasted about the evacuations, saying that after Israel forced Lebanese to flee in past conflicts, Hezbollah had now done the same to Israelis, putting political pressure on the government.

Israel says it aims to destroy Hamas' military capabilities and remove it from power in Gaza after the militants' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, in which they killed around 1,200 people, mainly civilians, and abducted around 250 others.

## Ukraine unleashes more attacks on Russia, Crimea

*Associated Press*

Russian air defenses downed dozens of Ukrainian drones in occupied Crimea and southern Russia on Friday, officials said, as Kyiv pressed its strategy of targeting the Moscow-annexed peninsula and taking the 22-month war well beyond Ukraine's borders.

Air raid sirens wailed in Sevastopol, the largest city in Crimea, and traffic was suspended for a second day on a bridge connecting the peninsula, which Moscow seized illegally a decade ago, with Russia's southern Krasnodar region. The span is a crucial supply link for Rus-

sia's war effort.

The Russian Defense Ministry said its defenses intercepted 36 drones over Crimea and one over Krasnodar, part of an emerging pattern of intensified Ukrainian aerial attacks.

A Ukrainian Neptune anti-ship missile also was destroyed over the northwestern part of the Black Sea, the ministry said.

The developments came after three people were injured Thursday night by other Ukrainian rocket and drone attacks on the Russian border city of Belgorod and the surrounding region, said Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov.

He posted photographs on Telegram of an apartment building with some windows shattered and damaged cars. He said authorities could help those wanting to move farther from the border.

On Jan. 6, Ukrainian attacks on Belgorod killed 25 people, officials there said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pledged to hit more targets on the Crimean Peninsula and inside Russian border regions this year. The goal is to unsettle Russians as President Vladimir Putin seeks another six years in power in a March 17 election.

A Ukrainian attack on military facilities in Crimea on Thursday affected a command center and the air defense system, according to a spokesperson for Ukraine's southern joint forces, Nataliia Humeniuk.

She said the Russian military recently relocated its Crimean launch sites for Shahed drones.

Following a drone strike deep inside Russia last year, Zelenskyy said Ukraine had developed a weapon that can hit targets 400 miles away. He said last month Kyiv plans to produce 1 million drones, which have become a key battlefield weapon.

# 'Fat Leonard' back in San Diego court

*The San Diego Union-Tribune*

SAN DIEGO — Leonard Glenn Francis, the mastermind behind the worst bribery and corruption scandal in U.S. Navy history, appeared Thursday in San Diego federal court for the first time since he left house arrest and fled the country in 2022, just weeks before he was set to be sentenced.

Known as "Fat Leonard" because of his size, Francis was not charged Thursday with any new crimes related to his escape. Federal prosecutors said they may seek new charges at some point, but not until after he's sentenced in the bribery and fraud scheme. Meanwhile his longtime defense attorneys re-upped a previous request to withdraw from the case.

U.S. District Judge Janis Sammartino indicated she would allow the withdrawal despite the objection of prosecutors.

Francis, once a powerful military contractor who bribed Navy officials to do his bidding and bilked the U.S. government of at least \$35 million, had spent more than 15 months jailed in Venezuela. That's where Interpol agents captured him about two weeks after he absconded from house arrest in San Diego.

He was extradited to Miami on Dec. 20 as part of a prisoner swap that also freed 10 jailed Americans and 25 imprisoned

Venezuelans in exchange for Alex Saab, an ally of Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro.

Thursday's hearing marked the first time the Malaysian-born Francis, 59, was back in San Diego since his escape on Labor Day weekend 2022, and his first time back in a San Diego federal courtroom in several years.

Francis was first arrested in 2013 during a sting operation at a San Diego Bay hotel and pleaded guilty in 2015 in U.S. District Court in San Diego to corruption charges related to his wide-ranging scheme to bribe Navy officials and overcharge the military for ship-servicing contracts.

A gregarious presence at Navy functions and port visits across Southeast Asia, Francis would shower officers with high-end meals, luxury resort stays and the services of prostitutes. In exchange, officers would leak confidential information to Francis, such as the details of ship movements, and steer ships to ports controlled by him and his company, Glenn Defense Marine Asia.

But Francis had long avoided sentencing in the case. He spent several years as a cooperating witness for the U.S. government in the continuing investigation and prosecution of the more than 30 Navy officials ensnared in his scheme. But he was not called as a witness during the

case's lone trial in 2022 — a mild surprise, though he may have been viewed by prosecutors as a liability on the stand, especially after secretly recording a podcast while he was on house arrest.

Francis was granted pretrial release in 2018 due to his poor health — he at one point had kidney cancer, though most of his various medical issues were discussed only in sealed hearings — and eventually moved into a luxurious Carmel Valley-area rental home, complete with hired staff and private security guards that he paid and who rarely interacted with him. On Sept. 4, 2022, he cut off his GPS ankle monitor and fled to Mexico. From there he went to Cuba, then Venezuela. Officials have said he was trying to make it from South America to Russia.

Thursday's hearing largely centered around who will represent Francis moving forward. A few weeks after his escape, his defense attorneys from the firm Warren & Burstein informed Sammartino that they would seek to withdraw their representation "based on an irreparable breakdown in the attorney-client relationship."

Defense attorney Jeremy Warren confirmed in court Thursday that he and his partners, Devin Burstein and Katie Jenkins, still intended to with-

draw from the case.

"We're not in a position to advocate" for Francis, Warren told the judge, adding that he would provide details in a sealed hearing if she needed further explanation of their reasoning. Warren said the firm is loyal to its clients and it was a decision made "with a heavy heart," but that Francis is in need of counsel by those who are "fully able to advocate for him."

Francis, wearing a tan jumpsuit and a white COVID face covering, spoke only two words. "No, ma'am," he told Sammartino when she asked if he had any objections to the withdrawal of his attorneys.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Fred Sheppard objected to the withdrawal, arguing that Warren and his firm knew the case too well and had represented Francis too long to be allowed to withdraw now. He also argued that finding Francis new attorneys and getting them up to speed on the case would cause a lengthy delay.

But Sammartino, pointing out the long history of the case, which has now stretched on for more than 10 years, indicated that a delay of a few more weeks would not be an issue.

Francis is next expected in court Feb. 8, by which time Warren said Francis should have new representation.

## B-1 bomber crashes at South Dakota Air Force base

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — A B-1 Lancer bomber from Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota crashed Thursday, with all four of its crew members ejecting, the Air Force said.

The B-1 crashed "at approximately 5:50 p.m. today while at-

tempting to land on the installation. At the time of the accident, it was on a training mission. There were four aircrew on board. All four ejected safely," the 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth said in a statement.

At the time of the crash, visibility was poor with freezing tem-

peratures and low clouds, according to automated weather reporting equipment recording airfield conditions.

The B-1 is a conventional supersonic bomber that first came into service in the 1980s. It has been used to support the U.S. bomber presence in the Asia-Pa-

cific region and to conduct close air support missions in U.S. operations in Afghanistan. It does not carry nuclear weapons.

While 100 were originally built, fewer than 60 remain in service at Dyess Air Force Base in Texas and Ellsworth Air Force Base.

# Contempt charge sought for Jack Smith

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Lawyers for former President Donald Trump on Thursday pressed to have special counsel Jack Smith's team held in contempt, saying the prosecutors had taken steps to advance the 2020 election interference case against him in violation of a judge's order last month that temporarily put it on hold.

Citing "outrageous conduct," the Republican presidential

candidate's attorneys told U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan in Washington, D.C., that she should consider holding Smith and two of his prosecutors in contempt for turning over to the defense thousands of pages of evidence and an exhibit list while the case was paused and for filing a motion that they said "teems with partisan rhetoric" and "false claims."

"In this manner, the prosecutors seek to weaponize the Stay

to spread political propaganda, knowing that President Trump would not fully respond because the Court relieved him of the burdens of litigation during the Stay," the lawyers wrote. "Worse, the prosecutors have announced their intention to continue this partisan-driven misconduct indefinitely, effectively converting this Court's docket into an arm of the Biden Campaign."

A spokesman for Smith de-

clined to comment on the motion. The motion says Trump's lawyers have conferred with prosecutors, who object to the defense attorneys' request.

The contempt motion lays bare the simmering tension between prosecutors and defense lawyers in the landmark case charging Trump with scheming to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, which he lost to Democrat Joe Biden.

## Probe continues 3 years after the Jan. 6 Capitol riot

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Members of far-right extremist groups. Former police officers. An Olympic gold medalist swimmer. And active duty U.S. Marines.

They are among the hundreds of people who have been convicted in the massive prosecution of the Jan. 6, 2021, riot in the three years since the stunned nation watched the U.S. Capitol attack unfold on live TV.

Washington's federal courthouse remains flooded with trials, guilty plea hearings and sentencing stemming from what has become the largest criminal investigation in American history. And the hunt for suspects is far from over.

"We cannot replace votes and deliberation with violence and intimidation," Matthew Graves, the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, told reporters on Thursday.

Authorities are still working to identify more than 80 people wanted for acts of violence at the Capitol and to find out who placed pipe bombs outside the Republican and Democratic national committees' offices the day before the Capitol attack. And they continue to regularly make new arrests, even as some Jan. 6 defendants are being released from prison after completing their sentences.

The cases are playing out at the same courthouse where Donald Trump is scheduled to stand trial in March in the case accusing the former president of conspiring to overturn his 2020 election loss in the run-up to the Capitol attack.

Here's a look at where the cases against the Jan. 6 defendants stand:

■ **By the numbers:** More than 1,230 people have been charged with federal crimes in the riot, ranging from misdemeanor offenses like trespassing to felonies like assaulting police officers and seditious conspiracy. Roughly 730 people have pleaded guilty to charges, while another roughly 170 have been convicted of at least one charge at a trial decided by a judge or a jury, according to an Associated Press database.

Only two defendants have been acquitted of all charges, and those were trials decided by a judge rather than a jury.

About 750 people have been sentenced, with almost two-thirds receiving some time behind bars. Prison sentences have ranged from a few days of intermittent confinement to 22 years in prison. The longest sentence was handed down to Enrique Tarrio, the former Proud Boys national chairman who was convicted of seditious conspiracy for what prosecutors

described as a plot to stop the transfer of power from Trump, a Republican, to Joe Biden, a Democrat.

Many rioters are already out of prison after completing their sentences, including some defendants who engaged in violence. Scott Fairlamb — a New Jersey man who punched a police officer during the riot and was the first Jan. 6 defendant to be sentenced for assaulting law enforcement — was released from Bureau of Prisons' custody in June.

■ **All eyes on the Supreme Court:** Defense attorneys and prosecutors are closely watching a case that will soon be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court that could impact hundreds of Jan. 6 defendants. The justices agreed last month to hear one rioter's challenge to prosecutors' use of the charge of obstruction of an official proceeding, which refers to the disruption of Congress' certification of Biden's 2020 presidential election victory over Trump.

More than 300 Jan. 6 defendants have been charged with the obstruction offense, and so has Trump in the federal case brought by special counsel Jack Smith. Lawyers representing rioters have argued the charge was inappropriately brought against Jan. 6 defendants.

The justices will hear argu-

ments in March or April, with a decision expected by early summer.

■ **Rioters on the lam:** Dozens of people believed to have assaulted law enforcement during the riot have yet to be identified by authorities, according to Graves. And the statute of limitations for the crimes is five years, which means they would have to be charged by Jan. 6, 2026, he said.

Several defendants have also fled after being charged, including a Proud Boys member from Florida who disappeared while he was on house arrest after he was convicted of using pepper spray gel on police officers. Christopher Worrell, who spent weeks on the lam, was sentenced on Thursday to 10 years in prison.

The FBI is still searching for some defendants who have been on the run for months, including a brother-sister pair from Florida. Olivia Pollock disappeared shortly before her trial was supposed to begin in March. Her brother, Jonathan Pollock, is also missing. The FBI has offered a reward of up to \$30,000 for information leading to the arrest of Jonathan Pollock, who is accused of thrusting a riot shield into an officer's face and throat, pulling an officer down steps and punching others.

# Teen kills 6th grader, wounds 5 others and takes own life

*Associated Press*

PERRY, Iowa — A teen armed with a shotgun and a handgun unleashed terror at an Iowa high school on the first day of classes in the new year, authorities said, killing a sixth grader and wounding five others as people hunkered down in classrooms, barricaded offices and fled the barrage of bullets.

The suspect, a 17-year-old student at the school in Perry, died of what investigators believe was a self-inflicted gunshot wound, an Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation official said. An administrator, later identified by his alma mater as Perry High School Principal Dan Marburger, was among those wounded Thursday as students returned from winter break.

Authorities identified the shooter as Dylan Butler but provided no information about a possible motive. Two friends and their mother who spoke with The Associated Press said Butler was a quiet person who had been bullied for years.

Authorities said Butler had a pump-action shotgun and a small-caliber handgun. Mitch Mortvedt, the state investigation division's assistant director, said during a news conference that authorities also found a "pretty rudimentary" improvised explosive device and rendered it safe.

A law enforcement official briefed on the investigation said federal and state investigators were interviewing Butler's friends and analyzing Butler's social media profiles, including

posts on TikTok and Reddit.

Shortly before Thursday's shooting, Butler posted a photo on TikTok inside the bathroom of Perry High School, the official said. The photo was captioned "now we wait" and the song "Stray Bullet" by the German band KMFDM accompanied it. Investigators have also found other photos Butler posted posing with firearms, according to the official, who was not authorized to publicly discuss details of the investigation and spoke to AP on condition of anonymity.

Sisters Yesenia Roeder and Khanya Hall, both 17, said alongside their mother, Alita, that Butler was bullied relentlessly since elementary school, but it escalated recently when his younger sister started getting picked on, too.

# Employers in US added 216,000 jobs last month

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The nation's employers added a robust 216,000 jobs last month, the latest sign that the American job market remains resilient even in the face of sharply higher interest rates.

Friday's report from the Labor Department showed that December's job gain exceeded the 173,000 that were added in November. The unemployment rate was unchanged at 3.7% — the 23rd straight month that joblessness has remained below 4%.

The latest data reflect an economy and a job market that are decelerating back to pre-pandemic norms.

Despite the economy's steady growth, low unemployment, healthy hiring and cooling inflation, though, polls show that many Americans are dissatisfied with the economy. That disconnect, which will likely be an issue in the 2024 elections, has puzzled economists and political analysts.

A key factor, though, is the public's exasperation with higher prices. Though inflation has been falling more or less steadily for a year and a half, prices are still 17% higher than they were before the inflation surge began.

At the same time, though, average hourly pay has outpaced inflation over the past year, leaving Americans with more money to spend. Indeed, as they did for much of 2023, consumers, a huge engine for U.S. economic growth, hit the stores in November, shopped online, went out to restaurants or traveled.

Since March 2022, the Fed has raised its benchmark interest rate 11 times, lifting it to a 22-year high of about 5.4%.

# China calls for peace, promises pandas on 45th anniversary of U.S.-China ties

*Associated Press*

BEIJING — Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Friday that the United States and China must insist on peaceful coexistence and transcend their differences like they did when they established diplomatic relations 45 years ago this week.

Wang also promised that giant pandas would return to the U.S. — and specifically California — by the end of the year.

"China-U.S. cooperation is no longer a dispensable option for the two countries or even for the world, but a must-answer question that must be seriously addressed," he said.

Wang struck a relatively positive note at a lavish banquet marking the anniversary with 300 guests at a hall in the sprawling Diaoyutai state guest house complex in the Chinese capital.

The countries are trying to navigate — and avoid a war — in what may be their most difficult waters since the U.S. ended official ties with Taiwan and recognized the communist government in Beijing as the government of China on Jan. 1, 1979.

China's rise as an economic and military power is challenging long-standing American leadership in the Asia region and globally.

"The world is currently undergoing profound changes unseen in a century," Wang said. "We must think about how to calibrate the direction of the large ship of China-U.S. relations (and) avoid hidden reefs and dangerous shoals."

Both Wang and David Meale, the deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy, cited congratulatory letters exchanged

by Chinese President Xi Jinping and U.S. President Joe Biden on Monday's anniversary.

Meale said Biden expressed his commitment to managing the relationship responsibly and said he looked forward to building on the progress made by past leaders of the two countries.

Wang did criticize the use of "the big stick of sanctions" and engaging in power games, charges that China often levels at the United States. He denied that China seeks to supplant any other country and called on the U.S. to respect China's development path and core interests.

The giant pandas in Memphis, Tenn., and Washington, D.C., returned to China last year, and some feared that China would stop lending pandas to American zoos.

# NCAA, ESPN reach \$920M, 8-year deal

*Associated Press*

The NCAA and ESPN announced on Thursday a \$920 million, eight-year agreement that will give the network exclusive rights to 40 championships, including the Division I women's basketball tournament, an event growing in popularity that the association has been accused of undervaluing in the past.

NCAA President Charlie Baker told The Associated Press the deal has an average annual value of \$115 million, an increase of more than 300% per year on what the previous 14-year deal with ESPN was paying the association.

"Yes, it's a bundle, but it's a bigger bundle and it's a bigger bundle that will be much better," Baker said.

The deal covers 21 women's and 19 men's sports, adding tennis, track and field, men's gymnastics, the women's Division II and III volleyball and basketball championships and the men's

DII and DIII basketball championships.

The deal guarantees national championship events in Division I women's basketball, women's volleyball, women's gymnastics, and the second-tier of Division I football known as FCS will be aired on ABC, though it does not guarantee any start times.

ESPN will also air selection shows for at least 10 championships on its linear networks.

"We had lots of conversations with lots of third parties and lots of interested parties, but we stayed with ESPN as long as they continued to make progress on the deal," Baker said. "I do believe this was the best deal that was available."

Baker said the NCAA's media consultant, Endeavor's IMG and WME Sports, has estimated about 57% of the value of the deal — or \$65 million annually — is tied to the women's March Madness tournament.

The popularity of the women's tournament has steadily increased during its time as an exclusive ESPN property, setting viewership records last year. The title game between LSU with Angel Reese and Iowa with Caitlin Clark drew nearly 10 million viewers.

"From Day 1, we made it very clear to Charlie and team that we were interested in an extension on the exclusivity side as well as the fact that we were interested in acquiring more rights, not less," ESPN chairman Jimmy Pitaro said.

Baker said NCAA membership will discuss creating performance units paid out to conferences for success in the women's tournament similar to those paid out for the men's tournament.

The rights to the NCAA men's basketball tournament are owned by CBS and Warner Brothers Discovery, a deal that pays the association about \$900

million per year and runs through 2032.

After being criticized for having inequitable resources and facilities at the 2021 men's and women's single-site basketball tournaments, the NCAA — under previous president Mark Emmert — commissioned a law firm to do an outside review of gender equity throughout the association.

Among the numerous recommendations in the Kaplan report was to consider unbundling the women's basketball tournament from the rest of the championships. Within that report, there was an estimate from Desser Sports Media that the tournament could be worth between \$81 and \$112 million annually beginning in 2025, when the new deal begins.

Hillary Mandel and Karen Brodtkin, executive vice presidents for Endeavor, said those estimates set unrealistic expectations.

## Nets are fined \$100,000 for sitting key players in loss

*New York Daily News*

NEW YORK — The Nets' controversial decision to sit key regulars in a Dec. 27 loss to the Bucks has officially cost them.

The NBA fined the Nets \$100,000 for violating the league's Player Participation Policy in a game Cam Johnson, Nic Claxton, Spencer Dinwiddie and Dorian Finney-Smith did not play.

"Following an investigation, including review by an independent physician, the NBA determined that four Nets rotation

players, who did not participate in the game, could have played under the medical standard in the Player Participation Policy," the NBA said Thursday.

Against the Bucks, Brooklyn ruled out Johnson with a right knee sprain — injury maintenance; Claxton with a left ankle sprain — injury maintenance; Finney-Smith with left knee soreness; and Dinwiddie for rest.

The 144-122 loss at Barclays Center marked the Nets' second game of a back-to-back. Johnson, Claxton, Dinwiddie and Finney-

Smith each appeared in the Nets' win in Detroit the previous night and have all played in each of the team's four games since the loss to Milwaukee.

"I'll treat each guy on an individual basis," Nets coach Jacques Vaughn said on Dec. 27. "When Dorian Finney-Smith comes to me and he's questionable after being assessed, and he played 34 minutes last night and 12 minutes straight and he already had a sore knee, then I'm going to be smart about it and I'm gonna sit him tonight. We're going to be

smart about individually assessing our guys and putting them into a position to have a team that we can have at the end of the year, middle of the year and right now."

Mikal Bridges, who has never missed a game in his six-year NBA career, only played 12 minutes against the Bucks — a decision the forward was critical of afterward.

The NBA introduced its Player Participation Policy before the season in an effort to scale back teams' use of load management.

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# Theegala leads PGA season opener at Kapalua with 64

Associated Press

KAPALUA, Hawaii — Collin Morikawa already has won two majors and played in the opening session twice in the Ryder Cup. His opening tee shot Thursday at Kapalua felt as special as any moment.

Long before Sahith Theegala rolled in his 10th birdie for a 9-under 64 to lead The Sentry, the PGA Tour began a new year with a ceremony on the first tee. It featured a Hawaiian blessing and chants geared toward renewal and regrowth, with emphasis on the deadly Lahaina fires.

Morikawa has a deep connection to Maui and hit the opening tee shot.

Where it went — straight and so long it rolled through the fairway into the rough — was of little importance to him.

“As special as it’s ever going to get,” Morikawa said of the first of his 65 shots on Thursday.

“I can talk about final rounds, last shots, first tee, final group and those in the majors, but that was as big of an honor as I could have had. Not because it was the first tournament of the year, but because it was out here in Maui, everything that this week represents for me.

“It just means that much more.”

He played like it meant more, with six birdies and one eagle when he carved a 3-wood up to the elevated green for eagle on the par-5 ninth.

On this glorious day of surprisingly little wind and typical magnificent views, Morikawa had plenty of company. His 65 was the best of the day until Theegala warmed up, starting the back nine with six straight birdies. He got up-and-down on the par-5 18th for one last birdie.

That gave him a one-shot lead

over Morikawa, FedEx Cup champion Viktor Hovland, Sungjae Im, Camilo Villegas and Jason Day.

Theegala made his Kapalua debut last year by reaching the Tour Championship as a rookie. Now the field at The Sentry — for years limited only to PGA Tour winners from the previous year — has been expanded to winners and the top 50 in the FedEx Cup. Theegala would be there no matter what, thanks to his win in Napa, Calif., in September.

The 59-player field is the largest ever for Kapalua, and they all had their way on a forgiving Plantation course missing its great defense with only a tropical breeze.

Eighteen players were at 67 or lower, and that was to be expected. The Plantation course’s infamous and challenging wind laid down for much of the day.

## Ex-Kansas State QB transferring to Ohio State

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Former Kansas State quarterback Will Howard announced his intention to transfer to Ohio State on Thursday night, giving the Buckeyes a replacement for Kyle McCord after his own decision to transfer to Syracuse.

Howard made the announcement on his social media channels.

Howard has one season of eligibility remaining after he went 12-5 as a starter for the Wildcats, leading them past TCU in the 2022 Big 12 title game and helping them reach the Pop-Tarts Bowl this past season. But with Kansas State expected to turn over its offense to five-star prospect Avery Johnson, who led the Wildcats to a victory in the bowl game, Howard announced he was entering the transfer portal and considered Miami and Southern California before settling on Ohio State.

He also considered declaring for the NFL draft before deciding to spend a year with the Buckeyes.

Howard has prototypical NFL size at 6-foot-5, 240-plus pounds, and along with a strong arm the ability to run. He also gives Ohio State some experience, having started 27 games and thrown for 5,786 yards and 48 touchdowns during his career.

The Buckeyes missed out on the College Football Playoff following their regular-season loss to Michigan, landing them in the Cotton Bowl. McCord’s decision to transfer forced them to start Devin Brown against Missouri, and he left in the second quarter with a sprained ankle, forcing Lincoln Kienholz to play the rest of the way in a 14-3 loss.

Johnson threw for 178 yards and two scores, ran for 71 yards and another TD and was voted the MVP of the Pop-Tarts Bowl.

## RB Dalvin Cook is joining the NFL-best Ravens after being waived by the Jets

Associated Press

Dalvin Cook is joining the Baltimore Ravens for a playoff run after being waived by the New York Jets.

The move, confirmed by Cook’s agents with LAA Sports & Entertainment to The Associated Press on Thursday, came after Cook cleared waivers and became a free agent.

NFL Network first reported the decision by Baltimore to sign Cook, who agreed to part ways with New York on Tuesday. ESPN also reported that Cook will be first added to the Ravens’ practice squad.

The four-time Pro Bowl running back will be able to get familiar with the Ravens’ offense

before the team opens its post-season during the AFC divisional round in 2½ weeks. It was not immediately clear whether Cook would be available for Baltimore’s regular-season finale at home Saturday against Pittsburgh.

Baltimore is the top seed in the AFC and has the first-round bye, along with home-field advantage through the playoffs.

Cook posted a picture on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, of him and Ravens wide receiver Zay Flowers smiling and displaying chains with the letters “LAA” for their shared agency. Cook also posted a purple heart emoji — for the Ravens’ colors — and a crossed

fingers emoji.

The 28-year-old Cook had a disappointing season with the Jets, who signed the four-time Pro Bowl selection to a one-year deal worth \$7 million — including \$5.8 million guaranteed — during the summer. He’ll now join quarterback Lamar Jackson and hope to bolster Baltimore’s backfield.

The Ravens lost running back J.K. Dobbins to a season-ending injury in their first game. Gus Edwards — who has 13 rushing touchdowns — has been productive in short-yardage situations, and Justice Hill has contributed a bit more lately. But Baltimore could use some more speed at running back.

# Nuggets' Jokic stuns Warriors at buzzer

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Nikola Jokic hit a 40-footer as time expired and the Denver Nuggets stunned the Golden State Warriors 130-127 on Thursday night after trailing by 18 points in the fourth quarter.

Jokic had 34 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds. He tied it at 127 with a short jumper with 26 seconds left. Golden State's fi-

nal possession ended with a turnover by Stephen Curry, setting the stage for Jokic's winner from near the right sideline.

The defending champion Nuggets have won 11 of 13 and six straight on the road. They sent the Warriors — who failed to get back to .500 after snapping a three-game skid Tuesday night — to a 1-3 start on their seven-game homestand.

Aaron Gordon scored 30 points for Denver, and Jamal Murray had 25.

Curry led Golden State with 30 points. Klay Thompson added 24.

**Bucks 125, Spurs 121:** Giannis Antetokounmpo had 44 points and 14 rebounds and visiting Milwaukee overcame an big night by Victor Wembanyama on his 20th birthday to beat

San Antonio.

Wembanyama had 27 points, and Devin Vassell led the Spurs with 34.

Wembanyama's first meeting with Antetokounmpo was delayed by the French rookie's sprained ankle Dec. 19 in Milwaukee, but it proved to be worth the wait.

Damian Lillard had 25 points and 10 assists for Milwaukee.

## Late 3-pointer lifts No. 15 Memphis over Tulsa 78-75

Associated Press

TULSA, Okla. — Jahvon Quinerly made a 3-pointer with 3.5 seconds left, and No. 15 Memphis survived a late flurry from Tulsa's Cobe Williams to beat the Golden Hurricane 78-75 on Thursday night.

David Jones and Nae'Qwan Tomlin each scored 17 points for

Memphis, which led 75-70 in the final minute before Williams scored five points in a three-second span. After Quinerly's 3, Williams' 3-point attempt at the buzzer rimmed out.

PJ Haggerty scored 27 points for Tulsa (9-4, 0-1), which had a nine-game home winning streak snapped. Carlous Wil-

liams added 16 and Cobe Williams finished with 10.

**No. 19 James Madison 68, Louisiana-Lafayette 61:** Noah Freidel hit two 3-pointers in the final two minutes, Terrence Edwards led all scorers with 19 points and T.J. Bickerstaff had 14 points and 11 rebounds as James Madison remained un-

defeated with a win over host Louisiana-Lafayette.

The Dukes (14-0, 2-0 Sun Belt) went on a 14-0 run midway through the second half to open a 49-40 lead and snap the Cajuns' 19-game home winning streak.

The Cajuns were led by Kentrell Garnett with 17 points.

## Top-ranked South Carolina routs Florida in SEC opener

Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Te'Hina Paopao scored 17 points, Raven Johnson added 16 and top-ranked South Carolina opened Southeastern Conference play with an 89-66 drubbing of Florida on Thursday night.

Bree Hall added 15 points for the Gamecocks (13-0), who won for the 55th time in their past 56 games and extended their conference winning streak to 17.

Kamilla Cardoso chipped in 10 points and 15 rebounds for the visitors, who also got eight boards and six blocks from Ashlyn Watkins.

Leilani Correa scored 27 points for the Gators (9-4), who lost their 16th straight in the series.

**No. 3 North Carolina State 88, No. 22 Florida State 80 (OT):** River Baldwin scored 21 points against her former team before leaving with an injury,

and host North Carolina State beat Florida State in overtime.

Baldwin fell to the floor late in the third quarter. The senior center was assisted off the court and didn't return.

Aziaha James had 18 points and Zoe Brooks scored 15 for the Wolfpack (14-0, 2-0 Atlantic Coast Conference).

Ta'Niya Latson finished with 30 points for the third straight game for Florida State (11-4, 2-1), which overcame a 12-point, fourth-quarter deficit to force OT.

**No. 7 LSU 92, Missouri 72:** Aneesah Morrow had 25 points and 10 rebounds, Angel Reese added 21 points and 13 boards, and host LSU pulled away in the second half to beat Missouri in the Southeastern Conference opener for both teams.

Flau'jae Johnson scored 24 points for LSU (14-1), which won its 14th straight game.

Hayley Frank led Missouri

(9-5) with 22 points.

**No. 13 Virginia Tech 82, Wake Forest 73:** Elizabeth Kitley had 27 points and 12 rebounds, Georgia Amoore had 10 points and 10 assists, and visiting Virginia Tech beat Wake Forest for its sixth straight victory.

Virginia Tech (11-2, 2-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) has won 14 straight games against ACC opponents.

Elise Williams scored a career-high 29 points for Wake Forest (4-10, 0-2).

**No. 14 Indiana 80, Michigan 59:** Mackenzie Holmes scored 20 points and host Indiana shot 13 of 13 from the field in the first quarter to race past Michigan.

Sara Scalia finished with 16 points and Sydney Parrish scored 14 for the Hoosiers (12-1, 3-0 Big Ten), who led 36-17 after the first period.

Laila Phelia scored 23 points to lead Michigan (11-4, 2-1),

which has dropped five of six to Indiana.

**No. 16 Notre Dame 71, Pittsburgh 66:** Hannah Hidalgo had 24 points, six rebounds, five assists and three steals, and visiting Notre Dame outlasted Pittsburgh after blowing a 20-point lead.

**No. 17 Louisville 61, Duke 44:** Kiki Jefferson made 8 of 8 free throws and scored 15 points, Olivia Cochran added 13 points and three steals, and host Louisville beat Duke for the 1,000th win in program history.

**No. 18 Gonzaga 74, Portland 53:** Brynna Maxwell scored 21 points, Yvonne Ejim had 18 and visiting Gonzaga beat Portland in the West Coast Conference opener for both teams.

**North Carolina 75, No. 25 Syracuse 51:** Alyssa Ustby had the first triple-double in program history, and host North Carolina snapped Syracuse's eight-game winning streak.

# Crosby lifts Penguins to win over Bruins

Associated Press

BOSTON — Sidney Crosby scored on the power play to snap a third-period tie and added two assists, lifting the Pittsburgh Penguins to a 6-5 win over the Boston Bruins on Thursday night.

Crosby's goal at 11:19 broke a 5-all deadlock and halted a four-game winning streak for the first-place Bruins, who rallied from three down to tie it. The Penguins also got goals from Drew O'Connor, Ryan Graves, Jake Guentzel, Lars Eller and Jeff Carter. Alex Nedeljkovic made 24 saves.

Brad Marchand scored twice for the Bruins, and David Pastrnak had a goal and two assists. Morgan Geekie added a goal and an assist, and Jeremy Swayman stopped 29 shots.

**Avalanche 5, Stars 4 (OT):** Nathan MacKinnon scored his second goal of the game 3:40 into overtime and visiting Colorado rallied past Dallas.

Jonathan Drouin had two goals and Mikko Rantanen also scored for the Avalanche. Alexander Georgiev stopped 28 shots in his league-leading 32nd start.

Tyler Seguin had two goals and Joe Pavelski and Evgenii Dadonov also scored for the Stars. Scott Wedgewood made 29 saves.

MacKinnon broke in on a 2-on-0 with Devon Toews and beat Wedgewood stick side for the winner. MacKinnon also had an assist for the Central Division-leading Avalanche, who have a season-best seven-game

point streak (6-0-1).

**Rangers 4, Blackhawks 1:** Artemi Panarin scored his team-best 24th goal, Vincent Trocheck added three assists and host New York beat Chicago.

Chris Kreider, Jacob Trouba and Jimmy Vesey also scored for the Rangers, who rebounded from Tuesday's 6-1 home loss to Carolina and improved to 10-1-0 after a defeat this season. Igor Shesterkin made 22 saves.

Colin Blackwell scored against his former team for Chicago, which has lost four straight and six of seven.

**Blues 2, Canucks 1:** Robert Thomas had a goal and an assist to lead host St. Louis over Vancouver.

Thomas, selected to his first All-Star Game earlier in the day, broke a 1-all tie at 8:03 of the third period for his team-leading 16th goal of the season.

Colton Parayko also scored for the Blues, who snapped a two-game skid. Jordan Binnington made 25 saves to improve to 12-11-1.

Conor Garland scored for the Canucks, who had won eight of 11. Thatcher Demko made 30 saves but fell to 18-8-1.

**Lightning 4, Wild 1:** Lightning defenseman Darren Raddysh scored his first two goals of the season and Victor Hedman had a power-play goal in visiting Tampa Bay's victory over injury-ravaged Minnesota.

Andrei Vasilevskiy made 22 saves to end a three-start losing streak and Brandon Hagel added an empty-net goal to help the

Lightning hand the Wild their fourth consecutive loss. Vasilevskiy's bid for his 34th career shutout lasted until Zach Bogosian snapped a shot past him with 4:25 left.

Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 26 shots for the Wild, failing for the third straight game to match Patrick Roy for second place on the NHL victory list with 551.

Nikita Kucherov was limited to one assist for the Lightning on the night he was named to his fifth All-Star Game, ending his four-game goal streak. The Russian right wing has 10 goals and 10 assists in his past 12 games.

**Blue Jackets 3, Flyers 2 (SO):** Johnny Gaudreau scored in the shootout, Damon Severson and Jake Bean netted goals in the third period and visiting Columbus came back to beat Philadelphia.

Gaudreau, the first Blue Jackets shooter, beat Flyers goalie Samuel Ersson, and Daniil Tarasov clinched the victory with a glove save on Tyson Foerster. Neither Sean Couturier nor Bobby Brink could convert for Philadelphia.

Tarasov stopped 39 shots. The win was just the second in seven games for Columbus.

All-Star forward Travis Konecny scored both goals for the Flyers, who have dropped four in a row and six of seven.

**Sabres 6, Canadiens 1:** Buffalo rookie Devon Levi made 32 saves in his first game at hometown Bell Centre to help the Sabres defeat host Montreal.

Tage Thompson had two goals and an assist, and Jeff

Skinner added a goal and three assists as the Sabres improved to 16-19-4. Casey Mittelstadt and Jack Quinn each had a goal and an assist, and Rasmus Dahlin scored into an empty net.

Joel Armia scored for Montreal, and Jake Allen stopped 32 shots. Returning from a seven-game trip, the Canadiens dropped to 16-17-5.

**Flames 6, Predators 3:** Connor Zary, Blake Coleman, Rasmus Andersson and Yegor Sharangovich each had a goal and an assist in visiting Calgary's victory over Nashville.

Nazem Kadri and Noah Hanifin also scored and Dan Vladar made 30 saves for the Flames in their third straight win.

Filip Forsberg, Colton Sissons and Michael McCarron scored and Juuse Saros made 21 saves for the Predators.

**Islanders 5, Coyotes 1:** Bo Horvat scored twice, the second in New York's three-goal third period, and Ilya Sorokin made 24 saves to help the visiting Islanders beat Arizona.

Anders Lee and Julien Gauthier scored 52 seconds apart for a 4-1 lead early in the third, and Horvat skated in alone for an unassisted goal with seven minutes remaining.

Mike Reilly also scored for the Islanders, who had lost three of four. All-Star forward Matthew Barzal had two assists to give him 401 points in the NHL.

Nick Schmaltz scored and Connor Ingram made 23 saves for the Coyotes, who had won six of eight.

# Oscar Pistorius to be released from prison on parole

Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa — Oscar Pistorius was due to be released from prison Friday to live under strict conditions at a family home having served nearly nine years of a murder sentence for the shoot-

ing death of girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp.

The double-amputee Olympic runner from South Africa was set to leave the Atteridgeville Correctional Centre in Pretoria after being approved for parole in November, the

second time he had applied. It will give the world a chance at its first glimpse in nearly a decade of the one-time sporting superstar who stunningly fell from grace after shooting Steenkamp multiple times through a closed toilet door at

his home in the predawn hours of Valentine's Day 2013.

South Africa's Department of Corrections declined to give any detail of when and how Pistorius would be released, saying "inmates and parolees are never paraded."