

## Houthis launch largest barrage yet

*Associated Press*

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Yemen's Houthi rebels fired their largest-ever barrage of drones and missiles targeting shipping in the Red Sea, forcing the United States and British navies to shoot down the projectiles in a major naval engagement, authorities said Wednesday. No damage was immediately reported.

The attack by the Iranian-backed Houthis came despite a planned United Nations Security Council vote later Wednesday to potentially condemn and demand an immediate halt to the attacks by the rebels, who say their assaults are aimed at stopping Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

However, their targets increasingly have tenuous — or no — relationship with Israel and imperil a crucial trade route

linking Asia and the Middle East to Europe. That raises the risk of a U.S. retaliatory strike on Yemen that could upend an uneasy cease-fire that's held in the Arab world's poorest country.

The assault happened off the Yemeni port cities of Hodeida and Mokha, according to the private intelligence firm Ambrey. In the Hodeida attack, Ambrey said ships described over radio seeing missiles and drones, with U.S.-allied warships in the area urging "vessels to proceed at maximum speed."

Off Mokha, ships saw missiles fired, a drone in the air and small vessels trailing them, Ambrey said early Wednesday. The British military's United Kingdom Marine Trade Operations also acknowledged the attack off Hodeida.

The U.S. military's Central Command said the "complex at-

tack" launched by the Houthis included bomb-carrying drones, anti-ship cruise missiles and one anti-ship ballistic missile.

It said 18 drones, two cruise missiles and the anti-ship missile were downed by F-18s from the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, as well as by American Arleigh Burke-class destroyers the USS Gravely, the USS Laboon and the USS Mason, as well as the United Kingdom's HMS Diamond.

"This is the 26th Houthi attack on commercial shipping lanes in the Red Sea since Nov. 19," Central Command said. "There were no injuries or damage reported."

"Vessels are advised to transit with caution and report any suspicious activity," the UKTMO added.

British Defense Secretary Grant Shapps described the as-

sault as "the largest attack by the Iranian-backed Houthis in the Red Sea to date," saying the Diamond used Sea Viper missiles and guns to shoot down multiple drones.

"The U.K. alongside allies have previously made clear that these illegal attacks are completely unacceptable and if continued the Houthis will bear the consequences," Shapps said in a statement. "We will take the action needed to protect innocent lives and the global economy."

The Houthis, a Shiite group that's held Yemen's capital since 2014, did not formally acknowledge launching the attacks. However, the pan-Arab satellite news network Al Jazeera quoted an anonymous Houthi military official saying their forces "targeted a ship linked to Israel in the Red Sea," without elaborating.

## Defense secretary treated for prostate cancer, UTI

**BY DOUG G. WARE**

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has prostate cancer that required surgery and caused a urinary tract infection that led to his recent undisclosed hospital stays, Pentagon officials and his doctors revealed Tuesday.

"His prostate cancer was detected early, and his prognosis is excellent," two of Austin's doctors said in a statement.

Austin, 70, has been in the hospital since Jan. 1 after experiencing complications from a procedure conducted Dec. 22. The secretary has come under scrutiny from lawmakers and news outlets after he failed to notify President Joe Biden and

other federal officials about his illness and hospital stay, which has now lasted more than a week.

During a regular health screening in early December, Austin's cancer was detected by Drs. John Maddox and Gregory Chesnut at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.

Austin was admitted to the hospital about three weeks later for a prostatectomy, which involves surgery to remove part of the prostate gland. The doctors called it "a minimally invasive surgical procedure." Austin was under general anesthesia during the surgery and left the hospital the following morning.

On Jan. 1, Austin returned to Walter Reed after experiencing pain in his abdomen, hip and leg, the doctors said. He was later found to have a urinary tract infection and Austin spent days in the intensive care unit before he was moved to a private section of the hospital.

"Further evaluation revealed abdominal fluid collections impairing the function of his small intestines," the doctors said. "This resulted in the backup of his intestinal contents which was treated by placing a tube through his nose to drain his stomach. The abdominal fluid collections were drained by nonsurgical drain placement. He has progressed steadily throughout his stay. His infec-

tion has cleared."

Austin was still at Walter Reed on Tuesday, and the Pentagon did not know how long he will stay there.

During Austin's medical treatments, no one at the Defense Department notified the White House, Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks, Congress or the public for several days. On Jan. 2, Austin transferred some of his more pressing responsibilities to Hicks, who was on vacation in Puerto Rico.

The situation has drawn criticism from Congress. On Tuesday, the Republican chairman of the House Armed Services Committee launched a formal inquiry into the matter.

# Landfill work resumes at Okinawa base site

*Associated Press*

TOKYO — Japanese construction workers on Wednesday resumed landfill work at the new site of the U.S. military base on Okinawa despite protests by the island's residents that the move tramples on their rights and raises environmental concerns.

The planned relocation site for the base, on Okinawa's eastern coast, has been at the center of a dispute between the government in Tokyo and the local authorities at a time of the island's growing strategic importance.

Okinawa is becoming key for the Japan-U.S. military alliance in the face of growing tensions with China while Japan also rapidly seeks to build up its military in the southwestern region.

Three weeks ago, the Fukuo-ka High Court's Naha branch ordered Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki to approve the central government's modified landfill plan, and allowed the Land and Transport Ministry to order the work to resume by overriding the governor's disapproval.

On a barge brought to the location on Wednesday, a pair of loader machines scooped up mounds of rock and gravel and dumped them into the sea as part of reclamation needed to reinforce the extremely soft seabed at the site planned for U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma.

Tamaki, who has appealed the order to the Supreme Court, said the court ruling was unjust and goes against the will of the residents. Under Japanese law, construction can proceed while the court decision is pending. He called the resumption of the landfill work "extremely re-

grettable."

Okinawa and Tokyo have long tussled over the relocation of the Futenma base. Tokyo and Washington agreed in 1996 to close the Futenma air station after the rape of a schoolgirl by three U.S. servicemen led to a massive anti-base movement. But the closing was held up for nearly 30 years because of persistent protests and lawsuits against the relocation plan.

In 2018, Japan's central government began the reclamation work off Henoko Bay on Okinawa's eastern coast to pave the way for the relocation of the Futenma base from its populated neighborhood on the island.

The central authorities later discovered that segments of the designated reclamation site are on soft ground, and submitted a revision to the original plan with additional land improvement at an estimated cost of \$6.5 billion. But Okinawa's prefectural government rejected the revision plan and suspended the reclamation work.

Tamaki, the governor, has sought a significant reduction of the U.S. military on Okinawa, which is home to more than half of 50,000 American troops based in Japan under a bilateral security pact.

Hundreds of scholars, film directors and ordinary citizens who have advocated for Okinawa's autonomy, signed a global petition demanding the island cease to be "a de facto military colony of the United States and Japan ever since the end of the World War II."

One of the petition organizers, Satoko Norimatsu Oka who heads the Vancouver-based Peace Philosophy Center, provided a copy of the document to The Associated Press.

# Navy glitch sends 2M gallons of sewage into Hawaii waters

BY WYATT OLSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Navy's wastewater treatment plant near Pearl Harbor dumped almost 2 million gallons of partially treated sewage into the ocean Monday due to an electrical failure, according to the service.

Heavy rain knocked out a transformer that provides power to an ultraviolet system used to treat wastewater in the plant on Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, the Navy said in a news release Tuesday.

About 1.89 million gallons of partially treated wastewater flowed into the sea during the five hours the transformer was down, the Navy said.

The discharge point is about 1.5 miles offshore of the joint base.

The Hawaii Department of Health has directed the Navy to post notifications about the discharge along the base's shoreline, the Navy said.

The ultraviolet system is the

fourth and final step before wastewater has been treated sufficiently to be discharged into the sea.

Tainted discharges such as this have been a chronic problem for the Navy in recent years.

In September 2022, the Hawaii Department of Health levied an \$8.7 million fine on the Navy for more than 700 incidents of discharging sewage from the plant over the previous two years.

"The Navy's failure to properly operate and maintain this wastewater treatment plant led to the pollution of state waters," Kathleen Ho, deputy director of environment health at the Health Department, said in a news release announcing the fine.

Navy contractors are at work repairing and modernizing the treatment plant. The work includes replacing sludge pumps, piping, valves, controls and ventilation systems.

# Navy's new medical ship named after noted hospital

BY JONATHAN SNYDER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy's newest medical ship will bear the name of the most well-known military medical center in the United States, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro announced this week.

The ship — the first in its class of expeditionary medical vessels — will be called USNS Bethesda in honor of Naval Support Activity Bethesda, Md., the site of what was known informally as Bethesda Naval Hospital and is now the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

Del Toro made the announcement Monday at Walter Reed, according to a Navy news release.

"This ship, as well as all the Bethesda-class of expeditionary medical ships, is designed to provide hospital-level care in austere environments, and will serve not just our Sailors and Marines, but offer assistance and comfort to our allies and partners around the globe in times of need," he said in the release.

The new medical ships will complement the existing hospital ships USNS Comfort and Mercy, Del Toro said.

# DHS head works on border deal in wake of GOP inquiry

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Marching ahead with impeachment plans, House Republicans have set their sights on Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, who they intend to prove is “derelict in his duty” over handling the surge of migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Speaker Mike Johnson gave his nod to Wednesday’s hearing at the Homeland Security Committee, which launches Mayorkas impeachment proceedings at a peculiar political moment: On one side of the Capitol, a bipartisan group of senators has been engaged in almost daily negotiations with Mayorkas over a landmark border security package. On the other, the House wants to remove him from office.

At a new year’s press conference, Rep. Mark Green, chair-

man of the Homeland Security Committee, stood with Johnson near the border, blamed Mayorkas for the record number of migrant crossings and vowed, “Accountability is coming, I promise.”

The House panel has been circling Mayorkas all year, at times expected to lurch ahead with impeachment proceedings against him as the border crossings hit record highs, topping 10,000 on some days. The number has recently dipped.

But impeaching a Cabinet secretary is rare, having only happened once before in the nation’s history, when the House impeached Defense Secretary William Belknap in 1876 over bribery.

Going after an official for a policy dispute, in this instance over the claim that Mayorkas is not upholding immigration laws, is unprecedented.

Green’s committee conducted a multi-part investigation into Mayorkas and the department but kicked the process into high gear when hard-right Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene pushed forward the impeachment resolution after Johnson won the speaker’s gavel following the ouster of Rep. Kevin McCarthy as speaker.

“I believe Secretary Mayorkas is an abject failure,” Johnson said over the weekend on CBS. “And I think there must be accountability for that.”

Many Republicans prefer a return to Donald Trump-era immigration policies, and they blame President Joe Biden for taking actions early in his presidency to stop construction of the border wall and end the COVID-19 era restrictions that prevented many migrants from entering the U.S.

# Floods and outages across US after storm

*Associated Press*

CONCORD, N.H. — A major storm drenched the Northeast and slammed it with fierce winds, knocking out power to hundreds of thousands following a bout of violent weather that struck most of the U.S.

The storm washed out roads and took down trees and power lines. Wind gusts reached 45 mph to 55 mph and more windy weather was expected throughout Wednesday.

It followed a day of tornadoes and deadly accidents in the South and blizzards in the Midwest and Northwest.

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy declared a state of emergency ahead of the storm. Many streets and roads were flooded and rivers were rising after some areas got up to 3 inches of rain since Tuesday night.

Lou DeFazio, 65, of Manville, N.J., lives steps away from the Millstone River that flooded disastrously in 2021 after the remnants of Ida slammed into the state and swerved riverbanks. He said the river was expected to crest later Wednesday.

“It’s getting worse and worse,” he said.

Even before high tide Wednesday morning, parts of Long Island’s southern shore were already inundated by coastal flooding.

In Nassau County, video showed cars sloshing through water that had collected on the streets of Freeport. Further east, near the Hamptons, the National Weather Service reported major flooding out of Shinnecock Bay. New York City officials evacuated nearly 2,000 migrants housed at a tent complex before the storm hit amid fears that the facility could collapse in heavy winds.

# Backlogs, identity theft still problems for IRS despite funding boost, IG says

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The IRS is still too slow in processing amended tax returns, answering taxpayer phone calls and resolving identity theft cases, according to an independent watchdog within the agency.

The federal tax collector needs to improve its processing and taxpayer correspondence issues despite a massive boost in funding provided by the Democrats’ Inflation Reduction Act, according to an annual report Wednesday to Congress from Erin M. Collins, who leads the organization assigned to protect taxpayers’ rights under the Taxpayer Bill of Rights.

The report serves as a reality

check of sorts as IRS leaders say the funding boost is producing big improvements in services to taxpayers.

GOP critics, meanwhile, are trying to claw back some of the money and painting the agency as an over-zealous enforcer of the tax code.

The IRS is experiencing “extraordinary delays” in assisting identity theft victims, taking nearly 19 months to resolve self-reported cases, which the report calls “unconscionable” since a delay in receiving a refund can worsen financial hardships.

Additionally, the backlog of unprocessed amended returns has quadrupled from 500,000 in

2019 to 1.9 million in October last year. And taxpayer correspondence cases have more than doubled over the same period, from 1.9 million to 4.3 million, according to the report.

The report also says IRS employees answered only 35% of all calls received, despite the agency claiming 85%.

The IRS doesn’t include calls where the taxpayer hangs up before being placed into a calling queue.

IRS Commissioner Daniel Werfel said in a statement that the Taxpayer Advocate “raises a number of very important areas that we are looking at to make improvements” with Inflation Reduction Act funding.



# Zelenskyy in Baltics to seek war supplies

Associated Press

VILNIUS, Lithuania — Ukraine has shown the world that Russia's military can be stopped, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Wednesday as he began a visit to the Baltic nations in search of more help for his country against the Kremlin's larger and better-supplied forces in the 22-month-old invasion.

Speaking in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, Zelenskyy said Ukraine still must bolster its air defenses against Russia's intensified missile and drone onslaughts and replenish its ammunition supplies as long-range strikes become the main feature of this winter's fighting.

"We have proven that Russia can be stopped, that deterrence is possible," he said after talks with Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda on his first foreign trip of the year.

The massive Russian barrag-

es — more than 500 drones and missiles were fired between Dec. 29 and Jan. 2, according to officials in Kyiv — are using up Ukraine's weapons stockpiles, however. The escalation is stretching Ukraine's air defense resources and leaving the country vulnerable unless it can secure further weapons supplies.

"We lack modern air defense systems badly," Zelenskyy said, noting that they are "what we need the most."

He acknowledged, however, that stockpiles are low in countries that could provide such materiel. "Warehouses are empty. And there are many challenges to world defense," he said.

Ukraine hopes to accelerate development of its domestic defense industry and establish joint projects with foreign governments to speed up ammunition and weapons production.

Ukrainian officials traveling with Zelenskyy signed several

documents on cooperation on joint arms production. Similar agreements are expected in the other Baltic countries Zelenskyy is expected to visit this week.

The focus of his two-day trip to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, Zelenskyy said on his official Telegram channel, will be security concerns, Ukraine's hopes to join the European Union and NATO, and building partnerships in drone production and electronic warfare capacities.

Zelenskyy thanked Lithuania for its military assistance and goodwill. He was expected in Estonia and Latvia on Thursday.

"We know how tiring this long-running war is, and we are interested in Ukraine's complete victory in it as soon as possible," Nausėda told reporters.

The small eastern European countries are among Ukraine's staunchest political, financial

and military supporters, and some in the Baltics worry they could be Moscow's next target.

The three countries were seized and annexed by Josef Stalin during World War II before regaining independence with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. They joined NATO in 2004, placing themselves under the military protection of the United States and its Western allies.

"Democratic countries have done a lot to help Ukraine, but we need to do more together so that Ukraine wins and the aggressor loses," Estonian President Alar Karis said in a statement.

In his Telegram message, Zelenskyy expressed gratitude to the Baltic countries for their "uncompromising" support of Ukraine over the past 10 years, referring to 2014 when Russia's aggression started with the illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimea Peninsula.

## Blinken meets with Abbas, seeks Palestinian reforms

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke Wednesday to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas about reforming his government as Blinken sought to rally the region behind postwar plans for Gaza that include concrete steps toward a Palestinian state.

The United States is pushing for a reformed Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza once the war is over. Blinken said multiple countries in the region have agreed to help rebuild the territory and that wider Israeli-Arab normalization is still possible, but only if there is "a pathway to a Palestinian state."

In their meeting in the West Bank city of Ramallah, Blinken told Abbas that the U.S. supports "tangible steps" toward a Palestinian state, according to State Department spokesman Matthew

Miller. He said the two discussed administrative reform.

The vision outlined by Blinken faces serious obstacles. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government has so far rejected Palestinian Authority control in Gaza and adamantly opposes the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. The autocratic, Western-backed Palestinian leadership, whose forces were driven from Gaza when Hamas took over in 2007, lacks legitimacy in the view of many Palestinians.

Abbas spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said they heard "good statements" from the Americans. "But nothing has happened," he said. "The priority now is to stop the war on Gaza."

Abbas, 88, has not stood for election since 2005 and lacks support among his own people.

## Calif. lawmakers to weigh under-12 tackle football ban

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California lawmakers were to debate Wednesday on whether to ban tackle football for children under 12, a move pushed by advocates seeking to protect kids from brain damage but opposed by coaches who have warned it would cut off youths from an important source of physical activity.

The bill, authored by Democratic Assemblymember Kevin McCarty, is scheduled to have its first public hearing before a legislative committee and is still a long way from passing. Wednesday's hearing is crucial; the bill must clear the state Assembly by the end of January to have a chance of becoming law this year.

If passed, the bill would not take effect until 2026. Proposed amendments would gradually phase in implementation.

Research has shown tackle football causes brain damage, and the risk increases the longer people play football, said Chris Nowinski, CEO of the Concussion Legacy Foundation and former Harvard football player and WWE professional wrestler. It can cause chronic traumatic encephalopathy, which causes the death of nerve cells in the brain.

"I don't have a problem with NFL players, who are adults and understand the risk and are compensated, risking CTE," Nowinski said. "I can't imagine a world in which we have children, who don't understand the risk, doing this for fun (and) taking the same risk with their brain."

No state has banned tackle football for kids, but there have been attempts to do so. Similar bills in California, New York and Illinois failed to pass.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Worker killed after being buried in a hole

**NY** HEAD OF THE HARBOR — A worker was killed in New York's Long Island on Monday after becoming buried in a hole while working on a septic system.

Suffolk County Police said the masonry company worker was installing cesspool rings at a home in Head of the Harbor just before 2:30 p.m. when the accident occurred.

The worker, whose name was not released, had entered the hole to level a ring when excavated dirt collapsed, burying the worker, police said.

Emergency crews from several towns worked to dig the worker free. He was eventually extricated from the hole by Emergency Service Section officers and pronounced dead, police said.

### GE spinoff to fill massive order for turbines

**NM** ALBUQUERQUE — A spinoff of General Electric will be building hundreds of turbines for what will be the largest wind project in the Western Hemisphere, part of a massive equipment order and long-term service agreement with global renewable energy giant Pattern Energy.

GE Vernova officials announced the agreement Tuesday, saying it represents the largest onshore wind turbine order received by the company both in quantity and in the amount of electricity that the 674 turbines will eventually generate when the SunZia Wind Project comes

online in 2026.

Construction is already underway on the SunZia wind farm and an associated multi-billion-dollar transmission line that will funnel power to populated markets in the western U.S. Pattern Energy just weeks ago announced that it had closed on \$11 billion in financing for the projects.

### Bond at \$1M for man charged with firing shots

**TN** MEMPHIS — A judge on Monday declined to reduce a \$1 million bond for a man charged with shooting at a contractor at a Jewish school in Memphis, after his attorney requested a lower amount to allow him to secure his release and get proper mental health treatment outside of jail.

Shelby County Judge James Jones Jr. maintained the bond amount after new details emerged during a court hearing about the day authorities said Joel Bowman went to the school he had previously attended with a gun. Witness testimony revealed he went to the home and office of his former school basketball coach, and to another school, on the day of the shooting.

Bowman, 33, has pleaded not guilty to charges including attempted second-degree murder, carrying a weapon on school property and aggravated burglary.

Authorities said Bowman was armed when he went to Margolin Hebrew Academy-Feinstein Yeshiva of the South on July 31, but he was denied entry.

Police said Bowman walked around the exterior of the

school and fired two shots at a contractor, who was not hit. Bowman then fired two more shots outside the school before driving away, police said.

### Woman pleads guilty after helping kill teen

**IL** CHICAGO — A 29-year-old Chicago woman has pleaded guilty to first-degree murder after authorities said she helped her mother kill a pregnant teenager whose baby was cut from her womb.

Desiree Figueroa's plea was made Monday at the Leighton Criminal Court Building. It stipulates that she testify against her mother, Clarisa Figueroa, whose first-degree murder trial is scheduled to start later this month, the Chicago Tribune reported.

The plea deal calls for Desiree Figueroa to receive 30 years in prison.

Prosecutors have said Clarisa Figueroa strangled 19-year-old Marlen Ochoa-Lopez with a cable on April 23, 2019, after she was lured to the Figueroa's home with the promise of free clothing for her unborn child. Ochoa-Lopez was nine months pregnant. Clarisa Figueroa then called 911, saying she had given birth and the child was not breathing.

The child died about two months later.

### Montana governor buys mansion, will donate it

**MT** HELENA — Montana's Gov. Greg Gianforte and first lady Susan Gianforte have purchased a historic Helena mansion for \$4 million that they eventually

plan to donate to the state for use as the governor's mansion, the governor's office announced Monday.

Gianforte, a Republican, is a multimillionaire who founded a cloud computing company that sold to Oracle in 2011 in a \$1.5 billion deal.

The Gianfortes purchased the home last week and it will be their primary residence in Helena, his office said.

### Students rally at Capitol after school shooting

**IA** DES MOINES — This year's Iowa legislative session kicked off Monday with student protesters filling the Capitol rotunda to call for stricter gun laws just days after a school shooting in Perry, Iowa, that left one 11-year-old boy dead and seven other people wounded.

High school and college students in the Des Moines area walked out of classes and came to the Iowa Capitol, where a couple hundred people rallied in response to last week's shooting about 40 miles northwest of Des Moines. Students were joined by parents, activists and Democratic legislators just hours after the 2024 session officially began.

Chloe Gayer, a student at Drake University from Ankeny, helped high school students organize the walkout to "send a message" to Iowa lawmakers.

"In the last few years, we've seen Iowa lawmakers gut safety legislation that we have in this state, and we want to show that that's not acceptable," Gayer said. "This is not going to be our reality."

— From wire reports

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# Steelers sticking with QB Rudolph for playoffs

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Mason Rudolph's unlikely renaissance will continue into the playoffs.

Pittsburgh Steelers coach Mike Tomlin said he is sticking with the former third-string quarterback ahead of a trip to AFC East champion Buffalo (11-6) on Sunday.

Rudolph is 3-0 as a starter since taking over for an ineffective Mitch Trubisky before a game against Cincinnati on Dec. 23. While starter Kenny Pickett has fully recovered from right ankle surgery in early December, Tomlin doesn't want to chance derailing the rhythm Pittsburgh's offense has found under Rudolph.

The Steelers (10-7) have averaged 27 points since Rudolph took over, a full 10 points more than they had been averaging during a sometimes rocky sea-

son that included a 1-4 stretch from mid-November to mid-December that dropped Pittsburgh out of playoff position. The move to Rudolph — languishing at the bottom of the depth chart for the past two seasons — in search of a “spark” turned into one of the league's more unlikely success stories.

Rudolph has thrown for 719 yards and three touchdowns without an interception while leading the Steelers to wins over the Bengals, Seattle and Baltimore as Pittsburgh slipped past several teams to reach the playoffs for the 11th time in Tomlin's 17-year tenure.

“We're simply staying with the hot hand and not disrupting the apple cart,” Tomlin said Tuesday. “We've been in some tough circumstances. He's delivered, we've delivered.”

Rudolph has had a quarter-

back rating of 112 or higher since becoming the starter and expertly navigated the elements during a driving rain in Baltimore last Saturday, completing 90% (18 of 20) of his passes and hitting Diontae Johnson for a go-ahead, 71-yard touchdown early in the fourth quarter.

“He's making good decisions,” Tomlin said. “He's working hard from a preparation standpoint and that preparedness is showing. There's a cumulative body of work to speak to. Mason's been here a long time, and I think that's a component of it as well.”

Rudolph, drafted by the Steelers in 2018, is on a one-year deal. It's too soon to tell what this rise over the past month means for his career going forward and Tomlin cautioned against reading too

much into the fact that he remains, at least on paper, third on the depth chart behind Pickett and Trubisky.

“We're going about our business cultivating a plan to win this week,” Tomlin said. “We care less about division of labor in terms of pieces of paper and depth charts and so forth.”

While Rudolph is in, star outside linebacker T.J. Watt is out. The NFL sack leader injured his left knee in the second half against the Ravens. Rookie Nick Herbig and veteran Markus Golden will fill in for Watt as the Steelers try to win a post-season game for the first time since beating Kansas City in the divisional round of the 2016 playoffs.

“You've got a few lines in the water when you're trying to replace a guy like TJ,” Tomlin said.

# Reid, Chiefs ready for frigid contest against Dolphins

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Coach Andy Reid was asked what impact a frigid forecast might have for Saturday night's wild-card playoff game between the Chiefs and Dolphins, and whether Kansas City would try to acclimatize by practicing outside this week.

Reid looked out a nearby window Tuesday and saw the 6 inches of snow that had blanketed the ground.

“We probably won't go out today,” he replied, “but there's a good chance tomorrow.”

The weather doesn't figure to be much better Wednesday, or the rest of the week for that matter. There is more snow coming late in the week, and then comes the bitter cold: The high temperature Saturday could struggle to reach double digits, and by the time the game is kicked off long after darkness sets in, the wind chill is expected to be well below zero.

Could that be an advantage for the Chiefs, who have played in similarly cold conditions plenty of times over the years, given that the Dolphins will spend the week practicing in 70-degree temps in South Florida?

“You can't bank on that. That's where you

get into trouble,” Reid said. “We're not having a snowball fight.”

Perhaps the Dolphins would fare better in one of those.

They have lost 10 straight when the temperature is 40 degrees or colder, and by an average of 17 points. And the forecast for their playoff game against Kansas City calls for temps to be 40 degrees below that point, with wind whipping from every angle through Arrowhead Stadium and accumulated snowfall certain to make it feel that much colder.

“A lot of people don't want to get hit, or hit in cold weather. It hurts a little more,” admitted Dolphins linebacker David Long, who grew up in the cold weather in Cincinnati. “And that's when you see what types of players you have on your team. How much do you love it? How much do you want to get to that certain point as a team?”

Long may be accustomed to the snow and cold. Same with Dolphins wide receiver Tyreek Hill, who played his first six seasons in Kansas City, and will be returning to Arrowhead Stadium for the first time since he was traded away two years ago.

That may not be the case for Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa, who grew up

in Hawaii and played college ball at Alabama.

“I don't think it means that we are soft or scared of the elements, just because the weather is better down here,” said Dolphins tight end Durham Smythe, a Pennsylvania native who played at Notre Dame.

“The guys in that locker room, obviously we come from all over, too. It's not like we all lived here in Miami our entire lives. We've dealt with elements before.”

Not particularly well, though. The Dolphins' cold weather losing streak began with a loss to Pittsburgh in 2017, when it was a balmy 17 degrees at kickoff. It continued through games in Buffalo, Cleveland, Green Bay and, yes, Kansas City, where the Chiefs beat the Dolphins 29-13 on Christmas Eve in 2017 when it was a mere 23 degrees at the start of the game.

As for Tagovailoa, the Miami quarterback is winless in four games when the temp is 45 degrees or lower.

“If we're playing in any playoff game that isn't at home,” Dolphins coach Mike McDaniell observed, “it probably will be cold. It will be the same for both teams. For us and for the individuals in the locker room, I know they will not use that as an excuse.”



# Lightning's Cooper gets 500th victory

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Nick Perbix scored 2:03 into overtime and the Tampa Bay Lightning rallied from two goals down in the third period to beat the slumping Los Angeles Kings 3-2 on Tuesday night.

Jon Cooper became the third-fastest NHL coach to win 500 games. Scotty Bowman (825) and Bruce Boudreau (837) were the only ones to get there faster than Cooper's 839 games. Cooper is the fastest to do it with one franchise, and 29th overall to reach the milestone.

Montreal coach Toe Blake had held the mark for fastest to 500 wins with one team, coming in 911 games.

Perbix ended a 40-game goal drought with his game-winner.

Tyler Motte and Brandon Hagel also scored for the Lightning.

Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 20 shots and is 10-9-0 since returning from back surgery.

Phillip Danault and Matt Roy had the Los Angeles goals. Cam Talbot made 26 saves for the Kings, who have lost six in a row (0-3-3).

**Panthers 5, Blues 1:** Matthew Tkachuk scored his fifth career hat trick to help visiting Florida beat St. Louis for its eighth straight victory.

Brayden Schenn scored and Joel Hofer made 26 saves for the Blues.

**Kraken 5, Sabres 2:** Alex Wennberg, Jaden Schwartz and Matty Beniers scored in the second period as visiting Seattle pulled away from Buffalo for its seventh consecutive win.

Jeff Skinner and Alex Tuch scored for the Sabres. Devon Levi stopped 21 shots.

**Maple Leafs 7, Sharks 1:** Mitchell Marner had two goals and two assists as host Toronto won its fourth straight and handed San Jose its 12th consecutive defeat.

Henry Thrun had the lone goal for San Jose.

**Canucks 5, Islanders 2:** Filip Hronek and Quinn Hughes scored first-period goals and Casey DeSmith made 17 saves as visiting Vancouver defeated New York to complete a three-game sweep of the area teams.

Brock Nelson scored both goals for the Islanders.

**Jets 5, Blue Jackets 0:** Cole Perfetti scored twice and Connor Hellebuyck made 29 saves as host Winnipeg blanked Columbus to match a franchise record with its seventh consecutive victory.

Daniil Tarasov stopped 18

shots for the Blue Jackets.

**Oilers 2, Blackhawks 1:** Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl scored as visiting Edmonton extended its winning streak to eight games with a victory over Chicago.

Jason Dickinson scored his team-high 14th goal for the Blackhawks.

**Coyotes 4, Bruins 3 (OT):** Nick Schmaltz scored with 56 seconds left on the clock in overtime to lift host Arizona over Boston.

**Ducks 5, Predators 3:** Troy Terry scored one goal and assisted on another, Lukas Dostal made 39 saves and visiting Anaheim defeated Nashville.

**Flames 6, Senators 3:** Yegor Sharangovich and Blake Coleman each scored twice and host Calgary posted four unanswered goals in the third period to defeat Ottawa.

# Chance of Michigan repeat hinges on player decisions

Associated Press

HOUSTON — After winning its first national championship in 26 years, Michigan heads into an uncertain future.

Who stays, who goes and is a repeat possible in an expanded and loaded Big Ten that will include the Washington team the Wolverines beat 34-13 in the national championship game?

The biggest question after Michigan wrapped up a 15-0 season is the status of coach Jim Harbaugh. The ninth-year coach has led his alma mater to three straight Big Ten titles and College Football Playoff appearances and is the top target for NFL teams with head coach openings. Harbaugh has not commented about his intentions.

Several players also are considering whether to enter the NFL Draft or return to school with NCAA sanctions possibly coming.

Third-year quarterback J.J.

McCarthy is widely projected to be a late first-round pick if he decides to declare. Fourth-year running back Blake Corum strongly considered entering the draft a year ago and indicated Tuesday he would move on after being named offensive player of the game Monday night.

Receiver Roman Wilson and four of the five starting offensive linemen also have decisions to make.

The Wolverines' defense led the nation in fewest points and yards allowed per game and could lose as many as eight starters depending on how many choose to declare.

One who will return is second-year cornerback Will Johnson, the defensive player of the game Monday. He said there is enough talent waiting in the wings to make Michigan a factor again.

"We had a great group of guys that will be back next year

that are super talented in my class, and other guys that will come back, too," he said. "So I'm just ready to keep enjoying this while I can and get back to work whenever we get started again."

Odds makers aren't forecasting a repeat for the Wolverines. FanDuel Sportsbook on Tuesday listed them as the fifth betting choice behind Georgia, Alabama, Ohio State and Texas.

"I definitely think the guys will run it back," Corum said. "They know what it takes. They know what it's like. And something Coach Harbaugh always says is don't get a big head. And none of the guys on the team will have a big head after this win."

Harbaugh repeated his post-game comment about why his players didn't become distracted by off-field matters. Harbaugh twice served three-game suspensions, the first imposed by the school for recruiting vio-

lations and the second by the Big Ten for the sign-stealing scheme that hung over the program all season. The NCAA continues to investigate both cases.

"We knew we were innocent," he said. "We stood tall, upright and innocent."

Harbaugh also used what might have been his final news conference as Michigan's coach to reiterate his belief that college athletes deserve to share in the revenue they help generate.

"We're all robbing the same train," he said. "And the ones that are in the position to do the heavy lifting, the ones that risk life and limb out there on the football field are the players. And not just football players, student-athletes. The organizations are fighting hard to keep all the money — the universities, the NCAA, the conferences. It's long past time to let the student-athletes share in the ever-increasing revenues."

# Last unbeaten, Houston falls at Iowa St.

Associated Press

AMES, Iowa — Tamin Lipsey scored 14 points, freshman Milan Momcilovic made a baseline jumper with 30.2 seconds left and Iowa State beat No. 2 Houston 57-53 on Tuesday night to knock off the nation's final unbeaten team.

Iowa State forward Hason Ward made two free throws with 1:20 remaining, but he was whistled for a lane violation on the second free throw to keep the lead at 53-51.

Houston's Jamal Shead split a double team and made a jumper with 55.9 seconds left to tie it at 53-all.

After an Iowa State (12-3, 1-1 Big 12) timeout, Momcilovic spun away from a double team and sank a jumper from a difficult angle for a 55-53 lead. He then hit a pair of free throws.

Emanuel Sharp scored 20 points for Houston (14-1, 1-1), which had its 12-game road winning streak snapped.

Iowa State secured its seventh win against a top-10 opponent in the last two seasons — the most in Division I.

**Nebraska 88, No. 1 Purdue 72:** Keisei Tominaga scored 19 points to lead the Cornhuskers, who opened an 11-point halftime lead then held off two second-half surges to upset the visiting Boilermakers.

Nebraska (13-3, 3-2 Big Ten)

last defeated a No. 1 team 41 years ago, when it beat Missouri 67-51. The Huskers' last win over a No. 1 in Lincoln was a 74-73 victory over Michigan in 1962.

Nebraska built its halftime lead by holding Purdue scoreless for the final 3½ minutes of the first half, scoring 13 unanswered in a run that began with two 3-pointers by Tominaga and ended with seven straight from Sam Hoiberg.

Reink Mast had 18 points for Nebraska, Wilcher scored 16 and Juwan Gray finished with 12.

Mason Gillis led Purdue (14-2, 3-2) with 16 points, Zach Edey had 15 points and Fletcher Loyer had 13.

**No. 6 Kentucky 90, Missouri 77:** Rob Dillingham scored 23 points off the bench, Tre Mitchell had 20 points and 14 rebounds, and the host Wildcats beat the Tigers for their sixth consecutive victory.

Noah Carter had 20 points, Sean East II added 19 and Tamar Bates scored 18 for Missouri, which lost for the fifth time in six games.

**No. 11 Duke 75, Pittsburgh 53:** Kyle Filipowski scored 26 points on 11-for-12 shooting and grabbed 10 rebounds as the visiting Blue Devils raced to a massive first-half lead and cruised past the Panthers for their sev-

enth straight victory.

Duke (12-3, 3-1 ACC) made quick work of Pitt (10-6, 1-3), overwhelming the Panthers during the opening 20 minutes under a barrage of 3-pointers — including three from Filipowski — while building a 25-point lead that Pitt never came close to threatening.

**No. 15 Baylor 81, No. 18 BYU 72:** Jalen Bridges scored 17 of his 25 points after halftime as the host Bears rallied from a nine-point deficit to beat the Cougars.

Ja'Kobe Walter added 16 points for Baylor (13-2, 2-0 Big 12) and Langston Love had 15, including a couple of second-half 3-pointers and two free throws with 54 seconds left after BYU coach Mark Pope was called for a technical foul.

Spencer Johnson and Trevin Knell each had 15 points for BYU (12-3, 0-2). Dallin Hall scored 13.

**No. 16 Auburn 66, Texas A&M 55:** Jaylin Williams scored 22 points and the host Tigers didn't give up a field goal in the final nine minutes to defeat the Aggies.

Williams' 3-pointer from the top of the key beat the shot-clock with 52 seconds left and sealed an eighth straight win for Auburn (13-2, 2-0 Southeastern Conference).

**Boise State 65, No. 17 Col-**

**orado State 58:** O'Mar Stanley scored 17 points and grabbed 11 rebounds, and Tyson Degenhart and Chibuzo Agbo added 13 points each to lead the host Broncos to a win over the Rams.

**No. 19 San Diego State 81, San Jose State 78:** Jaedon LeDee had 31 points and 10 rebounds, and the visiting Aztecs held off the Spartans for their seventh straight win.

**No. 20 Utah State 83, Wyoming 59:** Great Osobor scored 20 points, Darius Brown II added 13 points and a season-high tying 11 assists and the host Aggies beat the Cowboys to stretch the nation's longest active winning streak to 14 games.

**No. 22 Creighton 84, DePaul 58:** Baylor Scheierman and Ryan Kalkbrenner each scored 20 points, and the visiting Bluejays pounded the Blue Demons for their third consecutive win.

Trey Alexander added 17 points for Creighton (12-4, 3-2 Big East), which appears to be back on track after a tough stretch of three losses in four games.

**No. 25 Texas 74, Cincinnati 73:** Dylan Disu scored a career-high 33 points and Max Abmas hit a go-ahead jumper with eight seconds remaining to help the visiting Longhorns beat the Bearcats.

Abmas scored 15 points for Texas (12-3, 1-1 Big 12).

# Kings overcome rough first quarter to dump Pistons

Associated Press

DETROIT — Domantas Sabonis scored 37 points, and had 13 assists and 10 rebounds, to help the Sacramento Kings to a roller-coaster 131-110 victory over the Detroit Pistons on Tuesday.

The Kings trailed by 20 points in the first quarter, led by 15 in the third, let the Pistons tie the game in the fourth and then pulled away down the stretch. Keegan Murray added 32 points and De'Aaron Fox 26.

"I thought our defense was great after the first quarter — we gave up 47 points in the first and only 45 in the entire second half,"

Kings coach Mike Brown said. "Offensively, I think we were really good as well. We had 39 assists on 54 buckets. That's big time."

Detroit (3-34) has lost five straight since snapping its NBA-record, 28-game losing streak.

**Lakers 132, Raptors 131:** Anthony Davis scored 20 of his 41 points in a brilliant fourth quarter, and host Los Angeles held off Toronto to win back-to-back games for the first time in a month.

LeBron James had 22 points and 12 assists for the Lakers, who went 3-10 immedi-

ately after winning the inaugural NBA In-Season Tournament in December.

**Knicks 112, Trail Blazers 84:** OG Anunoby scored 23 points, his most since joining his new team, and host New York won its fifth in a row since he joined the lineup with a victory over Portland.

**Timberwolves 113, Magic 92:** Karl-Anthony Towns scored 23 of his 28 points in the first half and visiting Minnesota led from start to finish in a win over Orlando.

**Grizzlies 120, Mavericks 103:** Desmond Bane scored 32 points to lead injury-riddled Memphis to a win at Dallas.