

2 SEALs missing off coast of Somalia

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

Two Navy SEALs still are missing in the Gulf of Aden more than two days after conducting nighttime operations off the coast of Somalia.

The incident happened Thursday as the SEALs were attempting to board a suspicious vessel in rough seas, The Associated Press reported Saturday, citing unnamed U.S. officials.

One SEAL was attempting to

board the vessel when they were knocked off by high waves, AP reported. The other SEAL jumped into the sea to rescue their team member, according to the AP report.

Search and rescue efforts are ongoing in the Gulf of Aden, where the waters are warm, AP reported.

U.S. Central Command confirmed in a statement on Friday that the sailors were missing but did not offer additional details

out of operational security concerns and respect for the families. The statement did not say what Navy ships or other U.S. military personnel may have been involved.

It wasn't clear why the vessel drew the team's attention. Naval forces in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations regularly conduct operations intercepting weapons being sent to Iranian-backed Houthi militants.

In January 2023, Navy forces

intercepted 2,116 AK-47 rifles from a vessel in the Gulf of Oman along a maritime route from Iran to Yemen, Stars and Stripes reported at the time.

That incident came after similar interdictions in late 2022 that resulted in the seizures of over 170 tons of potentially explosive chemicals and 50 tons of ammunition rounds, fuses and rocket propellants from fishing vessels also transiting in the same area.

US, Britain face war-tested foe in Yemen's Houthis

The Washington Post

President Joe Biden said U.S.-led strikes on Houthi militants across Yemen sent "a clear message" that the United States would not tolerate attacks on its personnel or commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

But analysts say the assault early Friday, which the Houthis said killed five people, played directly into the hands of a battle-tested militant group whose standing in the region has only been enhanced.

In the aftermath of the U.S. and British strikes on dozens of Houthi positions, the movement was defiant. Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree said the long-threatened operation would not go unanswered.

Nor, he said, would it deter the militants from continuing to attack freighters and the warships that now escort them through the region — action that the Houthis say they are taking to end Israel's siege of the Gaza Strip.

That defiance, analysts say, is more than just bluster. The Houthis, targets of a years-long

Saudi-led bombing campaign, have proved their ability to absorb such strikes. Friday's attack provided them an opportunity to elevate their status among the constellation of Iranian-backed groups in the Middle East and among people, in the Arab world and beyond, desperate for any sign of resistance to Israel's military campaign in Gaza.

U.S. and British leaders described the attacks as a success. But analysts say they lay bare a U.S. failure to contain the regional fallout from the Israeli offensive in Gaza — an operation that the White House has backed — and Yemen's enduring civil conflict.

The West, particularly the United States, has been looking for "quick solutions to long, ongoing conflicts" in the Middle East, said Baraa Shibani, an associate fellow of the London-based Royal United Services Institute.

"There has been a lack of strategic thinking," he said, including on Yemen, and a failure to invest the kind of attention

that might have produced an alternative to the dominance of the Houthis.

Laurent Bonnefoy, a researcher who studies Yemen at Sciences Po in Paris, said the strikes were what the Houthis were "looking for."

"They are gaining what they want, which is to appear as the boldest regional player when it comes to confronting the international coalition, which is largely in favor of Israel and does not care for people in Gaza," he said. "This generates some form of support for them, internationally as well as internally."

If the United States intervened on behalf of Israel, the Houthis warned after Oct. 7, they would retaliate. That month, the militants fired their first salvo: cruise missiles aimed at Israel.

They were shot down by a U.S. Navy destroyer. Since early November, the group has launched more than two dozen attacks on ships in the Red Sea.

The United States and Britain were supported in Friday's air-

strikes by Canada, Australia, the Netherlands and just one Arab country: Bahrain. Several governments expressed misgivings or condemned the assault. Saudi Arabia, a close U.S. partner in the region that's trying to conclude a peace deal with the Houthis, warned of the risks of escalation.

The Saudi Foreign Ministry said it was "closely monitoring" developments "with great concern."

Badr Albusaidi, the foreign minister of neighboring Oman, said the strikes went "against our advice and will only add fuel to an extremely dangerous situation."

"I urge all parties to exercise restraint and focus on a ceasefire in Gaza now," he wrote on X, formerly Twitter. Humanitarian and aid organizations also expressed concern.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the aim of the strikes was to "disrupt and degrade the Houthis' capabilities." But analysts say it would be difficult to accomplish even that goal.

Notification bill follows Austin health matter

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers in the House are seeking to amend federal law to prevent the delays and lack of transparency that left top U.S. officials unaware of Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's recent hospitalization for days.

A bill introduced last week by Reps. Jen Kiggans, R-Va., and Don Davis, D-N.C., both members of the House Armed Services Committee, would require all members of the National Security Council to provide notification within 24 hours of any planned or emergency medical incapacitation.

The council assists the president with national security and foreign policy decisions and includes the defense secretary as a member.

"At a time when our nation is facing threats around the world, we cannot afford for those who are critical to America's national security to disappear without explanation and a

clear delegation of their consequential responsibilities," said Kiggans, a former Navy helicopter pilot.

Agencies that fail to notify the president's office, the nation's comptroller general and both chambers of Congress would be required to submit a comprehensive report explaining the notification failure within 30 days, according to the bill. The proposed bill would serve as an amendment to the Federal Vacancies Reform Act, which establishes requirements for temporarily filling vacant positions in top government posts.

The newly introduced legislation is the latest congressional response to the Pentagon's handling of Austin's ongoing hospitalization at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., for complications from prostate cancer surgery.

The White House was not told of Austin's early December diagnosis or his late December surgery, which required him to go under general anesthesia, until last week. Austin's

hospitalization on Jan. 1 was not disclosed to top Pentagon officials, the White House, lawmakers or the public for several days.

"Congress must require National Security Council agencies to provide a notice of the incapacitation of its agency head within 24 hours," said Davis, an Air Force veteran. "We owe this to the American people."

Seven other lawmakers, all of them Republicans, are also cosponsoring the bill.

The House Armed Services Committee has launched an official inquiry into what went wrong in Austin's case while its Senate counterpart delivered a letter Thursday urging the Pentagon to review its notification procedures.

Austin remains hospitalized in good condition with no date set for his release, Pentagon spokesman Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said in a statement Saturday, according to Bloomberg News. Austin, 70, is in contact with senior staff and "continues to monitor DOD's day-to-day operations worldwide."

Search called off for last missing Osprey crewman

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force has called off search efforts for the only missing crew member from a CV-22 Osprey that crashed off the southern Japan coast more than a month ago.

For 44 days, U.S. and Japanese military search teams scoured more than 23,000 square miles of ocean surface and 15 square miles of ocean floor without finding the body of Maj. Eric "Doc" Spendlove, Air Force Special Operations Command said in a news release Thursday.

More than 1,000 U.S. and Japanese personnel, using 46 aircraft, 23 vessels and 21 unmanned aerial and underwater systems, had exhausted "all identified possible options" to recover Spendlove, Rear Adm. Jeromy Williams, head of Special Operations Command Pacific, said in the release.

Williams expressed a "deep regret" for being unable to find Spendlove, but said it was "inspiring to see the lengths our forces will go in order to attempt to bring a teammate home."

Spendlove, 36, of St. George, Utah, was a flight surgeon and medical operations flight commander aboard the Osprey that crashed Nov. 29 during a routine training operation. The tiltrotor went down off the coast of Yakushima, an island south of Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands.

"Our main priority since the mishap has been locating and bringing our Heroes back to their families," Williams said.

The remains of seven other crew members were recovered between Nov. 29 and Dec. 10.

Preliminary findings determined the crash was likely the result of equipment failure, not human error.

Okinawans bring 'anger' to protest Marine runway

BY MARI HIGA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP SCHWAB, Okinawa — Close to 1,000 people gathered Friday outside the Camp Schwab Marine Corps base to protest construction for creating a military runway from reclaimed sea bottom.

Several citizens' groups opposed to the continuing presence of U.S. military bases rallied at 10 a.m. during the protest organized by All Okinawa. About 10 speakers expressed their dissatisfaction with the Japanese government's approval of a modified construction plan over the objections of Okinawa's governor.

Hiroji Yamashiro, of the Okinawa Peace Activity Center, shouted through a microphone to say Tokyo is not qualified to decide the airfield question. He also said the citizens' effort is successfully delaying its construction.

"It is impossible to complete

this base," he said. "They won't be able to landfill the water as deep as [328 feet], not even in 100 years."

The runway is being built on reclaimed land in Oura Bay in the rural Henoko area to replace Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in densely populated Ginowan.

Work started Wednesday on the beleaguered project after a Japanese Cabinet minister, acting on a court decision in Tokyo's favor, approved permits for design changes blocked by Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki.

Tetsuo Saito, minister of land, infrastructure, transport and tourism, approved the permits Dec. 28 after a protracted legal contest with Tamaki, who ignored a Dec. 25 court-imposed deadline to approve the permits himself.

The project, originally slated for completion by 2014, will now take until at least 2032 and cost the Japanese government \$6.9 billion, at last estimates.

Audit: \$1B in materiel to Kyiv not fully tracked

By **DOUG G. WARE**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — More than \$1 billion in military weapons and equipment the United States has provided Ukraine to fight invading Russian forces cannot be accounted for and is not being fully tracked, according to a Pentagon audit released Thursday.

Since the Russian invasion in February 2022, Ukraine has been given roughly \$45 billion in U.S. military aid that has included a wide range of weapons such as air-defense systems, anti-drone systems, various missiles and rockets and small-arms ammunition. The Defense Department inspector general

concluded in the report that about \$1 billion in weapons which are required to be tracked have not been.

“High rates of delinquency may correlate with an inability to maintain complete accountability of the ... defense articles, which, in turn, may increase the risk of theft or diversion,” the 92-page report states. “Achieving a complete picture of [the] defense articles in Ukraine will be difficult as the inventory continues to change, and accuracy and completeness will likely only become more difficult over time as the total number of ... defense articles in Ukraine continues to change.”

The weapons audit comes at a

time when Congress is debating whether to send more military aid to Ukraine. Almost all previously authorized money for providing weapons and equipment to Ukraine has been spent, and President Joe Biden is asking Congress for tens of billions more for 2024 as part of a supplemental funding request. But no new aid money has been approved.

The report, which is partly redacted, does not say exactly how many weapons have not been tracked. The New York Times, however, wrote that the total is about 40,000, citing the unredacted report. The audit said there’s no indication yet that any of the weapons have been

stolen or intercepted.

“It was beyond the scope of our evaluation to determine whether there has been diversion of such assistance,” according to the report.

The untracked weapons are subject to what the Pentagon calls enhanced end-use monitoring requirements. Equipment that falls under the EEUM category requires heightened accountability and security due to its sensitive technology and smaller size, which makes it more appealing to arms traffickers.

The report issued Thursday said the U.S. had given Ukraine about \$1.7 billion in EEUM-designated weapons by mid-2023.

War of words for China, Taiwan after elections

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — A war of words erupted the day after Taiwan’s presidential and parliamentary elections, with Taiwan on Sunday accusing China of making “fallacious comments” and China criticizing the United States for congratulating the winner.

The verbal sparring highlighted the seemingly intractable divide over Taiwan’s fate, a major flashpoint in U.S.-China relations that risks leading to an actual war in the future.

The victory of Lai Ching-te in Saturday’s election was a setback for China’s efforts to bring Taiwan under its control. His Democratic Progressive Party has advocated maintaining the status quo, in which Taiwan governs itself but refrains from declar-

ing formal independence — a move that could trigger a Chinese military response. China, meanwhile, has called for what it terms a “peaceful reunification,” but that seems increasingly unrealistic as most Taiwanese have come to oppose becoming part of China.

Taiwan said as much, taking issue with China over its often-repeated line that Taiwan is a domestic Chinese issue. China regards the island of 23 million people as a renegade province and has said it should not have its own president or official relations with foreign governments.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement on the election that “the Taiwan question is China’s internal affair” and “the basic fact that ... Taiwan is part of China will not change.”

Taiwan said that statement “is completely inconsistent with international understanding and the current cross-strait situation. It goes against the expectation of global democratic communities and goes against the will of the people of Taiwan to uphold democratic values. Such cliches are not worth refuting.”

The U.S., in a statement attributed to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, congratulated Lai on his victory and said it looks forward to working with all of Taiwan’s leaders “to advance our shared interests and values.” It congratulated the people of Taiwan for demonstrating the strength of their democracy, a nod to the Biden administration’s efforts to find common ground with other democracies in the face of China’s rise.

N. Korea test fires missile which could reach Guam

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea fired a suspected intermediate-range ballistic missile into the sea Sunday, South Korea’s military said, two months after the North claimed to have tested engines for a new harder-to-detect missile capable of strik-

ing distant U.S. targets in the region.

The launch was the North’s first this year.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that it detected the launch of a ballistic missile of an intermediate-range class from the North’s capital region Sun-

day afternoon.

It said the missile flew about 620 miles before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan.

The missile is mainly designed to hit U.S. military bases in the U.S. Pacific territory of Guam, which is about 2,110 miles from Pyongyang,

the North’s capital.

With a range adjustment, the missile can also be used to attack closer targets — the U.S. military installations in Japan’s Okinawa island, according to Chang Young-keun, a missile expert at the Korea Research Institute for National Strategy in Seoul.

Pro-Palestinian protests draw thousands

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Thousands of demonstrators converged opposite the White House on Saturday to call for an end to Israeli military action in Gaza, while children joined a pro-Palestinian march through central London as part of a global day of action against the longest and deadliest war between Israel and Palestinians in 75 years.

People in the U.S. capital held aloft signs questioning President Joe Biden's viability as a presidential candidate because of his staunch support for Israel in the nearly 100-day war against Hamas. Some of the signs read: "No votes for Genocide Joe," "Biden has blood on his hands" and "Let Gaza live."

Vendors were also selling South African flags as protes-

ters chanted slogans in support of the country whose accusations of genocide against Israel prompted the International Court of Justice in the Hague, Netherlands, to take up the case.

Dan Devries, a New York resident, said he attended the protest because he wants to see a free Gaza, but that he wouldn't vote for either Biden or possible Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

"I see this war as part of the U.S.'s drive to offset its economic decline by engaging in continual war," said Devries.

Washington resident Phil Kline held up a sign calling for Pope Francis to excommunicate Biden.

"I know he's a devout Catholic. Maybe he will take this issue seriously when the pope removes him from the church.

There's no justification for bombing civilians," Kline said, though he added he still intends to vote for Biden in the November elections.

Medea Benjamin, a co-founder of anti-war group CodePink, told The Associated Press that the moniker "Genocide Joe" will stick with Biden for a certain segment of the community because of his handling of the war in Gaza.

"I think the Democrats are playing with fire in many ways — playing with fire in that they're supporting a genocide in Gaza but also playing with fire in terms of their own future," Benjamin said.

Jake and Ida Braford, a young couple from Richmond, Va., who brought their two small children to the protest, said they were unsure of whether to vote

for Biden in November.

"We're pretty disheartened," Ida Braford said. "Seeing what is happening in Gaza, and the government's actions makes me wonder what is our vote worth?"

The plight of children in the Gaza Strip was the focus of the latest London march, symbolized by the appearance of Little Amal, an 11.5-foot puppet originally meant to highlight the suffering of Syrian refugees.

The puppet had become a human rights emblem during a 4,970-mile journey from the Turkish-Syrian border to Manchester in July 2021.

Nearly two-thirds of the 23,843 people killed during Israel's campaign in Gaza have been women and children, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

Leaders ready bill to extend government funding

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders are preparing a stopgap bill to keep the federal government running into March and avoid a partial shutdown this week.

The temporary measure will run to March 1 for some federal agencies whose approved funds are set to run out Friday and extend the remainder of government operations to March 8. That's according to a person familiar with the situation and granted anonymity to discuss it.

The stopgap bill, expected to be released

Sunday, would come as House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has been under pressure from his hard-right flank in recent days to jettison a recent bipartisan spending deal with Senate Democrats. The bill would need Democratic support to pass the narrowly divided House.

Johnson insisted Friday that he is sticking with the deal he struck with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., despite pressure from some conservatives to renegotiate.

Still, in his first big test as the new leader,

he has yet to show how he will quell the revolt from his right flank that ousted his predecessor.

"Our top-line agreement remains," Johnson said Friday, referring to the budget accord reached Jan. 7.

That accord sets \$1.66 trillion in spending for the next fiscal year, with \$886 billion of the tally going to defense.

Hard-right members have criticized the deal, including several of those who helped oust Rep. Kevin McCarthy from the speaker's office last year.

US ups oversight of Boeing, plans production audits

Associated Press

The Federal Aviation Administration says it will increase oversight of Boeing and audit production of the 737 Max 9 jetliner after a panel blew off an Alaska Airlines plane in midflight this month, the latest in a string of mishaps at the troubled aircraft maker.

The FAA said Friday that it would judge whether Boeing and its parts suppliers followed approved quality procedures.

Amid reports of continued manufactur-

ing problems, the FAA also said it's reconsidering a long-standing practice of relying on employees at aircraft manufacturers to perform some safety analysis of planes. Members of Congress criticized the practice of deputizing Boeing employees as inspectors after two deadly crashes involving Boeing 737 Max 8 planes in 2018 and 2019.

"It is time to re-examine the delegation of authority and assess any associated safety risks," said new FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker. "The FAA is exploring the use of

an independent third party to oversee Boeing's inspections and its quality system."

Whitaker suggested that the FAA might find "a technical, nonprofit organization" to help oversee Boeing's work.

The agency also said it will increase monitoring of problems reported on Max 9 flights.

He told CNBC on Friday that the FAA will also step up its oversight of Spirit AeroSystems, which supplies Boeing with fuselages for the 737 Max.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

EBay fined for mailing live spiders, cockroaches

MA BOSTON — Online retailer eBay Inc. will pay a \$3 million fine to resolve criminal charges over a harassment campaign waged by employees who sent live spiders, cockroaches and other disturbing items to the home of a Massachusetts couple, according to court papers filed Thursday.

The Justice Department charged eBay with stalking and other offenses three years after the employees were prosecuted in the scheme to intimidate David and Ina Steiner. The couple produced an online newsletter called EcommerceBytes that upset eBay executives with its coverage.

Ina Steiner received harassing and sometimes threatening Twitter messages as well as dozens of strange emails from groups like an irritable bowel syndrome patient support group and the Communist Party of the United States. Along with a box of live spiders and the cockroaches, the couple had a funeral wreath, a bloody pig mask and a book about surviving the loss of a spouse show up at their door.

The harassment started in 2019 after Ina Steiner wrote a story about a lawsuit brought by eBay accusing Amazon of poaching its sellers, court records said.

Ex-leader said to violate military college's values

VT NORTHFIELD — The recently departed president of Norwich University, the country's oldest private military college, violated

the school's core guiding values and policies, according to the board of trustees.

Mark Anarumo submitted his resignation effective Jan. 4 and the board accepted it on Tuesday, trustees said.

In late November, the board was informed of some of Anarumo's actions that may have violated the school's policies, the board said. The panel launched an outside investigation and Anarumo was placed on paid leave when preliminary findings determined that he violated Norwich's core values and policies, the board said.

Judge: State can enforce ban on transgender care

AL MONTGOMERY — Alabama can begin immediately enforcing a ban outlawing the use of puberty blockers and hormones to treat transgender people under 19, a federal appeals court ruled Thursday, granting the state's request to stay a preliminary injunction that had blocked enforcement of the 2022 law.

The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals had previously ruled that the injunction should be vacated, but the decision had been effectively on hold for more than 18 months while families with transgender children asked the full appellate court to reconsider the decision. The Thursday order will allow the ban to take effect while the full court decides whether it will revisit the issue.

Meeting of Satan club at school protested

TN MEMPHIS — The first meeting of an After School Satan Club at an elementary school drew protes-

ters.

Faith and education leaders denounced plans for the club at Chimneyrock Elementary in Cordova when it was announced last month, but said they would follow the law and allow the organization hosting the club to meet.

The launch of the club Wednesday drew dozens to protest outside the school, WMC-TV reported. Charlotte Bergmann organized the protest and told the station the turnout was larger than she expected.

"What I want the school district to do is to obey the law," Bergmann said. "And allow God to take care of this because this fight is not between the school and the satanic club. This fight is between God and the satanic club, and God's going to bring it down."

After the first meeting, The Satanic Temple told WMC that "the kiddos had a great time."

A flyer about the club says The Satanic Temple is a nontheistic religion that views Satan "as a literary figure who represents a metaphorical construct of rejecting tyranny and championing the human mind and spirit."

Prisoners' bodies were missing organs, suit says

AL BIRMINGHAM — The bodies of two men who died while incarcerated in Alabama's prison system were missing their hearts or other organs when returned to their families, a federal lawsuit alleges.

The family of Brandon Clay Dotson, who died in a state prison in November, filed a federal lawsuit last month against the Alabama Department of Cor-

rections and others saying his body was decomposing and his heart was missing when his remains were returned to his family.

In a court filing in the case last week, the daughter of Charles Edward Singleton, another deceased inmate, said her father's body was missing all of his internal organs when it was returned in 2021.

Dotson, 43, was found dead on Nov. 16 at Ventress Correctional Facility. His family, suspecting foul play was involved in his death, hired a pathologist to do a second autopsy and discovered his heart was missing, according to the lawsuit. His family filed a lawsuit seeking to find out why his heart was removed and to have it returned to them.

Storm harms lighthouse that's on state's quarter

ME PORTLAND — The caretakers of part of one of Maine's most beloved lighthouses said Thursday they believe they can rebuild a portion of the structure that was damaged in a storm last week.

The strong storm that brought high winds and heavy rains badly damaged the site of Pemaquid Point Light in Bristol. The nearly 200-year-old lighthouse is featured on the state quarter and is a popular coastal destination.

The lighthouse's bell house, which dates to the 19th century, sustained the worst of the damage, and parts were reduced to a pile of bricks. It was struck by high waves and wind gusts of 79 mph, said Shelley Gallagher, beach manager for Bristol's parks and recreation department.

— From wire reports



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Mahomes, Chiefs put Dolphins on ice

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — It was so cold that Patrick Mahomes' helmet shattered on a hit. Andy Reid's mustache froze on the sideline. Fans and players alike huddled for warmth, trying their best to grit their way through the fourth-coldest game in NFL history.

The Kansas City Chiefs managed to handle the adversity well Saturday night.

Handled the Miami Dolphins quite well, too.

Mahomes threw for 262 yards, found Rashee Rice eight times for 130 yards and a touchdown, and made several daring runs for key first downs. Isiah Pacheco pounded over the frozen turf for 89 yards and another score. And the Chiefs shut down a prolific Miami offense in a 26-9 victory in the wild-card round of the playoffs.

Harrison Butker added four field goals for the reigning Super Bowl champs, who appear

to be warming up for another run.

"Guys came with that attitude, that mentality — we knew it was going to be cold," Mahomes said. "All week we were preaching, 'Let's come in there with that fire and just get after it and see what happens.'"

Meanwhile, the injury-depleted Dolphins (11-7) looked nothing like the same dynamic offense that led the league in yards. Tua Tagovailoa was pressured relentlessly by the NFL's second-ranked defense, wide receiver Tyreek Hill had a 53-yard TD catch but was otherwise shut down in his return to Kansas City, and the Dolphins finished with 264 yards in all.

They have not won at Arrowhead Stadium since Nov. 6, 2011, nor won a playoff game since Dec. 30, 2000.

"Losing is never fun, and when the stakes are higher — when it's playoff time — you

feel that maybe 10 times more," said Tagovailoa, who was just 20-for-39 for 199 yards passing with an interception. "We've got to live with that loss."

The Chiefs get to live with another win in their 15th consecutive home playoff game, not counting a trio of Super Bowls that netted them two Lombardi Trophies. But they will head to Buffalo next week if the Bills beat the Steelers on Monday in a game pushed back a day by a blizzard. Otherwise, the Chiefs will host Houston, which beat the Browns earlier Saturday.

"Everybody was out there playing for each other," Rice said. "We just put the weather to the side and knew that our opponent didn't want to be out there just as much as we didn't, and we showed our love for the game."

It was minus-4 degrees Fahrenheit at kickoff, easily setting a record for the coldest game at Arrowhead Stadium. But it was

wind gusts, whipping through at more than 25 mph and driving the wind chill to a bone-rattling minus-27 degrees, that made the weather truly miserable for just about everyone.

That included pop star Taylor Swift, who once again turned up to see her boyfriend, Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce.

She at least got to watch from an enclosed suite. Most fans bundled up outside in parkas, ski goggles and snow pants, and players huddled around heaters on the sidelines as if they were oases in the cold. The National Weather Service even issued a warning for what it called "dangerously cold" weather that had blanketed the Midwest.

In fact, the cold may have made Mahomes' helmet brittle enough that a hit in the third quarter knocked a chunk of the plastic shell from it. Once officials saw the fist-sized hole, they made Mahomes get a back-up helmet from the bench.

Stroud, Texans rout Browns to advance to next round

Associated Press

HOUSTON — As the games get bigger, C.J. Stroud just keeps getting better.

The rookie became the youngest quarterback to win a playoff game after throwing for 274 yards and three touchdowns, and the Houston Texans returned two interceptions by Joe Flacco for scores in a 45-14 rout of the Cleveland Browns in a wild-card matchup Saturday.

"C.J. is the reason why we're in this position," coach DeMeco Ryans said. "He's special, a special young man. Special player. Continues to shine no matter how big the moment is.

"Our whole team is leaning on him and he has the shoulders to carry that weight."

Stroud, the second overall pick in the draft last April, is also the highest-drafted rookie QB to

win in the postseason. He picked apart Cleveland's vaunted defense, throwing touchdown passes of 15 yards to Nico Collins, 76 to Brevin Jordan and 37 to Dalton Schultz.

"It's been a heck of a year and I thank God, I can just go another week with my teammates," Stroud said. "This is like a dream come true."

At 22 years and 102 days old, Stroud passed Michael Vick, who was 22 years, 192 days old in 2002 when his Falcons beat the Packers.

"I'm super blessed to be considered with a great name like Michael Vick, who was my favorite quarterback growing up," he said. "And hopefully I can make it two (wins)."

Stroud threw for 236 yards and three touchdowns before halftime as the Texans built a 24-

14 lead. The defense took over after that, with Steven Nelson and Christian Harris returning interceptions for touchdowns on consecutive drives in the third quarter to extend the lead to 38-14.

"It was really, really big to put up 14 points on top of what C.J. was already doing," Nelson said. "That just put the icing on the cake for us."

With the Texans up 45-14 with nine minutes to go, Stroud's work was done, and he was replaced by Davis Mills.

It's the Browns' worst postseason loss since a 34-0 thumping by the Baltimore Colts on Dec. 29, 1968.

Houston is back in the playoffs for the first time since 2019, and Stroud's stellar play and the leadership of Ryans, who's in his first year, transformed the Tex-

ans (11-7) from NFL laughing-stock to AFC South champions.

Flacco, who turns 39 on Tuesday, came off the couch to go 4-1 as a starter to end the regular season. He led the Browns (11-7) to just their third playoff appearance since their 1999 expansion rebirth, but second in four seasons under coach Kevin Stefanski.

"We picked a bad day to have a bad day," Stefanski said. "That's all of us. That's players, coaches, offense, defense, special teams. Not good enough."

Playing in his 17th postseason game but first in nine years, Flacco couldn't continue his magical run under the bright lights of the playoffs.

"It's definitely a shame the way it went down and hard to deal with at the moment," Flacco said.

Djokovic fends off first-timer Prizmic

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Until he took on defending champion Novak Djokovic at Rod Laver Arena on opening Sunday in Australia, Dino Prizmic had never played a Grand Slam match.

The 18-year-old Croatian qualifier, who was born seven months after Djokovic made his Grand Slam debut in 2005, made it last as long as he could. He unsettled the 24-time major winner before Djokovic finished off the match 6-2, 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-4.

Djokovic has developed a record at the Australian Open no man can match, with 10 titles here among his unprecedented career haul. He later said he'd been feeling "under the weather" for four or five days, but credited Prizmic's talent.

The first set played out just about as expected. From there, it became quite a ride.

Prizmic took the second set

and went up a break in the third, stunning a capacity crowd, before the world's No. 1-ranked player broke back and took the set.

Prizmic didn't give up when he trailed 4-0 in the fourth, either, saving a break point before getting a service break back. He saved three match points at 5-3 down and made Djokovic serve it out. He then saved a further two match points before it ended in 4 hours and 1 minute.

"He deserved every applause, every credit he got tonight," Djokovic said. "Amazing performance for someone that is 18 years old and never had the experience of playing on a big stage. Kudos to him."

The first of three Sundays — an extra day was introduced at Melbourne Park to try to reduce the number of post-midnight finishes — didn't have quite the desired outcome.

Fifth-seeded Andrey Rublev

needed four hours to beat Thiago Seyboth Wild 7-5, 6-4, 3-6, 4-6, 7-6 (6).

No. 12 Taylor Fritz needed a medical timeout to get his left ankle taped in the second set before he recovered to beat Facundo Diaz Acosta 4-6, 6-3, 3-6, 6-2, 6-4 in a seesawing four-hour match.

Frances Tiafoe, the 17th seed, beat Borna Coric 6-3, 7-6 (7), 2-6, 6-3 in 3½ hours and Daniel Elahi Galan needed almost five hours to beat Australia's Jason Kubler 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (3), 4-6, 7-6 (8).

Djokovic's late finish meant defending women's champion Aryna Sabalenka didn't start until 11:41 p.m. local time. The No. 2 seed didn't waste much time until right at the end, ousting 18-year-old Ella Seidel 6-0, 6-1 in 53 minutes on her seventh match point.

Women's eighth seed Maria Sakkari admitted her relief after

she beat Nao Hibino of Japan 6-4, 6-1, her first Grand Slam win since last year's Australian Open.

"I lost three first rounds in my last three Grand Slams," she said. "For me, it was a very difficult match today emotionally. I'm happy I managed to do the job right and play a good second set."

Also advancing were 2021 U.S. Open finalist Leylah Fernandez, who beat 17-year-old Sara Bejlek 7-6 (5), 6-2.

Another Russian qualifier, Maria Timofeeva had a 6-2, 6-4 win over Alize Cornet, who was appearing in a women's record 68th consecutive Grand Slam event.

Timofeeva will next face 2018 champion Caroline Wozniacki, who in her first Australian Open since becoming a mom advanced when 20th-seeded Magda Linette retired while trailing 6-2, 2-0.

Pesce helps surging Hurricanes top Penguins in OT

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Brett Pesce scored his second goal of the game at 1:41 of overtime to give the Carolina Hurricanes a 3-2 victory over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday night.

Antti Raanta made a season-high 38 saves and Jordan Martynok also scored for Carolina. The Hurricanes are 7-0-1 since the Christmas break and have at least a point in 14 of 15 games.

Pesce had scored only one goal in the first 33 games.

Jake Guentzel and Bryan Rust scored for Pittsburgh. Tristan Jarry stopped 32 shots.

Bruins 4, Blues 3 (OT): Charlie McAvoy scored his second goal in overtime and Brad Marchand added two goals, leading visiting Boston to the victory over St. Louis.

Oilers 2, Canadiens 1 (OT): Evan Bouchard scored a power-play goal 2:01 into overtime, and

visiting Edmonton beat Montreal for a franchise-record 10th consecutive victory.

Coyotes 6, Wild 0: Nick Bjugstad had his second career hat trick, Connor Ingram made 38 saves for his fifth shutout of the season and visiting Arizona routed Minnesota.

Flames 3, Golden Knights 1: Mikael Backlund had a goal and an assist, and visiting Calgary beat Vegas.

Chandler Stephenson scored for the Golden Knights, who have lost eight of 11.

Avalanche 5, Maple Leafs 3: Nathan MacKinnon broke a tie with 3:25 left and host Colorado overcame an early three-goal deficit to beat Toronto.

Senators 5, Sharks 4: Vladimir Tarasenko scored with five seconds remaining in the third period as host Ottawa snapped a five-game losing streak with a victory over San Jose.

Red Wings 5, Kings 3: Dylan Larkin had two goals and host Detroit handed Los Angeles its eighth consecutive loss.

Kraken 7, Blue Jackets 4: Jared McCann had two goals and an assist, Joey Daccord made 32 saves and visiting Seattle extended its winning streak to nine games.

Stars 3, Blackhawks 1: Mason Marchment scored with 5:06 left in regulation to snap a tie, and visiting Dallas came back with three goals in the third period to top Chicago.

Predators 3, Islanders 1: Alexandre Carrier scored with 7.9 seconds remaining in the third period to lead host Nashville over New York.

Lightning 5, Ducks 1: Steven Stamkos scored a pair of power-play goals during a 3:51 span in the second period and had an assist, NHL points leader Nikita Kucherov had three assists and

host Tampa Bay beat Anaheim.

Devils 4, Panthers 1: Nico Daws stopped 36 shots, Jesper Bratt scored for the second straight game and visiting New Jersey snapped Florida's nine-game winning streak.

Flyers 2, Jets 0: Samuel Ersson made 35 saves, Cam Atkinson scored twice to snap a 26-game goal drought and visiting Philadelphia ended NHL-leading Winnipeg's franchise-record winning and points streaks.

Canucks 1, Sabres 0: Thatcher Demko made 26 saves, Sam Lafferty scored the only goal of the game and visiting Vancouver beat Buffalo for its fifth win in a row.

Capitals 3, Rangers 2: Nic Dowd tied the game in the third period by batting the puck in out of the air, T.J. Oshie scored the go-ahead goal 1:53 later and host Washington beat New York.

Celtics win 19th consecutive home game

Associated Press

BOSTON — If Jayson Tatum wants to argue with the referees during a 30-point blowout, that's OK with Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla.

"I'm a pretty self-aware person. I understand the time and score of the game," Tatum said after he was ejected on back-to-back technical fouls in the fourth quarter of Boston's 145-113 victory over the Houston Rockets on Saturday. "The game was pretty much over. I've got to stand up for myself."

Tatum had 27 points and eight rebounds before being ejected for the second time in six weeks, and Boston remained unbeaten at home by beating the Rockets and ex-coach Ime Udoka. Jaylen Brown scored 32 points and the Celtics improved to 19-0 in the TD Garden — the first time in the histo-

ry of the much-decorated franchise that it has opened a season with more than 17 home wins in a row.

Cam Whitmore scored 22 points and Alperen Sengun had 19 points and 10 rebounds for the Rockets, who have lost three of their last four to drop their record to 19-19. They won just 22 games all last season.

Thunder 112, Magic 100: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 37 points and host Oklahoma City beat short-handed Orlando to tie Minnesota for the Western Conference lead.

Jazz 133, Lakers 123: Lauri Markkanen had 29 points, nine rebounds and five assists to lead host Utah past Los Angeles for its fifth straight victory and eighth in a row at home.

Bulls 122, Spurs 116: Nikola Vucevic had 24 points and 16 rebounds and visiting

Chicago overcame a career-high 30 points from Tre Jones to top San Antonio with rookie star Victor Wembanyama sitting out.

Pelicans 118, Mavericks 108: Rookie Jordan Hawkins scored a season-high 34 points and visiting New Orleans beat Dallas in a game in which most of both teams' regular starters weren't in uniform.

Bucks 129, Warriors 118: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 33 points and host Milwaukee used a big fourth quarter to pull away against Golden State.

Knicks 106, Grizzlies 94: Julius Randle had 24 points and 11 rebounds, OG Anunoby scored 18 points and visiting New York beat Memphis.

Wizards 127, Hawks 99: Kyle Kuzma scored 29 points and visiting Washington took advantage of Atlanta's worst offensive night this season.

Edey, 3-point shooters lift No. 1 Purdue over Penn St.

Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Purdue fans treated Zach Edey to a pregame standing ovation in commemoration of him becoming the school's second player with 1,000 career rebounds.

They serenaded him again following another milestone moment.

The reigning national player of the year scored 30 points, grabbed a season-high 20 rebounds and watched his teammates make 11 3-pointers Saturday as No. 1 Purdue routed Penn State 95-78.

"Not many people can say they've had 30 and 20 multiple times in their career at Purdue," Edey said after achieving the feat for the second time. "I do get to say that, so it's a pretty surreal feeling."

For Edey, this was as impressive a game as he's played. In the first half, he had 19 points, 13 rebounds, three assists and two blocks while going 6-for-6 from the field. He finished 10-for-12 from the field and produced just the third 30-20 game with three blocks and three rebounds.

And he had plenty of help.

The Boilermakers added

eight 3s in the first half as they took a 56-36 halftime lead. Lance Jones added 14 points, Fletcher Loyer had 11 and Braden Smith matched his career high with 11 assists.

TCU 68, No. 2 Houston 67: Emanuel Miller's layup with six seconds left lifted the host Horned Frogs to the victory, the Cougars' second straight loss to an unranked team.

No. 3 Kansas 78, No. 9 Oklahoma 66: Kevin McCullar had 15 of his 21 points in the second half as the host Jayhawks extended their winning streak over the Sooners to six games.

No. 5 Tennessee 85, Georgia 79: Dalton Knecht scored 36 points, including a go-ahead 3-pointer with less than two minutes remaining, and the visiting Volunteers recovered after losing a 14-point lead to end the Bulldogs' 10-game winning streak.

Texas A&M 97, No. 6 Kentucky 92 (OT): Wade Taylor IV scored a game-high 31 points, Tyrece Radford scored a season-high 28 and the host Aggies (10-6, 1-2 Southeastern Conference) defeated the Wildcats in overtime.

No. 7 North Carolina 103, Syracuse 67: RJ Davis scored 22 points to help the host Tar Heels race away from the Orange for the win.

Washington State 73, No. 8 Arizona 70: Isaac Jones had 24 points and 13 rebounds and the host Cougars defeated the Wildcats.

No. 11 Duke 84, Georgia Tech 79: Kyle Filipowski scored a career-high 30 points while Tyrese Proctor and Ryan Young had big second-half contributions to help the host Blue Devils hold off the Yellow Jackets, losers of five straight.

No. 15 Wisconsin 71, Northwestern 63: Max Klesmit scored a career-high 24 points and A.J. Storr added 14 to help the host Badgers hold off the Wildcats.

No. 16 Auburn 93, LSU 78: Chad Baker-Mazara had 19 points and six steals off the bench and host Auburn won its ninth straight by double digits over LSU.

No. 18 BYU 63, UCF 58: Aly Khalifa scored 17 points and the visiting Cougars held on for their first Big 12 win since joining the conference.

New Mexico 88, No. 19 San Diego State 70: Jaelen House scored 26 points, including nine straight in a 17-0 first-half run, and the host Lobos ended the Aztecs' seven-game winning streak.

No. 20 Utah State 87, UNLV 86: Great Osobor made two free throws with 8.4 seconds left to complete a five-point play and allow the visiting Aggies to escape with a victory.

No. 21 Clemson 89, Boston College 78: PJ Hall and Joe Girard III each scored 26 points to help the host Tigers (12-4, 2-3 ACC) snap a three-game Atlantic Coast Conference losing streak by beating the short-handed Eagles.

No. 22 Creighton 66, St. John's 65: Trey Alexander made the go-ahead free throws with 12.3 seconds left, and the host Bluejays ended the Red Storm's (12-5, 4-2) four-game winning streak.

West Virginia 76, No. 25 Texas 73: Pat Suemnick set career highs of 16 points and six rebounds, and the host Mountaineers built a double-digit lead and held on to beat the Longhorns.