

CBO: Navy needs billions more for ships

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The Navy will need a budget boost of at least \$85 billion annually to realize an ambitious goal to grow its fleet by nearly 100 ships over the next three decades, according to a recent Congressional Budget Office analysis.

The service would need an estimated annual budget of \$340 billion to operate, purchase and maintain a fleet of 381 battle force ships as outlined in its most current shipbuilding proposal, the CBO said in a report released Monday.

That's roughly one-third more under current valuations than the Navy's \$255 billion budget in 2024, said the CBO, which analyzed the service's 30-year shipbuilding plan submitted to Congress in March.

That plan would grow the fleet to a level not seen since 2001, according to the report. The service now has about 296 numbered battle force ships, including air-

craft carriers, destroyers, submarines and combat logistics vessels, among others.

"Over the past decade, funding for ship construction reached its highest level since the Reagan Administration's defense buildup in the 1980s," the CBO said. "Since 2015, lawmakers have appropriated an average of \$2.5 billion more per year for shipbuilding than the President has requested, partly because of concerns that the fleet is too small to perform all of its missions."

The Navy needs a larger, more flexible fleet to address growing threats in the Indo-Pacific, Europe and the Middle East, officials and naval analysts have argued.

An inadequately sized force is one reason why there are fewer Navy ships currently on patrol in the eastern Mediterranean Sea than in recent years, analysts recently told Stars and Stripes.

Presence in the Mediterranean is "partly threat-driven and

situation-driven, and it's all conditioned by (the fact that) there aren't enough ships in the Navy," said Bradley Martin, a retired Navy surface warfare officer and director of the Rand Corp. National Security Supply Chain Institute.

Under the Navy's 2025 shipbuilding plan, the service would buy fewer next-generation attack submarines and large surface ships, favoring proven current-generation submarines, destroyers and other vessels, according to the CBO report.

For example, in its 2024 plan the Navy envisioned purchasing as many as 35 next-generation attack submarines. Its 2025 proposal includes buying just 14 of them.

Instead, the service is opting to buy 36 Virginia-class fast-attack submarines in the coming decades. In 2024, the Navy said it would buy as few as 10 of those submarines.

Over the next 30 years, the Navy would buy 364 ships, or an av-

erage of about 12 annually, for an estimated \$903 billion.

That cost likely is higher — \$1.075 trillion in current-year dollars — when all expenses, such as outfitting new ships or purchasing oceanographic survey, sealift and other vessels not considered part of the battle force are included, the CBO said.

The Navy and CBO cost calculations also vary in the way they determine the design and capabilities of some future ships, as well as labor and other costs, the report stated.

The CBO cautioned that the estimates don't include costs for adding 134 surface and undersea drones in the Navy's plan, which would bring its total platforms to 515 by 2054.

The report cast doubt on the Navy's ability to achieve its acquisition goals, which also include more missiles and unmanned systems on ships to make it more difficult for an opponent to destroy the fleet's offensive capability.

Trump says Greenland, Panama Canal vital to US

Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. — President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday said he would not rule out the use of military force to seize control of the Panama Canal and Greenland, as he declared U.S. control of both to be vital to American national security.

Speaking to reporters less than two weeks before he takes office on Jan. 20 and as a delegation of aides and advisers that includes Donald Trump Jr. is in Greenland, Trump left open the use of the American military to secure both territories. Trump's intention marks

a rejection of decades of U.S. policy that has prioritized self-determination over territorial expansion.

"I'm not going to commit to that," Trump said, when asked if he would rule out the use of the military. "It might be that you'll have to do something. The Panama Canal is vital to our country."

He added, "We need Greenland for national security purposes." Greenland is an autonomous territory of Denmark, a longtime U.S. ally and a founding member of NATO.

Trump, a Republican, has also floated having Canada join

the United States, but he said he would not use military force to do that, saying he would rely on "economic force."

Earlier Tuesday, Trump told residents of Greenland that "we're going to treat you well" as his oldest son visited the mineral-rich Danish territory that's home to a large U.S. military base, heightening speculation that the incoming U.S. administration could seek to acquire it.

Trump posted a video showing a plane emblazoned with the word TRUMP landing in Nuuk, the Arctic territory's capital, in a landscape of snow-

capped peaks and fjords.

"Don Jr. and my Reps landing in Greenland," Trump wrote. "The reception has been great. They, and the Free World, need safety, security, strength, and PEACE! This is a deal that must happen. MAGA. MAKE GREENLAND GREAT AGAIN!" Supporters later posted video of Trump speaking by phone to locals.

In a statement, Greenland's government said Donald Trump Jr.'s visit was taking place "as a private individual" and not as an official visit, and Greenlandic representatives would not meet with him.

N. Korea tests a hypersonic intermediate range missile

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Tuesday its latest weapons test was a new hypersonic intermediate-range missile designed to strike remote targets in the Pacific as leader Kim Jong Un vowed to further expand his collection of nuclear-capable weapons to counter rival nations.

The North Korean state media report came a day after South Korea's military said it detected North Korea launching a missile that flew 685 miles before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. The launch, conducted weeks before Donald Trump returns as U.S. president, came off a torrid year in weapons testing.

North Korea demonstrated

multiple weapons systems last year that can target its neighbors and the United States, including solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles, and there are concerns that its military capabilities could advance further through technology transfers from Russia.

North Korea in recent years has flight tested various intermediate-range missiles, which if perfected, could reach the U.S. military hub of Guam. In recent months, North Korea has been testing combining these missiles with purported hypersonic warheads to improve their survivability.

North Korea since 2021 has been testing various hypersonic weapons designed to fly at more than five times the speed of sound. The speed and maneu-

verability of such weapons aim to withstand regional missile defense systems. However, it's unclear whether these missiles are consistently flying at the speeds the North claims.

The North's state media said Kim supervised Monday's launch, and that the weapon traveled 932 miles, during which it reached two different peaks of 62 miles and 26.4 miles and achieved a speed amounting to 12 times the speed of sound, before accurately striking a sea target.

Lee Sung Joon, spokesperson of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the South Korean military believes North Korea was exaggerating capabilities of the system, saying the missile covered less distance and that there was no second peak.

Attack kills 10 rebels in Somalia

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. forces helped evacuate Somali troops from harm's way during a recent operation against insurgents that resulted in the deaths of 10 militants from al-Shabab, U.S. Africa Command said Tuesday.

The operation, carried out on Dec. 31, comes on the heels of a separate AFRICOM airstrike that killed a top al-Shabab commander a week earlier.

The New Year's Eve strike happened in a town called Beer Xaani, which is about 20 miles northwest of an operational base used by U.S. and Somali forces in Kismayo, according to an AFRICOM statement.

On Monday, AFRICOM confirmed the Dec. 24 death of Mohamed Mire, described as a top official in the al-Qaida-aligned militant group.

In the Dec. 31 airstrike, U.S. forces also rescued Somali counterparts who were attacked while fighting the terrorist group, the AFRICOM statement said without elaborating on the evacuation.

AFRICOM did not specify what assets were involved, citing operational security. The U.S. has several hundred troops in Somalia, where they train and assist local forces.

Al-Shabab has been waging a long-running armed insurgency against Somalia's weak central government, whose military has been bolstered by U.S. troops.

Over the years, AFRICOM has carried out periodic airstrikes against militants, but the pace of those strikes has slowed. In 2020, AFRICOM conducted a record 63 strikes in the country, compared with roughly a dozen in 2024.

China sets record for vessels spotted near Japanese Senkaku island chain

Stars and Stripes

Chinese coast guard ships sailed near the Senkaku chain a record 355 times last year, as Beijing made good on its promise to increase its presence around the islands.

China topped the record it set the year before, when its vessels were spotted 352 times in the contiguous zone around the Senkakus, a territory administered by Japan, a spokesman with Japan's coast guard said by phone Tuesday.

The contiguous zone is a 24-mile-wide band beyond the 12-mile territorial limit.

Nations may exercise limited control in their contiguous zones, according to the United

Nations.

The Senkakus, also claimed by China and Taiwan, include five uninhabited islets and three reefs 105 miles east of Taiwan and 254 miles west of Okinawa.

The vessels sailed within the Senkakus' 12-mile territorial limit 39 times in 2024. The record is 52 times in 2013, the spokesman said.

Of the 2024 instances, 18 involved Chinese coast guard ships chasing Japanese fishing vessels, according to the spokesman.

Chinese vessels last intruded into territorial waters around the Senkakus on Dec. 6, according to a Japan coast guard news release that day. Four vessels

that looked to be armed with deck-mounted machine guns were spotted and warned away with radio and electronic message boards.

The Japanese government has lodged numerous protests with Beijing over the incidents, including in September when four Chinese vessels armed with what appeared to be deck-mounted machine guns crossed the 12-mile limit.

China set another record in 2023 and 2024 for consecutive days sailing within the contiguous zone near the Senkakus. Vessels were spotted for 215 straight days from Dec. 22, 2023, to July 23, the spokesman said.

President grieves with New Orleans

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — President Joe Biden told mourners in New Orleans on Monday that they are not alone as he paid tribute to victims of the deadly New Year's attack and channeled the pain felt by their loved ones.

Biden made the remarks at St. Louis Cathedral in the city's historic French Quarter, not far from the area where an Army veteran drove a truck into revelers last week, killing 14 and injuring 30 more.

Biden praised "so many that ran toward the chaos, trying to help save others," including first responders. He noted the city's enduring strength and resilience amid tragedy, invoking past devastation like Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

"The city's people get back

up," Biden said. "That's the spirit of America as well."

Biden met privately with grieving families, survivors and first responders before the prayer service. He also stopped at a makeshift memorial where the attack had begun to unfold. It is being investigated as an act of terrorism inspired by the Islamic State militant group.

Biden has made dozens of visits to sites of violence, natural disaster and other calamities during his four years in office.

In his remarks Monday, Biden alluded to the personal loss in his own life and recounted words of collective grief he's delivered time and again as president. He acknowledged the searing loss the grieving families will feel at holidays and birthdays to come, along with

the small details they will miss about their loved ones.

"We know what it's like to lose a piece of our soul. The anger. The emptiness," he said.

He told the grieving families that they will eventually reach a day when the memory of their loved ones will make them smile before it makes them cry.

"It will take time, but I promise you, it will come. I promise you," he said.

Before he met privately with the victims' families, Biden and first lady Jill Biden made their first stop in the city at a memorial that sprung up on Bourbon Street at the spot where the attack started.

Flowers and messages were left at the bases of the crosses erected on the sidewalk. After Jill Biden placed white flowers

at the memorial, she and the president stood in silence and bowed their heads.

At the public prayer service at the cathedral, a rendition of "Amazing Grace" was performed with a New Orleans jazz spin. The Bidens placed a candle at the altar. The president then returned to his seat in the front pew, shutting his eyes tight in prayer.

In New Orleans on Jan. 1, the driver plowed into a crowd on Bourbon Street. Shamsud-Din Jabbar, who steered his speeding truck around a barricade and plowed into the crowd, later was fatally shot in a firefight with police.

Jabbar, an American citizen from Texas, had posted five videos on his Facebook account in the hours before the attack in

Trump's sentencing in hush money case on track

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President-elect Donald Trump remains on track to be sentenced this week in his hush money case after a judge on Monday denied his request to halt proceedings while he appeals a ruling that upheld the historic verdict.

Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan ordered sentencing to proceed as scheduled on Friday, a little more than a week before Trump's inauguration. The judge rejected a push by Trump's lawyers to postpone it indefinitely

while they ask a state appeals court to reverse his decision last week that let the conviction stand.

Trump, on course to be the first president to take office convicted of crimes, can still ask the appeals court to delay sentencing or seek to have another court intervene. His lawyers have previously suggested taking the case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Trump's lawyers have told Merchan that if his sentencing happens, he will appear by video rather than in person. The judge had given him the option, acced-

ing to the demands of the presidential transition process.

Trump's lawyers, who are also challenging Merchan's prior refusal to toss the case on presidential immunity grounds, filed appeal paperwork Monday in the appellate division of the state's trial court.

Trump's lawyers did not immediately ask the appeals court to halt Trump's sentencing.

In a separate filing with Merchan, they argued that the appeal should automatically pause the case. If it didn't, they said he

should step in and do it himself — an idea he rejected.

Manhattan prosecutors had urged Merchan to proceed with sentencing as scheduled.

Prosecutors blamed Trump for pushing his sentencing to the brink of his second term by repeatedly seeking to postpone his sentencing, originally set for July.

"He should not now be heard to complain of harm from delays he caused," they wrote in a court filing Monday afternoon, hours before Merchan ruled.

Unpaid medical bills banned from credit reports

Associated Press

Unpaid medical bills will no longer appear on credit reports, where they can block people from mortgages, car loans or small business loans, according to a final rule announced Tuesday by the Biden administration.

The Consumer Financial Pro-

tection Bureau rule will remove \$49 billion in medical debt from the credit reports of more than 15 million Americans, according to the bureau, which means lenders will no longer be able to take that into consideration when deciding to issue a loan.

The change is estimated to

raise the credit scores by an average of 20 points and could lead to 22,000 additional mortgages being approved every year, according to the bureau. Vice President Kamala Harris said in a statement that it would be "life-changing" for millions of families. Harris also announced that

states and local governments have used a sweeping 2021 pandemic-era aid package to eliminate more than \$1 billion in medical debt for more than 700,000 Americans.

The administration announced plans for the rule in fall 2023.

Southern US to feel next round of bitter cold

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — The next round of bitter cold was set to envelop the southern United States on Tuesday, after the first significant winter storm of the year blasted a huge swath of the country with ice, snow and wind.

The immense storm system brought disruption even to areas of the country that usually escape winter's wrath, downing trees in some Southern states, threatening a freeze in Florida and causing people in Dallas to dig deep into their wardrobes for hats and gloves.

On Tuesday morning, the wind chill temperature was 16 degrees Fahrenheit at Dallas/

Fort Worth International Airport, according to the National Weather Service. A low-pressure system was expected to form as soon as Wednesday near south Texas, bringing the potential of snow to parts of the state that include Dallas, as well as to Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana.

"As we go through the next few days, we're still going to be seeing those colder-than-normal temperatures," said Peter Mullinax, a meteorologist with the weather service in College Park, Md. "We're going to see areas of snow and ice start to take shape across northern Texas, southern Oklahoma as we get into Thurs-

day morning."

Snow and ice are expected to make their way farther south into the lower Mississippi Valley, some of it "pretty disruptive," he said.

Lingering snow and ice in the central Plains through the Ohio Valley into the Atlantic is likely to stick around for a few days, Mullinax said. That will create opportunities for constant re-freezing, and black ice, which may create treacherous travel conditions in some areas for the next few days.

The polar vortex that dipped south over the weekend kept much of the country east of the Rockies in its frigid grip Monday,

making many roads treacherous, forcing school closures, and causing widespread power outages and flight cancellations. Some experts have said such cold air outbreaks are happening more frequently, paradoxically, because of a warming world.

Ice and snow blanketed major roads in Kansas, western Nebraska and parts of Indiana, where the National Guard was activated to help stranded motorists. The weather service issued winter storm warnings for Kansas and Missouri, where blizzard conditions brought wind gusts of up to 45 mph. The warnings extended to New Jersey into early Tuesday.

Death toll in Honolulu fireworks blast rises

Associated Press

HONOLULU — A 3-year-old boy who died Monday was the fourth person to succumb to injuries from a massive explosion of fireworks on New Year's Eve at a Honolulu home, and a doctor said six others faced long recoveries in Arizona, where they were sent to be treated for severe burns.

The blast also killed three women and injured more than 20 people, many of whom have burns over most of their bodies.

The Honolulu medical examiner identified the toddler as Cassius Ramos-Benigno. The cause and manner of death were listed as pending.

After the disaster, Hawaii's leaders intensified their oft-repeated calls to crack down on the state's vast illegal fireworks trade with stepped-up enforcement and greater penalties.

The U.S. military flew six of the injured to Phoenix for treatment Saturday because Hawaii's lone burn unit doesn't have enough capacity to care for all the victims.

They are all in their 20s or 30s and have extensive burns, Dr.

Kevin Foster, the director of the Arizona Burn Center, said at a news conference streamed online.

The person with the least has burns over 45% of their body while the most has burns over nearly 80% of their body. Each of the six is using a breathing tube and five are in medically induced comas.

Foster said they are all doing "very well" and have good vital signs. But it will be six months to a year before any are able to return to anything resembling a normal life, Foster said. Four patients will likely have to remain intubated and in a coma for weeks, he said.

The patients will likely suffer post-traumatic stress disorder, Foster said, adding that the burn center has two full-time psychologists and a psychiatrist hospital on staff to help them.

"There's something uniquely and particularly horrifying about being burned, especially from this type of injury," Foster said. "And we anticipate that all of these patients are going to have some adjustment issues."

Forecasters warn of fire risks with strong winds in California

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Winds began gaining strength across Southern California on Tuesday, as forecasters warned of powerful, dry gusts that could bring down trees, damage homes and bring extreme fire risk to areas that haven't seen substantial rain in months.

The National Weather Service said what could be the strongest windstorm in more than a decade would begin in the afternoon across Los Angeles and Ventura counties and peak in the early hours of Wednesday, when gusts could reach 80 mph. Isolated gusts could top 100 mph in mountains and foothills.

The weather service warned of possible downed power lines and knocked-over big rigs, trailers and motorhomes. Strong offshore gusts will also bring dangerous conditions off the coasts of Orange and Los Angeles counties, including Catalina Island, and potential delays and turbulence could arise at local airports.

Southern California Edison said it was considering preemptively cutting power starting Tuesday to more than 415,000

utility customers across seven counties. San Diego Gas & Electric said it could shut service to more than 64,000 customers. In recent years, California utilities have routinely de-energized electrical lines as a precaution against weather conditions that might damage equipment and spark a fire.

The upcoming winds will act as an "atmospheric blow-dryer" for vegetation, bringing a long period of fire risk that could extend into the more populated lower hills and valleys, according to Daniel Swain, a climate scientist with the University of California, Los Angeles and the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

"We really haven't seen a season as dry as this one follow a season as wet as the previous one," Swain said during a Monday livestream.

Southern California hasn't seen more than 0.1 inches of rain since early May. Much of the region has fallen into moderate drought conditions, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. Meanwhile, up north, there have been multiple drenching storms.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man trapped in circling Waymo misses his flight

CA LOS ANGELES — A Los Angeles man said he recently missed his flight home after getting trapped on his way to the airport in a Waymo that wouldn't stop making circles in a parking lot.

L.A. tech entrepreneur Mike Johns posted a video three weeks ago on LinkedIn of his call to a customer service representative for Waymo to report that the car kept turning in circles and that he was nervous about missing his flight.

"I got a flight to catch. Why is this thing going in a circle? I'm getting dizzy," Johns said. "It's circling around a parking lot. I got my seat belt on. I can't get out of the car. Has this been hacked? What's going on? I feel like I'm in the movies. Is somebody playing a joke on me?"

The customer service representative told Johns to open his Waymo app and that she would try to pull the car over, but seemed to struggle with getting the vehicle to stop.

1 person killed, another hurt in large avalanche

WY JACKSON — An avalanche killed one skier and injured another after the group they were in triggered the large snowslide while ascending a mountain in western Wyoming.

The avalanche happened Saturday in a backcountry area about 20 miles east of Grand Teton National Park.

As the group of four people went up a steep slope at an elevation of 10,400 feet, a large slab of snow about 5 feet thick broke

away and slid, fully burying the victim and partially burying a second skier, according to Teton County Search and Rescue and the Bridger-Teton Avalanche Center.

It took rescuers almost four hours to reach the scene by skis after a helicopter tried to reach the site but had to turn around because of stormy weather.

Plan to let voters repeal and create state laws

WI MADISON — Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers is reviving his plan to let voters repeal and create state laws without legislative involvement, this time through the state budget.

Evers said Friday the budget he plans to unveil next month will include a mandate that legislators take up a constitutional amendment allowing voters to petition for ballot proposals to repeal statutes and create new ones. The Democratic governor crafted a similar proposal in 2022 for voters to repeal the state's 1849 abortion ban, but Republicans killed the plan.

Pope names ally as city's new archbishop

DC WASHINGTON — Pope Francis on Monday named Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego as the archbishop of Washington, tapping one of his most progressive allies to head the Catholic Church in the U.S. capital.

McElroy, 70, replaces Cardinal Wilton Gregory, who at 77 is two years beyond the normal retirement age for bishops and steps down after having navigated the fallout of a new erup-

tion of the clergy abuse crisis.

Supreme Court asked to halt special election

MN ST. PAUL — The state Republican Party and conservative Minnesota Voters Alliance have asked the state Supreme Court to void Gov. Tim Walz's decision to hold a special election Jan. 28 for a DFL-held House seat.

The legal challenge is among the unsettled issues that will determine which party controls the Legislature in the 2025 session, which starts in just more than a week. Republicans will begin the session with a 67-66 advantage in the House because the Roseville-area seat was left open after a court order voided a DFLer's victory.

Until the December court order, the DFL and GOP were to open the session tied at 67 members each and had been discussing a power-sharing agreement. But now Republicans say the 67-66 advantage will allow them to elect a speaker and control assignments. DFLers disagree, saying 68 votes are needed for any House action, including the election of a speaker.

The GOP petition seeks to delay the special election — and prolong the party's advantage.

Lawsuit alleges ex-host harassed hairstylist

CA LOS ANGELES — A woman who worked as a hairstylist for Fox Sports alleges in a lawsuit that former host Skip Bayless made repeated, unwanted advances toward her — including an offer of \$1.5 million to have sex with him.

Attorneys for Noushin Faraji,

who was a hair stylist at Fox for more than a decade, are seeking unspecified damages from Bayless, Fox Sports and its parent company, Fox Corporation, according to a copy of the lawsuit filed Friday in California Superior Court in Los Angeles.

The complaint claims Fox executives fostered a hostile work environment that allowed senior managers and on-air personalities including Bayless to abuse workers without fear of punishment.

Spider monkey wearing pink tutu escapes home

MO JEFFERSON COUNTY — Deputies in Missouri encountered a "bananas" situation when they came face to face with a nearly-naked suspect. But the suspect — a spider monkey dressed in a tutu — was no match for the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office.

The department said in a Jan. 3 post on Facebook that the spider monkey was staying at a home when it pried open a door and went outside.

"The monkey actually kind of came up (to a deputy K-9 handler) and tugged on his pant leg, and so he didn't really know what to do. He squatted down and was trying to offer some sort of safety," Public Safety Information Coordinator Grant Bissell told KTVI.

"After careful negotiations and some coaxing, deputies were able to get close enough to go 'hands on' with the subject and bring this bananas situation under control without incident," the sheriff's office said.

The monkey was then taken back to its caretaker.

— From Associated Press

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Thunder-Cavs a clash of winning streaks

Associated Press

Best in the Eastern Conference. Best in the Western Conference. The best shooting team in the NBA vs. the best defensive team in the NBA. A matchup like only two others in league history.

Clear the calendar for Wednesday night, when Oklahoma City goes to Cleveland.

Technically, any game between an East team and a West team is a potential NBA Finals preview — but this one especially deserves that billing. A Thunder team on a 15-game winning streak, taking on a Cavaliers team on a 10-game winning streak (after having its own 15-game streak earlier this season).

“Every game is a challenge, and every game is an opportunity to get better,” Oklahoma City coach Mark Daigneault said. “There’s a different challenge every single night in the NBA season. Every game tests you in different ways.”

He’s not wrong. But his team is 30-5. Cleveland is an NBA-best 31-4. Combined, that’s 61-9. Every game might test these teams, sure, but the Thunder and Cavs are passing just about every one of those tests with flying colors.

“We expect to win every game,” Cleveland guard Donovan Mitchell said.

He laughed when he said that. The thing is, he might not have been joking around. And Oklahoma City, less than three years removed from going 24-58, should probably be expecting to win every time it takes the floor as well.

“It’s cool,” Thunder star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander said. “I try not to think about where we were or where we’re going and just stay in the moment.”

These teams — the first game of an ESPN doubleheader Wednesday, one with Giannis Antetokounmpo and Milwaukee taking on Victor Wembanyama and San Antonio in the nightcap — are truly a clash in styles.

They’re the best in just about everything.

The Cavs lead the NBA in field-goal percentage (.504). Oklahoma City leads the NBA in field-goal percentage defense (.426). Cleveland is second in the league in points per game (122.5). The Thunder lead the league in points allowed per game (103.0). The Cavs lead the league in 3-point percentage (.404). Oklahoma City — you guessed it — leads the league in 3-point percentage defense (.327).

There’s still a long way to go this season. It’s not even half over. But Cleveland has a big

lead over Boston in the East and the Thunder are running away with the West. Barring all-out collapses over the next month, it’ll be Daigneault, Cavs coach Kenny Atkinson and their staffs heading to San Francisco to coach in the All-Star Game. And at this rate, it won’t be long before phrases like “home-court advantage” and “No. 1 seed” get bandied about in Cleveland and OKC.

“It’s so hard to win in this league. You know, there’s so much parity,” Atkinson said. “I do think you catch a wave, kind of a confidence wave and then everything flows. It seems like that’s what we’ve caught. And it’s a collective confidence. Sometimes it’s two or three guys. We have 12 or 13 guys that are playing with great confidence on both ends.”

There’s a lot of that going around the league right now.

There have been 16 teams this season — more than half the league — that have already had at least one winning streak of five or more games. New York just had a nine-game winning streak broken by the Thunder last Friday. Boston, Dallas, Milwaukee, Phoenix and Oklahoma City (exclusive of its current 15-game streak) have all had seven-game streaks so far this season.

But what the Cavs and Thunder are doing is historic on multiple levels. They are the first teams to have winning streaks of 15 games or more in the same NBA season since Toronto and Milwaukee did it in 2019-20.

And Wednesday will mark just the third game in NBA history when two teams on winning streaks of at least 10 games go head-to-head. The others: Feb. 29, 2000, when the Los Angeles Lakers played the Portland Trail Blazers (both were on 11-game streaks) and Jan. 26, 1995, when the Utah Jazz played the Seattle SuperSonics, before they moved to OKC and became the Thunder (both were on 10-game streaks).

Plus, this is the second time that two NBA teams have gotten off to 30-5 starts, or better, in the same season. The other was 1971-72, when the Lakers started 32-3 and the Milwaukee Bucks started 30-5. They wound up meeting in that season’s playoffs; Los Angeles beat Milwaukee in the West finals on its way to the NBA title.

If Cleveland and Oklahoma City meet in this season’s playoffs, it’ll be with the Larry O’Brien Trophy on the line in the NBA Finals. And with the way these clubs are playing, there’s no reason to say that isn’t a real possibility.

Tuch, Peterka lift Sabres in shootout win over Capitals

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Alex Tuch scored twice, JJ Peterka had the deciding goal in the shootout and the Buffalo Sabres defeated the Washington Capitals 4-3 on Monday night.

Tage Thompson also scored for the Sabres. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 25 saves and stopped three of four shooters in the shootout to end their three-game losing skid. Tuch also scored during the shootout.

Tom Wilson scored twice, Aliaksei Protas added a goal and an assist, and Charlie Lindgren made 24 saves for the Capitals.

Peterka’s shootout winner came after he skated slowly to the right of Lindgren and snapped a shot that beat him low to his left-

hand blocker side.

Canadiens 5, Canucks 4 (OT): Nick Suzuki scored a power-play goal 48 seconds into overtime and also had two assists as host Montreal beat Vancouver.

Lane Hutson also had a goal and two assists, Cole Caufield had a goal and an assist, and Kaiiden Guhle and Kirby Dach also scored for the Canadiens. Sam Montembeault stopped 16 shots to help Montreal win for the fifth time in six games and eighth in its last 10.

J.T. Miller had two goals and two assists, and Jake DeBrusk and Jonathan Lekkerimäki also scored for the Canucks, who have lost seven of their last nine. Kevin Lankinen made 19 saves.

Avalanche 3, Panthers 1: Devon Toews scored twice, including the go-ahead goal with 11:06 remaining, and host Colorado beat Florida.

Mikko Rantanen added a late empty-net goal to help the Avalanche wrap up a four-game homestand at 3-0-1. Rantanen’s score allowed him to extend his points streak to 14 games.

Devils 3, Kraken 2: Ondrej Palat scored the tiebreaking goal early in the third period, and visiting New Jersey beat Seattle.

Dawson Mercer had a goal and an assist, and Paul Cotter also scored to help the Devils snap a four-game losing streak. Jacob Markstrom had 21 saves.

DeRozan, Kings hold off Heat in double OT

Associated Press

Sacramento, Calif. — DeMar DeRozan scored nine of Sacramento's 11 points in the second overtime, and the Sacramento Kings beat the Miami Heat 123-118 to extend their winning streak to a season-high five games under interim coach Doug Christie.

DeRozan finished with 30 points on 12-for-26 shooting. Domantas Sabonis had 21 points, 18 rebounds and 11 assists as the Kings (18-19) won their second straight without injured point guard De'Aaron Fox.

Malik Monk scored 23 points, Keon Ellis had 17 and Keegan Murray added 14 points and 12 rebounds.

Jaime Jaquez Jr. had a triple-double with 16 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists for the Heat (17-17). Tyler Herro scored 26 but was called for a costly 8-second violation toward the end of the fourth quarter.

Terry Rozier added 18 points and Haywood Highsmith had 14.

Pistons 118, Trail Blazers 115: Cade Cunningham had 32 points and nine assists as host Detroit reached .500 for the first time after New Year's Day since 2019 with a win over Portland.

Tim Hardaway Jr. added 26 points for Detroit and Jalen Duren had 14 points and 12 rebounds. The Pistons (18-18), who were 3-33 after 36 games a season ago, have won seven of eight.

Anfernee Simons had 36 points and nine assists for Portland, while Shaedon Sharpe had 20 points, eight assists and eight rebounds. The Trail Blazers led by 22 points in the first half.

Hardaway tied the game with a jumper with 3:39 to play, then hit a 3-pointer to make it 109-106. After the teams traded baskets, Simons hit a layup to make it a one-point game.

Suns 109, 76ers 99: Bradley Beal came off the bench for the first time in nine years and

scored 25 points as visiting Phoenix ended a four-game skid with a win over Philadelphia.

Beal was shifted to a reserve role before the game and scored 20 points in the second half as the Suns overcame an early 12-point deficit and won for the second time in nine games.

Kevin Durant scored 23 points and Ryan Dunn 15 for the Suns.

Tyrese Maxey had 31 points and 10 assists for the Sixers, who were missing Joel Embiid, who was sidelined with a left foot sprain. Kelly Oubre added 26 points as Philadelphia lost for the third time in four games.

Pacers 113, Nets 99: Tyrese Haliburton scored 23 points, Bennedict Mathurin added 20 and visiting Indiana beat Brooklyn.

Pascal Siakam contributed 19 points and Obi Toppin scored 11 for the Pacers, who have won three straight and nine of 12.

Day'Ron Sharpe had 16 points and 13 rebounds, Tyrese Martin added 15 points and Noah Clowney scored 14 for the Nets, who have lost 10 of 13.

Indiana led by 24 points in the third quarter before the Nets went on a 12-0 run over the last 4:30 of the period to trim the deficit to 78-70. Brooklyn fell behind by 14 early in the fourth quarter and got within 10 before the Pacers responded with a 14-2 spurt, capped by a dunk and a 3-pointer from Toppin that increased the lead to 105-83 with 4:33 left.

Bucks 128, Raptors 104: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 11 points, 13 assists and 12 rebounds for his fourth triple-double of the season, Damian Lillard scored 25 points and visiting Milwaukee beat struggling Toronto.

Bobby Portis scored 20 points, Gary Trent Jr. had 17 against his former team and Brook Lopez added 16 for the Bucks. Milwaukee outscored the Raptors 63-24 in bench

points and handed Toronto its 13th loss in 14 games.

Lillard scored 15 points in the third, making all five of his field goal attempts.

The Bucks came in having lost two straight and four of five, all to teams with losing records. But Milwaukee had no trouble handling the Raptors. The Bucks' biggest lead was 33 points, 113-80, after a Lopez 3-pointer in the fourth quarter.

Bulls 114, Spurs 110: Coby White made a go-ahead layup with 47 seconds left, and host Chicago topped Victor Wembanyama and San Antonio.

Zach LaVine had 35 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists for the Bulls, who trailed by 19 before rallying in the fourth quarter. Nikola Vucevic had 24 points and 11 boards, and White finished with 23 points.

After White's layup gave Chicago its first lead at 111-110, Devin Vassell threw away the ball for the Spurs. White then drove into the lane and dunked over a late-arriving Wembanyama, delighting the crowd of 18,886 at the United Center.

Wembanyama had 23 points, 14 rebounds and eight blocks for San Antonio, which carried a 95-82 lead into the final period. Chris Paul added 18 points and nine assists in the opener of a four-game trip.

Grizzlies 119, Mavericks 104: Jaren Jackson Jr. had 35 points, 13 rebounds and five assists to lead host Memphis to a victory over Dallas.

Scotty Pippen Jr. finished with 18 points, while Jaylen Wells added 17 points and 11 rebounds as the Grizzlies won for the 10th time in their last 11 home games.

P.J. Washington led the Mavericks with 17 points and 10 rebounds. Naji Marshall finished with 16 points, while Klay Thompson and Jaden Hardy added 15 points each. Dallas has lost five straight.

The Mavericks were already without leading scorer Luka

Doncic with a left calf strain, and earlier Monday, Dallas announced that backcourt mate Kyrie Irving will miss time with a bulging disk in his back. That meant both teams were without their starting backcourts as injuries kept Ja Morant and Desmond Bane out for Memphis.

Timberwolves 108, Clippers 106: Anthony Edwards scored 28 of his 37 points in the second half and host Minnesota overcame a 19-point first-half deficit to beat Los Angeles.

Edwards, who had a career-high 53 points in Saturday's loss at Detroit, finished 14 of 29 from the field, including a pair of late 3-pointers for his eighth game this season of 30-plus points.

Naz Reid scored 18 off the bench and Donte DiVincenzo added 15 for the Timberwolves, who ended a three-game slide. Rudy Gobert had eight points and a game-high 18 rebounds.

Norman Powell led the Clippers with 25 points, James Harden added 22 and Ivica Zubac had 17 points and 16 rebounds. Los Angeles has lost three of four.

Magic 103, Knicks 94: Cole Anthony scored 24 points, Wendell Carter Jr. had a season-high 19 off the bench and visiting Orlando shut down a New York team missing Karl-Anthony Towns for a victory.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope added 15 points for the Magic, who are missing their top four scorers because of injuries but didn't need too much offense the way they defended. They limited the Knicks to 4-for-22 shooting from 3-point range and didn't allow a make in the second half until Cam Payne's basket with 8.2 seconds remaining.

Jalen Brunson and Mikal Bridges each scored 24 points for New York, which was held to its lowest point total of the season in its season-high third straight loss. Towns, averaging 25.3 points and an NBA-leading 14 rebounds, sat with right knee pain.

SEC teams starting to beat each other

Associated Press

The SEC spent the first couple weeks of the men's college basketball season beating up on the rest of the nation, and the result was No. 1 Tennessee and second-ranked Auburn leading nine teams from the league into this week's AP Top 25.

Now, after opening up conference play last weekend, they begin to beat each other up in earnest.

The Vols hit the road to face eighth-ranked Florida on Tuesday, the same night sixth-ranked Kentucky headed to Georgia, which is among three more SEC teams receiving votes in the poll. On Wednesday, it is No. 23 Ole Miss visiting Arkansas — which just fell out this week following a lopsided loss to Tennessee — and No. 10 Texas A&M visiting No. 17 Oklahoma.

Then comes what can only be

described as Super Saturday: Among other games, the Vols head to Texas, No. 5 Alabama visits the Aggies, sixth-ranked Kentucky travels to No. 14 Mississippi State, the Gators head to Arkansas and Oklahoma visits Georgia.

"In this league, every game you're going to play is going to be a hard game. Every one," said Arkansas coach John Calipari, whose team was whipped 76-52 by Tennessee on Saturday, the first of three straight it will have against ranked SEC foes.

Alabama plays four of its first five conference games against teams in the Top 25. So do Kentucky and Texas A&M.

Auburn gets a relatively mild start to conference play by opening against Missouri, Texas and South Carolina. But the Tigers will make up for it later with three straight Top 25

games to start February and four in a row to wrap up the league race.

"We're good enough to win every game on the road. We're good enough to lose every game at home. That's how good the league is," said Auburn coach Bruce Pearl, who earned his 213th win on the Plains with the win over Missouri on Saturday, and who can break a tie with Joel Eaves for the most in program history by beating the Longhorns on Tuesday night.

The Tigers have won seven straight against SEC opponents dating to last season.

"Honestly, nobody enjoys winning more than me. Nobody hates losing more than me. I'm a really bad loser," Pearl added. "But you know me. You have to know I'm on to Texas, on to the next one. The only thing I'd rather do on (discussing the record) is talk about Joel Eaves, or

some of the great coaches I get to join because I'm the coach at Auburn right now."

One thing is certain: As SEC teams begin to fight amongst themselves, some winning streaks are bound to end.

The Vols (14-0) can match the second-longest streak in school history by beating the Gators, trailing only a 19-game run during the 2018-19 season. The Aggies (12-2) have won eight in a row since their loss to No. 15 Oregon, tied for the fourth-longest streak in men's Division I basketball. Mississippi State and Vanderbilt, both 13-1 and among the biggest surprises so far this season, have won their last seven apiece, while Auburn and Alabama are riding six-game winning streaks.

"We're in it now," Crimson Tide coach Nate Oats said simply. "We're in SEC play."

Miller leads North Dakota St. to record 10th FCS title

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Cam Miller ran for two touchdowns and threw for two more in his 54th consecutive start as North Dakota State's quarterback, and the Bison won their record 10th Football Championship Subdivision title, beating top-seeded and previously undefeated Montana State 35-32 on Monday night.

North Dakota State (14-2) made the trip from Fargo to Frisco for the 11th time in 14 seasons. Its previous title there was three years ago, in a game that also had Miller and the Bobcats' Tommy Mellott as the starting quarterbacks.

Miller completed 19 of 22 passes for 199 yards and ran 18 times for 121 yards to win his 45th game (out of 56 starts) and his second national title.

"Cam Miller was the best quarterback on the football field

today. There was no doubt about it," said first-year NDSU coach Tim Polasek, who was an assistant for the Bison's first two titles in Frisco at the end of the 2011 and 2012 seasons. "Tommy's a good football player, there's no question about that either. But all year long, these guys have answered the bell with complimentary football."

Montana native Mellott had a 44-yard touchdown run that got the Bobcats (15-1) within 28-25 early in the fourth quarter. He won the Walter Payton Award this season as the FCS' top offensive player in a close vote over Miller.

Mellott ran for 135 yards on 14 carries and was 13-for-24 passing for 195 yards and two touchdowns. He threw a 19-yarder to Taco Dowler with 1:09 left before an unsuccessful onside kick attempt.

"Our offense was a little bit

stagnant there in the first half unfortunately and we came up short because of it," Mellott said. "Guys kept fighting, it's very easy 21-3 to quit ... and we came back out there and we had a group of guys that fought for this team, fought for the seniors."

NDSU never trailed after Miller capped the game's opening drive that took more than seven minutes with a 2-yard plunge. Miller had an empty backfield behind him on their second possession when he got the snap and sprinted 64 yards untouched up the middle for another touchdown.

"It was a draw play with an option to pass as well ... they played the perfect front and the perfect coverage for it for us. It just parted," Miller said. "It didn't feel real honestly. Usually when we run draws, you've got to make a few guys miss. And there was nobody there."

Miller threw a 1-yard TD to Bryce Lance right before half-time for a 21-3 lead. Lance's FCS-best 17th TD came one play after a catch near the front pylon when he was ruled out of bounds inside the 1 after a replay review. He is the younger brother of former Bisons quarterback Trey Lance, who made his first start for the Dallas Cowboys on Sunday before attending the FCS title game.

Bryce Lance, who finished with nine catches for 107 yards, had a diving 38-yard reception on the final play of the third quarter to set up Miller's 1-yard TD pass to Joe Stoffel to restore a 10-point lead.

"The way the game played out, they played better than us and, you know, ultimately put ourselves in a big hole," said Montana State coach Brent Vigen, a former NDSU player and assistant coach.