

LA hoping for respite from winds, fires

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Firefighters hoped for a break Friday from fierce winds fueling massive blazes in the Los Angeles area that have killed 10 people, obliterated whole neighborhoods and set the nation's second-largest city on edge.

The fires have burned more than 10,000 homes and other structures since Tuesday, when they first began popping up around a densely populated, 25-mile expanse north of downtown Los Angeles. No cause has been identified for the largest fires.

The level of devastation is jarring even in a state that has grown used to massive wildfires. Dozens of blocks of scenic Pacific Palisades were flattened to smoldering rubble. In neighboring Malibu, blackened palm strands were all that was left above debris where oceanfront homes once stood.

Metropolitan LA and its 13 million residents woke up Friday to yet another day of fire-stoking winds and the threat of

new flareups. But the gusts were expected to diminish by evening and already have died down from earlier in the week, when hurricane-force winds blew embers that ignited hill-sides.

That could give firefighters a chance to make more progress, but meteorologist Rich Thompson warned the break could be short-lived.

"We're looking for a little respite on Friday and Saturday from the Santa Ana winds but then they're going to pick up again Sunday through most of next week," he said Thursday evening.

New blazes have continued to crop up. On Thursday afternoon, the Kenneth Fire started in the San Fernando Valley just 2 miles from a school serving as a shelter for evacuees from another fire. It moved into neighboring Ventura County, but a large and aggressive response by firefighters stopped the flames from spreading.

Only hours before the fire roared to life, officials said they

were encouraged after firefighters aided by calmer winds and help from out-of-state crews saw the first signs of successfully beating back the region's two devastating wildfires.

A firefighting plane had to be grounded Thursday after it was struck by a drone flown by a civilian, the Los Angeles County Fire Department said. Nobody was injured. It's a federal crime to fly a drone during firefighting.

Firefighters made gains Thursday at slowing the spread of the major fires, but containment remained far out of reach.

Robert Lara sifted through the remains of his home in Altadena, next to Pasadena, on Thursday with tears in his eyes, hoping to find a safe with a set of earrings that once belonged to his great-great-grandmother.

"All our memories, all our sentimental attachments, things that were gifted from generation to generation to generation are now gone," he said.

The Eaton Fire burning in

that area started Tuesday night and has burned more than 5,000 structures, a term that includes homes, apartment buildings, businesses, outbuildings and vehicles. Firefighters for the first time have made progress containing the Eaton blaze, officials said Friday.

To the west, the fire in Pacific Palisades, the largest burning in the LA area, has destroyed more than 5,300 structures. Firefighters were able to establish the first bit of containment Thursday, but the blaze is already the most destructive in Los Angeles' history.

Crews also knocked down a blaze in the Hollywood Hills with the help of water drops from aircraft. The fire that sparked late Wednesday near the heart of the entertainment industry came perilously close to igniting the famed Hollywood Bowl outdoor concert venue.

At least five churches, a synagogue, seven schools, two libraries, boutiques, bars, restaurants, banks and grocery stores have been burned.

No punishment given in Trump hush money case

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President-elect Donald Trump was sentenced Friday in his hush money case, but the judge declined to impose any punishment.

The outcome cements Trump's conviction before he returns to power while freeing him to return to the White House unencumbered by the threat of a jail term or a fine.

Trump's sentence of an unconditional discharge caps a norm-smashing case that saw him charged with 34 felonies,

put on trial for almost two months and convicted by a jury on every count. Yet, the legal detour — and sordid details aired in court of a plot to bury affair allegations — didn't hurt him with voters, who elected him to a second term.

Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan could have sentenced the 78-year-old Republican to up to four years in prison. Instead, he chose a sentence that sidestepped thorny constitutional issues by effectively ending the case but assured that

Trump will become the first person convicted of a felony to assume the presidency.

Merchan said that like when facing any other defendant, he must consider any aggravating factors before imposing a sentence, but the legal protection that Trump will have as president "is a factor that overrides all others."

Trump, briefly addressing the court as he appeared virtually from his Florida home, said his criminal trial and conviction has "been a very terrible

experience" and insisted he committed no crime.

The hush money case accused Trump of fudging his business' records to veil a \$130,000 payoff to porn actress Stormy Daniels. She was paid, late in Trump's 2016 campaign, not to tell the public about a sexual encounter she maintains the two had a decade earlier.

He says nothing sexual happened between them, and he contends that his political adversaries spun up a bogus prosecution to try to damage him.

Kremlin welcomes possibility of meeting of Trump, Putin

Associated Press

The Kremlin has welcomed President-elect Donald Trump's readiness to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin, a senior Moscow official said Friday.

Russia attaches no conditions to the possibility of face-to-face talks, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters during a conference call.

Trump said Thursday that "Putin wants to meet" and that a meeting is being set up. He indicated that efforts to end the almost three-year war between Russia and Ukraine were behind the overtures for talks. "We have to get that war over with," Trump said when referring to his possible meeting with Putin.

Trump, who has criticized U.S. aid for Ukraine's war effort, has called Putin "pretty smart" for invading Ukraine and has praised Russia's mili-

tary record in historical conflicts. Putin has been accused of war crimes by the International Criminal Court.

Ukrainian officials are alarmed at the possibility that the U.S., its single biggest donor, could reduce or stop providing aid. Without Western support, its fight against Russia's invasion could be doomed.

The outgoing Biden administration is providing Ukraine with as much military support as it can, including approving a new \$500 million package of weapons, with the aim of putting Ukraine in the strongest position possible for any future negotiations to end the war.

"We are aware that the (Biden) administration will try to leave as difficult legacy in bilateral relations as possible for Trump and his team," Peskov said.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said that in

any peace negotiation, his country would need assurances about its future protection from Russia, its much bigger neighbor, which has invaded Ukraine twice since the turn of the century. Europe alone cannot provide that guarantee, he said late Thursday.

"European security guarantees are not sufficient for Ukraine that fights such an enemy as Russia. We need joint security guarantees from the U.S. and Europe," Zelenskyy said.

Ukraine is to receive \$2 billion in military aid packages after Thursday's meeting in Germany of senior officials from more than 50 countries that have been supporting Kyiv's war effort, according to Zelenskyy.

Meanwhile, Ukraine has received its first funds from the European Union from frozen Russian assets, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said Friday.

NATO sends two ships to watch for sabotage

The Washington Post

NATO is increasing its surveillance operations in the Baltic Sea region with two ships deployed to the area following suspected sabotage of undersea cables between Finland and Estonia.

The move was unveiled on Friday by Finland's Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen, who called on policymakers to increase technical surveillance of the area, noting that it is impossible to monitor all submarine activity with ships.

A wider presence in the area by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has a "calming and stabilizing effect and we are very pleased about the decision," Valtonen told reporters in Helsinki.

The decision comes after Finland retrieved the anchor of a tanker, Eagle S, from the seabed as it probes aggravated criminal mischief and aggravated interference of communications in the cable breach incident that happened in late December. The vessel, sailing under the Cook Islands flag, has been identified as a member of the so-called shadow fleet transporting Russian petroleum products.

The incident is the third in about 15 months in which a ship anchor has ruptured underwater infrastructure in the Baltic Sea, and prompted Estonia to send its own military vessel to patrol one of two submarine electricity cables with Finland in late December.

Finland and Estonia are co-hosting a summit with NATO members from around the Baltic Sea in Helsinki on Tuesday to discuss measures to secure critical assets on the seabed.

Court backs White House effort to block plea deal for accused 9/11 mastermind

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration succeeded Thursday in temporarily blocking accused 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed from entering a guilty plea in a deal that would spare him the risk of execution for al-Qaida's Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

It is the latest development in a long struggle by the U.S. military and successive administrations to bring to justice the man charged with planning one of the deadliest attacks ever on the United States. It stalls an attempt to wrap up two decades of

military prosecution beset by legal and logistical troubles.

A three-judge appeals panel agreed to put on hold Mohammed's guilty plea scheduled for Friday in a military commission courtroom at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

In an unusual move, the Biden administration is pushing to throw out a plea agreement that its own Defense Department had negotiated with Mohammed and two 9/11 co-defendants. Mohammed is accused of developing and directing the plot to crash hijacked airliners into the World Trade Center

and the Pentagon.

A small number of relatives of some of the nearly 3,000 victims already had gathered in Guantanamo to hear Mohammed take responsibility in one of the most painful chapters in American history.

"It's very upsetting," said Elizabeth Miller, who lost her firefighter father, Douglas Miller, in the attacks and leads a group of 9/11 families supporting the plea agreements and opposing execution for the defendants. She sees the deals as "the best way for families to receive finality."

Judge throws out Biden's Title IX rules

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration's Title IX rules expanding protections for LGBTQ+ students have been struck down nationwide after a federal judge in Kentucky found they overstepped the president's authority.

In a decision issued Thursday, U.S. District Judge Danny C. Reeves scrapped the entire 1,500-page regulation after deciding it was "fatally" tainted by legal shortcomings. The rule had already been halted in 26 states after a wave of legal challenges by Republican states.

President-elect Donald Trump, whose inauguration is days away, previously promised to end the rules "on day one" and made antitransgender themes a centerpiece of his campaign.

The decision came in response to a lawsuit filed by Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia.

Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti called it a rejection of the Biden administration's "relentless push to impose a radical gender ideology."

"Because the Biden rule is vacated altogether, President Trump will be free to take a fresh look at our Title IX regulations when he returns to office," Skrmetti said in a statement.

The Education Department did not immediately comment on the decision.

Some civil rights groups called the ruling a step backward. GLAAD, a leading LGBTQ+ advocacy group, said transgender and nonbinary students are among the most bullied and harassed.

"Protections for the most vulnerable students make the entire school safer and stronger for everyone," said Sarah Kate Ellis, president and CEO of GLAAD.

The Biden administration ignited controversy when it finalized the new rules last year. The

regulation expanded Title IX, a 1972 law forbidding discrimination based on sex in education, to also prevent discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation. It also widened the definition of harassment to include a broader range of action.

Civil rights advocates hailed it as a victory, saying it gave LGBTQ+ students new recourse against discrimination. But it drew outrage from conservatives who said it could be used to protect transgender athletes in girls' sports.

The rule didn't explicitly address athletics and mostly detailed how schools and colleges were required to respond to cases of discrimination and sexual assault. A separate proposal dealing with transgender athletes in sports was put on the back burner and later revoked after it became a focal point of Trump's campaign.

In his decision, Reeves found the Education Department

overstepped its authority by expanding the scope of Title IX. There's nothing in the 1972 law suggesting that it should cover any more than it has since Congress created it, Reeves wrote. He called it an "attempt to bypass the legislative process and completely transform Title IX."

The judge also found that it violated free speech rights by requiring teachers to use pronouns aligning with a student's gender identity.

"The First Amendment does not permit the government to chill speech or compel affirmation of a belief with which the speaker disagrees in this manner," Reeves wrote.

Rather than carve out certain aspects of the rule, Reeves decided it was best to toss the regulation in its entirety and revert to a previous interpretation of Title IX. He said his decision will "simply 'cause a return to the status quo' that existed for more than 50 years prior to its effective date."

Court denies bid to block release of Trump report

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal appeals court on Thursday denied a bid to block the public release of special counsel Jack Smith's report on President-elect Donald Trump's efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss.

The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals turned down a emergency challenge aimed at keeping under wraps the report expected to detail unflattering revelations about Trump's failed effort to cling to power in the election he lost to President Joe Biden.

A separate volume of the same special counsel report — related to Trump's hoarding of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate — will not become public while the case

against two co-defendants of the president-elect remains pending, the Justice Department has said.

Even with the appeals court ruling, though, the election interference report will not immediately be released, and there's no guarantee it will be as more legal wrangling is expected. A lower court ruling from Trump-appointed U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon in Florida temporarily blocking the Justice Department from releasing the report remains in place for three days.

The defendants may now ask Cannon to rule on the merits of their request to block the report, which she did not do earlier when she granted their emergency motion.

Democrats work with GOP to advance migrant bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Newly in the minority, Democrats voted with Republicans on Thursday to advance legislation that would require federal authorities to detain unauthorized immigrants who have been accused of certain crimes.

The Democrats' moves signals that they will try and find spots to work with President-elect Donald Trump while simultaneously trying to block much of his agenda.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and most other Democrats voted to proceed with the legislation, advancing the bill 84-9.

Trump and Republicans have pushed the bill and made it a priority since Georgia nurs-

ing student Laken Riley was killed last year by a Venezuelan man who entered the U.S. illegally and was allowed to stay to pursue his immigration case.

Still, Schumer hasn't promised to vote for the final bill — and he made clear that Democrats want Republicans to work with them on bipartisan amendments.

Thursday's procedural vote will allow that process to begin.

On the Senate floor ahead of the vote, Schumer said that new Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., "has said he wants to make the Senate a place where all members should have a chance to make their voices heard. This bill would be a fine place to start."

S. Korean presidential security chief quits in wake of standoff

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea's acting leader on Friday accepted the resignation of the chief of the presidential security service, Park Jong-joon, as he faced police questioning over how his forces blocked law enforcement efforts to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol last week.

The acting leader, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, also expressed regret over the clashes between law enforcement officials and the presidential security service and called for lawmakers to reach a bipartisan agreement to launch an independent investigation.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials and police are planning a second attempt to bring Yoon into custody as they jointly investigate whether his brief martial law declaration on Dec. 3 amounted to an attempted re-

bellion.

The presidential security service blocked an earlier attempt to detain Yoon at his official residence, which he has not left for weeks.

It wasn't immediately clear how Park's resignation and Choi's call for an independent investigation to take over the probe on Yoon would affect the push to bring Yoon into custody.

"The government has been deliberating to find a wise solution, but unfortunately, within our current legal framework, it's difficult to find a clear resolution to end the conflict between the two agencies," Choi said about the tensions between the anti-corruption office and presidential security service over Yoon's potential detention.

"We urge the ruling and opposition parties to work together to agree on a bill to launch a special prosecutor investigation that is free from constitutional

issues. This will naturally resolve the ongoing intense standoff."

The main liberal opposition Democratic Party accused Choi of legitimizing Yoon's refusal to comply with a court-issued warrant under the guise of neutrality.

"It amounts to a public declaration of support for the leader of a rebellion," said Noh Jong-myun, a party lawmaker and spokesperson.

The Democrats and other opposition parties on Thursday introduced a bill calling for an independent investigation into allegations of rebellion against Yoon.

An earlier bill by the opposition proposing an independent investigation was scrapped after members of Yoon's conservative party opposed a clause allowing only opposition parties to recommend special prosecutor candidates.

US added 256K jobs last month

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. hiring picked up unexpectedly in December as employers added a strong 256,000 jobs, another sign of the economy's resilience in the face of high interest rates.

Job growth rose 212,000 last month from November, the Labor Department reported Friday.

For all of 2024, the economy added 2.2 million jobs, a solid number but down from 3 million in 2023, 4.5 million in 2022 and a record 6.4 million in 2021 as the economy bounded back from massive pandemic layoffs.

The monthly numbers beat forecasters' expectation of around 155,000 new jobs and 4.2% unemployment.

Health care companies added 46,000 jobs, retailers 43,000 and government agencies at the federal, state and local levels, 33,000. But manufacturers cut 13,000 jobs.

Storm plods into South, sparking emergency declarations

Associated Press

DALLAS — A powerful winter storm that dumped heavy snow and glazed roads with ice across much of Texas and Oklahoma lumbered eastward into southern U.S. states Friday, prompting governors to declare states of emergency and shuttering schools across the region.

Arkansas Gov. Sarah Sanders mobilized the National Guard to help stranded motorists. School was canceled for millions of children across a wide tract of southern states from Texas to Georgia and as far east as South Carolina.

Some of the heaviest snowfall was expected Friday across the northern half of Arkansas and much of Tennessee, with totals in some parts of those states

ranging from 6 to 9 inches, according to the National Weather Service.

Farther south and east into Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, a wintry mix of sleet and freezing rain made travel treacherous.

The storm dumped as much as 7 inches in some spots in central Oklahoma and northern Texas before pushing into Arkansas.

Snow that began falling in metro Atlanta before dawn led to hundreds of flights being canceled and hundreds more delayed at Atlanta's airport, according to flight tracking software FlightAware. With radar showing much of the heaviest precipitation in Georgia concentrated in a band near Atlan-

ta's airport, controllers declared a ground stop before 8 a.m., meaning no planes could land or take off. Atlanta, a major hub for Delta Air Lines, is the world's busiest airport. Gov. Brian Kemp declared a state of emergency for Georgia.

Other airports with significant delays and cancellations included those in Charlotte, N.C., Dallas-Fort Worth and Nashville.

The polar vortex of ultracold air usually spins around the North Pole, but it sometimes ventures south into the U.S., Europe and Asia. Some experts say such events are happening more frequently, paradoxically, because of a warming world.

Paul Kirkwood, a National Weather Service meteorologist,

said the storm that swept through the Dallas area will create a "swath of snow" impacting parts of Mississippi, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina and South Carolina.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott urged residents to avoid driving if possible. Roads could be dangerous as 75,000 fans were expected Friday at AT&T Stadium in Arlington for the college football championship semifinal between Texas and Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl.

As much as 8 inches of snow could fall in parts of Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia through Saturday, the weather service said. Snow and ice were likely to accumulate across metro Atlanta on Friday.

Late pick, field goal give Irish title shot

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Penn State quarterback Drew Allar said he was trying to throw the ball into the ground. Notre Dame defensive back Christian Gray dove for it anyway and — luck of the Irish — the ball ended up right in his hands.

A few seconds later, Gray and Notre Dame found themselves with a spot in the national title game after a thrill-a-minute 27-24 victory Thursday night in the Orange Bowl.

Gray's snag of Allar's ill-advised pass across the middle at the Penn State 42 with 33 seconds left, set up a 19-yard drive that ended with Mitch Jeter's winning 41-yard field goal.

The Irish (14-1), seeded seventh in this, the first 12-team college playoff, will have a chance to bring home their 12th title and first since 1988 on Jan. 20 in Atlanta. Their opponent will be the winner Friday night of the Texas-Ohio State semifinal in the Cotton Bowl.

"Just catch the ball. Just catch the ball," Gray said about his interception. "That was going through my mind and I knew I was going to make a play."

Allar explained he saw his first two options covered on the play, then wanted to throw the ball into the dirt. But the throw, under pressure and across his body, didn't have enough zip on it to reach either receiver Omari Evans or the ground before Gray slid in.

"Honestly, I was trying to 'dirt' it at his feet," said the junior quarterback. "I should've thrown it away when I saw the first two progressions were not open. I didn't execute."

It was the most memorable play of a game that was the best of what's been a sleepy few weeks of playoff football. It featured three ties and three lead changes, along with 31 points in the fourth quarter alone.

In the final, Irish coach Marcus Freeman will try to become

the first Black coach to win the title at college football's highest level. Freeman, whose mother is South Korean, also is the first coach of Asian heritage to get this far.

"We found a way to make a play when it mattered the most," Freeman said. "In my opinion, great teams, great programs, find a way to do that."

Penn State coach James Franklin fell to 4-20 with the Nittany Lions against teams ranked in the AP Top 10. The sixth-seeded Nittany Lions ended the season at 13-3.

"Everyone wants to look at a specific play," Franklin said. "But there's probably eight to 12 plays in that game that could have made a difference. I'm not going to call out specific plays or specific players. There are a ton of plays where we could have done better."

Notre Dame quarterback Riley Leonard shook off a hit late in the second quarter that sent him to the medical tent to be

checked for a concussion. He came back and led the Irish on four scoring drives in the second half, including the last one.

"He's a competitor and competitors find a way to win, and that's what Riley does," Freeman said.

Leonard finished with 223 yards passing, including a key 10-yard dart to Jaden Greathouse to convert third-and-3 on the last drive. Leonard also had 35 yards rushing, and passed and ran for a score each.

With 4:38 left in the game, the senior quarterback hit Greathouse for a 54-yard score to tie it at 24 after a defender slipped.

The game started slow, but Riley's injury injected some life. He led Notre Dame on TD drives of 75 and 72 yards in the third quarter to lead 17-10.

Penn State had its chances, and Allar, considered a first-round pick by some if he leaves for the NFL, will spend the off-season reliving that last throw — or trying to forget it.

NFL moves Vikings-Rams playoff game to Arizona

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The NFL has moved the Rams' wild-card playoff game against the Minnesota Vikings to Arizona after days of devastating wildfires in the Los Angeles area.

The game will be played Monday night at State Farm Stadium, the home of the Arizona Cardinals, in suburban Glendale.

The league announced the decision Thursday, a few hours after yet another fire broke out in an area several miles from the Rams' training complex in the

Woodland Hills neighborhood. The Rams canceled the post-practice media availability for their players to allow everyone to get home quickly.

In a brief statement, the league said the decision was made "in the interest of public safety."

Los Angeles has been besieged by multiple wildfires all week following two days of extraordinary wind across the vast metropolitan area. The newest fire triggered an evacuation order in West Hills, a suburban neighborhood direct-

ly northwest of the Rams' complex. The Kenneth Fire ballooned in size — charring over a square mile — within hours of igniting.

More than 10,000 structures burned in the two largest fires, the Palisades Fire in Pacific Palisades and the Eaton Fire near Pasadena.

While none of the fires was burning near SoFi Stadium in Inglewood — which is southwest of downtown Los Angeles — the NFL opted to move the game amid concerns about air quality, the strain put on the

community and the possible demands on police and fire department personnel.

The Rams and the Los Angeles Chargers — who will play a wild-card game at Houston on Saturday — both practiced outdoors this week, but both teams' coaches were concerned about the air quality, with Chargers coach Jim Harbaugh cutting his players' normal outdoor time in half.

The Rams will travel to Phoenix on Friday after their early-afternoon practice, the team confirmed late Thursday.

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Oregon rallies late to beat Ohio State

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Jackson Shelstad scored 24 points and made two free throws with seven seconds left as No. 15 Oregon rallied late to beat Ohio State 73-71 on Thursday night.

Nate Bittle had 21 points, eight rebounds and three blocks for Oregon (14-2, 3-2 Big Ten), which took a 70-67 lead on TJ Bamba's shot in the lane with 40 seconds left. After Ohio State scored, Shelstad was trapped in the corner and turned it over, leading to two free throws by freshman John Mobley Jr. to give the Buckeyes a 71-70 lead with 12.6 seconds to play.

Shelstad raced the other way for a quick shot, and he was fouled before making two free throws to give Oregon a one-

NCAA MEN

point lead. Bruce Thornton had a decent look at a 3-pointer from the top of the key, but it was short and Bittle secured the rebound.

Thornton led Ohio State (10-6, 2-3) with 20 points and Mobley had 16.

■ **No. 16 Michigan State 88, Washington 54:** Jaden Akins scored 20 points and No. 16 Michigan State extended its winning streak to eight games by rolling past Washington.

Jeremy Fears Jr. had his first career double-double with 12 points and 10 assists for Michigan State (14-2, 4-0 Big Ten), which pulled even with archrival Michigan for the conference lead. Jase Richardson scored 12

points and Tre Holloman added 11 points and six assists.

The Spartans didn't allow a basket for more than 10 minutes to begin the game and led 42-13 at halftime.

Tyler Harris scored 14 points for the Huskies (10-6, 1-4), who missed their first 14 shots. Great Osobor, who was averaging a team-high 14.3 points, went 0 for 8 from the field while scoring six points.

■ **No. 20 Purdue 68, Rutgers 50:** Braden Smith and Trey Kaufman-Renn scored 16 points apiece to lead No. 20 Purdue to a win over Rutgers.

Smith, the reigning Big Ten Player of the Week, had 14 assists.

Fletcher Loyer added 13 points, giving him 1,009 for his

career. He joined Smith in passing the 1,000-point mark, which Smith accomplished earlier in the week.

The Boilermakers (12-4, 4-1 Big Ten) have won four straight for the second time this season. They opened the season on a four-game win streak.

Freshman sensation Ace Bailey led Rutgers (8-8, 1-4) with 17 points. Tyson Acuff added 10 points.

This was the second consecutive game in which the Scarlet Knights trailed throughout. They have dropped four of their last five games.

Rutgers' other talented freshman, Dylan Harper, who has been slowed down by the flu over the past week, scored six points in 28 minutes.

No. 6 LSU wins thriller against No. 16 Tennessee

Associated Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — Kailyn Gilbert made a layup with 1 second left to give No. 6 LSU an 89-87 victory over No. 16 Tennessee on Thursday night.

Tennessee's Zee Spearman had a good look but missed a short jumper that would have sent the game to overtime. The Lady Vols (13-2, 1-2 Southeastern Conference) took their second narrow loss in five days to a top-10 team.

Aneesah Morrow had 23 points and 21 rebounds to lead the Tigers (18-0, 3-0). Gilbert finished with 22 points, Flau'Jae Johnson had 20 and Mikaylah Williams 16.

Jewel Spear scored 25 points and Talaysia Cooper had 24 for Tennessee, which trailed by 18 in the second quarter. Ruby Whitehorn and Samara Spencer scored 10 each.

■ **No. 2 South Carolina 90, Texas A&M 49:** South Carolina beat Texas A&M in a final tuneup before its biggest stretch of the season.

NCAA WOMEN

The Gamecocks (15-1, 3-0 Southeastern) are playing thin after junior forward Ashlyn Watkins suffered a season-ending injury in their last game, but they rolled over the Aggies (8-7, 1-2) with smothering defense. Texas A&M shot a mere 20% in the first half, as South Carolina built a 20-point lead, and finished at 29%.

Freshman Joyce Edwards led the Gamecocks with 19 points and 10 rebounds to complete her seventh double-double. Sole Williams had 10 points to pace the Aggies.

■ **No. 3 Notre Dame 100, Wake Forest 64:** Hannah Hidalgo had 23 points and six steals as No. 3 Notre Dame overpowered Wake Forest.

Liatu King scored 17 points, Sonia Citron scored 16 and Olivia Miles added 13 points and nine assists for the Fighting Irish (13-2, 4-0 Atlantic Coast Conference). Notre Dame has won all 13 meetings with the De-

mon Deacons.

Elise Williams scored 18 points, Demeara Hinds scored 17 and Malaya Cowles added 15 for Wake Forest (7-8, 0-4).

Notre Dame's defense sparked a 15-2 run in just under three minutes that built Notre Dame's lead to 40-19 in the second quarter. The Fighting Irish forced four turnovers and hit 6 of 7 shots during the surge.

■ **No. 5 Texas 84, No. 18 Alabama 40:** Madison Booker scored 21 points in just 18 minutes and No. 5 Texas beat No. 18 Alabama for its ninth straight win.

Texas (16-1, 3-0 SEC) has won 16 consecutive home games since late January 2024. The Longhorns led 29-7 after the first quarter on their way to snapping Alabama's six-game winning streak.

Taylor Jones had 11 points and 12 rebounds for Texas, and point guard Rori Harmon added 10 points, six assists, five rebounds and two steals.

Karly Weathers scored seven

points to lead Alabama (15-2, 2-1). Zaay Green, the leading scorer for Alabama this season with 17 points a game, was limited to five. She committed nine of the Crimson Tide's 20 turnovers.

Alabama shot 27 from the field, including 4 for 23 on 3-pointers. The Crimson Tide averaged nine 3-point baskets a game before getting shut down by Texas.

■ **Mississippi State 81, No. 10 Oklahoma 77:** Jerkaila Jordan scored 24 points, 18 in the second half, and Mississippi State held on for a win over No. 10 Oklahoma.

Jordan made 10 of 17 field goals and had six rebounds, four steals and three assists. Eniya Russell scored 12 points and reserve Destiney McPhaul added 10 points for the Bulldogs (14-3, 1-2 Southeastern Conference).

Raegan Beers had 19 points and 10 rebounds, Payton Verhulst scored 15 points and Liz Scott added 12 for Oklahoma (13-3, 1-2).

Timberwolves win 3rd straight, beating Magic

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Julius Randle had 23 points and 10 rebounds, Anthony Edwards added 21 points and seven assists and the Minnesota Timberwolves beat the Orlando Magic 104-89 on Thursday night for their third straight victory.

Naz Reid came off the bench to score 16 points, and Rudy Gobert added 10 points and 12 rebounds for Minnesota.

Goga Bitadze led Orlando with 15 points and eight rebounds. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope added 13 points.

Minnesota led from the middle of the first quarter and by 24 at one point. They broke a seven-game losing streak against Eastern Conference opponents.

The lack of scoring punch continues to be a problem for the Magic, which shot 38% and is now the lowest-scoring team in the NBA at 104.8 points per game. It may have been the last of 34 games without Paolo Banchero. The 22-year-old power forward, out since October with a torn right oblique, is expected to return Friday night.

■ **Cavaliers 132, Raptors 126:** Darius Garland scored a season-high 40 points, Jarrett Allen had 18 points and 15 rebounds, and NBA-leading Cleveland beat Toronto to extend their win streak to 12.

Evan Mobley finished with 21 points, 11 rebounds and six assists for the Cavaliers, who are tied for the fifth-best record in league history through 37 games at 33-4. Cleveland also has the top home mark in the NBA, going 20-1 at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse.

Scottie Barnes had 24 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists for Toronto, which is a league-worst 1-17 on the road and has lost 15 of its last 16 overall. Chris Boucher added 23 points and 12 rebounds off the bench.

Cavaliers guard Donovan Mitchell was given the night off

after playing a team-high 35 minutes Wednesday in a 129-122 win over the Thunder. West leader Oklahoma City had won a franchise-record 15 in a row.

■ **Warriors 107, Pistons 104:** Buddy Hield scored 19 points, helping Golden State hold on for a win over Detroit.

Golden State earned a much-needed victory after dropping two straight games at home, losing by 16 points to Miami and getting routed by 30 points against Sacramento.

It wasn't easy.

The Warriors led by 18, but Malik Beasley missed a 3-pointer just before the buzzer that could have sent the game to overtime.

Detroit's Cade Cunningham had 32 points, eight assists and six rebounds. Beasley scored 21 points, missing 10 of his 14 3-pointers.

The Pistons fell to .500 after winning five straight and eight of their previous nine games.

Warriors coach Steve Kerr, whose 90-year-old mother lost her home in the California wildfires, said his team lacked "a competitive spirit" earlier this week and was certainly happy with the response in Detroit.

Golden State led after each quarter and made enough plays on both ends of the court to win. After a 12-3 start, the Warriors had lost 15 of their previous 21 games.

■ **Mavericks 117, Trail Blazers 111:** Jaden Hardy scored a season-high 25 points off the bench, P.J. Washington had 23 points and 14 rebounds and the Dallas Mavericks used a late 16-0 run to beat the Portland Trail Blazers 117-111 on Thursday night.

Dereck Lively II added season highs with 21 points and 16 rebounds for the Mavericks, who are still without All-Star guards Luka Dončić and Kyrie Irving. Dallas has won two straight following a season-long five-game losing streak.

Anfernee Simons and Shae-

don Sharpe each scored 22 points to lead the Blazers, who finished a stretch of road games 2-3.

Scout Henderson scored 20 off the bench, hitting all 12 of his free throws.

Portland led 109-99 with 4:33 to play but then missed its next six field-goal attempts and committed two turnovers. Washington hit two free throws tying the score at 109 with 2:26 left and followed with a right-corner 3-pointer for a 112-109 lead with 1:58 to go.

The Blazers went in averaging 12.1 3-pointers and surpassed that late in the third period but were only 3 of 9 behind the arc in the fourth quarter.

■ **Rockets 119, Grizzlies 115:** Alperen Sengun had 32 points and 14 rebounds, and Houston held on to beat Memphis in a showdown between two of the top teams in the Western Conference.

Jalen Green finished with 27 points and Fred VanVleet scored 22 as the Rockets won their third straight and solidified their hold on second place in the Western Conference, moving 1½ games ahead of Memphis.

Ja Morant scored 27 points in his return from a five-game absence with a shoulder injury, and Jaren Jackson Jr. added 21 points, eight rebounds and six blocks for Memphis. Desmond Bane had 16 points.

Houston dominated the inside early, scoring 20 points in the paint before the halfway point of the first quarter. Memphis initially couldn't stop anything at the rim. Houston opened a 17-point lead before taking a 68-63 advantage at the break.

After allowing the Rockets to score inside and build a big lead, Memphis chipped into the advantage to make it a more competitive game.

■ **Suns 123, Hawks 115:** Bradley Beal scored 25 points, Kevin Durant added 23 and

Phoenix beat Atlanta.

Beal — still adjusting to his new role coming off the bench — shot 11 of 16 from the field in one of his most efficient games this season. Devin Booker added 20 points and 12 assists despite shooting 0 of 8 from 3-point range.

Beal made a driving layup just before the third quarter buzzer to give the Suns a 98-92 lead heading into the fourth.

Grayson Allen, who scored 23, hit his fifth 3-pointer to give the Suns a 120-105 lead with 3:26 left. The Hawks scored the next 10 points but Allen sealed it with a tough layup in traffic with 36 seconds left.

Trae Young led the Hawks with 21 points and seven assists. Seven Atlanta players scored in double figures.

The Suns took a 38-31 lead in the first quarter after shooting 75% from the field, but the Hawks rallied with their own hot-shooting quarter to take a 72-68 advantage by halftime.

■ **Heat 97, Jazz 92:** Tyler Herro scored 23 points and Jaime Jaquez had 20, including five in the final 1:03, to lead Miami to a victory over Utah.

In a ragged game with 31 combined turnovers and both teams shooting under 40%, the Heat made the most of transition points (17-7) and hustle plays when it mattered.

Collin Sexton and Lauri Markkanen each scored 23 for Utah, which has lost nine in a row at home.

The Jazz were missing six injured players, including Jordan Clarkson (foot), John Collins (hip), Keyonte George (heel) and Brice Sensabaugh, who scored 61 points in Utah's last two wins against Miami and Orlando before falling ill.

The Heat played without Kevin Love (personal reasons), who had rallied his teammates in an emotional meeting after Jimmy Butler was suspended for seven games, according to teammate Nikola Jović.

Stars take 6th straight with win over Flyers

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Casey DeSmith stopped 27 shots to lead the Dallas Stars to their sixth straight victory, 4-1 over the Philadelphia Flyers on Thursday night.

The Stars won for the seventh time in eight games as they continue their run up the Western Conference standings. Mavrik Bourque and Roope Hintz scored in the first period. Wyatt Johnston made it 3-0 in the second.

Miro Heiskanen added an empty-netter in the third period to help the Stars win for the ninth time in their last 11 games in Philadelphia dating to March 27, 2018.

■ **Penguins 5, Oilers 3:** Sidney Crosby had a goal and two assists to move into ninth on the NHL's career scoring list as Pittsburgh beat Connor McDavid and Edmonton.

The Penguins captain tied Hall of Famer Joe Sakic at 1,641 points with an assist on Bryan Rust's first-period goal. Crosby then moved past Sakic with an assist on Drew O'Connor's sixth goal of the season later in the period as the Penguins raced to a 4-1 advantage.

Rust also had a goal and two assists for Pittsburgh, which snapped a three-game losing streak. Alex Nedeljkovic made 40 stops for the Penguins and Rickard Rakell scored his team-high 21st goal as Pittsburgh won without injured center Evgeni Malkin.

McDavid finished with three assists. Leon Draisaitl scored twice to boost his season total to an NHL-best 31.

■ **Blue Jackets 6, Kraken 2:** Denton Mateychuk and Luca Del Bel Belluz, both recent call-ups from the AHL, each had a goal and an assist to help lift Columbus over Seattle.

Zach Werenski also added a goal and an assist, extending his home point streak to 16 games, as the Blue Jackets won their third straight.

Sean Kuraly, Kent Johnson and Kirill Marchenko also scored. James van Riemsdyk contributed two assists, and Elvis Merzlikins made 29 saves for Columbus.

Eeli Tolvanen scored twice for Seattle, which has lost four straight. Philipp Grubauer stopped 14 shots before being replaced late in the second period by Joey Daccord, who saved all four shots he faced in his first game action since suffering an upper-body injury on Dec. 22 against the Colorado Avalanche.

■ **Rangers 3, Devils 2, OT:** Sam Carrick scored in overtime and Igor Shesterkin made 21 saves as New York beat New Jersey.

Carrick one-timed a pass from Reilly Smith past Devils netminder Jacob Markstrom 2:48 into the extra session. Carrick's third goal this season gave the Rangers a much-needed home win before a three-game road trip. Adam Fox and Artemi Panarin also scored for the Rangers.

Jesper Bratt and Jack Hughes scored for the Devils.

After Fox scored on the power play at 12:05 of the first, Hughes scored his 16th at 4:03 of the second.

Bratt put New Jersey ahead at 8:28, whipping a high shot past Shesterkin for his 15th goal. Hughes assisted for his team-leading 50th point.

■ **Lightning 4, Bruins 1:** Brayden Point reached 600 career points with a power-play goal, Andrei Vasilevskiy made 27 saves and Tampa Bay beat Boston.

Brandon Hagel had a goal and an assist, Michael Eyssimont and Anthony Cirelli scored goals 5:03 apart in the second period and Ryan McDonagh had two assists.

Tampa Bay has won back-to-back games after dropping four in a row. The Lightning moved past the Bruins into third place in the Atlantic Division.

■ **Hurricanes 6, Maple Leafs 3:** Jordan Staal scored a hat trick to lead Carolina to a win over Toronto.

Eric Robinson, Jackson Blake and Seth Jarvis also scored for the Hurricanes while Pyotr Kochetkov stopped 30 shots for his first home win since Dec. 17.

Nicholas Robertson, William Nylander and Auston Matthews scored for Toronto, which had won five in a row. Joseph Woll made 28 saves.

The Maple Leafs took an early 2-0 lead but the Hurricanes evened it at 2-all with Staal's first goal with 5:45 left in the first period. Staal scored 35 seconds into the second period for a 3-2 lead and 20 seconds into the third period to extend Carolina's lead to 5-3.

■ **Sabres 4, Senators 0:** Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 35 saves, Jack Quinn scored twice and Buffalo spoiled Ottawa's homecoming.

Dylan Cozens and Ryan McLeod also scored for the Sabres.

Anton Forsberg stopped 17 shots for Ottawa. The Senators returned to the Canadian Tire Centre after a nine-game trip and nearly a month away because of the world junior hockey championship.

Quinn buried his first goal midway through the first period to open the scoring. He made it 2-0 later in the frame, taking Peyton Krebs' pass at center ice as he stepped out of the penalty box before going bar-down for his seventh of the season.

■ **Avalanche 6, Wild 1:** Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and his NHL-leading 53rd assist of the season to help Colorado rout Minnesota.

Mikko Rantanen and Logan O'Connor also each had a goal and an assist, Ross Colton, Parker Kelly and Artturi Lehkonen also scored.

Zach Bogosian scored for the second straight game for the Wild.

Leading 2-1 in the second pe-

riod, MacKinnon fed a pass into the slot on a 2-on-2 rush. Rantanen converted on a wrist shot past a screened Gustavsson for his 25th goal of the season.

Rantanen returned the favor when MacKinnon scored Colorado's third goal in a span of 4:25 of the third period to put the Aves on top 6-1.

■ **Blues 6, Ducks 2:** Robert Thomas scored twice and St. Louis beat Anaheim.

Jordan Kyrou and Pavel Buchnevich each had a goal and an assist, and Tyler Tucker and Dylan Holloway also scored for St. Louis. Brayden Schenn had two assists and Joel Hofer stopped 22 shots.

Nikita Nesterenko and Sam Colangelo scored for the Ducks. Lukas Dostal gave up six goals on 22 shots before he was replaced midway through the second period.

The Blues scored three goals on their first six shots as Thomas, Tucker and Kyrou tallied in the first 6:40 of the game.

The fourth goal came on the Blues' 13th shot by Holloway with 6:05 remaining in the first period.

Thomas scored again at 4:45 of the second, and Buchnevich made it 6-1 at 8:02. That ended Dostal's night.

Colangelo got his first goal of the season — and second of his career — with 5:22 left in the middle period to close the scoring.

■ **Islanders 4, Golden Knights 0:** Captain Anders Lee, playing in his 800th career game, scored a goal and Ilya Sorokin made 30 saves as New York beat Vegas.

This was the Islanders' second shutout this season. The other occurred Nov. 30, same day as the Golden Knights were last blanked.

Brock Nelson had a goal and an assist, and Bo Horvat and Mathew Barzal also scored for the Islanders.

Alexander Romanov had two assists.