

More fierce winds in forecast for LA

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A growing force of firefighters moved into the Los Angeles area Monday as more powerful winds were expected to trigger new wildfires that could set back the recent progress made in containing blazes that have destroyed thousands of homes and killed at least 24 people.

Crews and equipment arrived from across the U.S., and from Canada and Mexico — including water trucks and planes that drop firefighting chemicals — as the National Weather Service warned that the coming days could become “particularly dangerous.”

It predicted severe fire conditions will last through Wednesday, with wind gusts in the mountains reaching 65 mph. The most dangerous day will be Tuesday, warned fire behavior analyst Dennis Burns at a community meeting Sunday night.

The relative calm Sunday allowed some people to return to

previously evacuated areas. But even as containment increased in the worst of the fires, more bad news emerged from the ashes: The death toll surged late Sunday with an update from the Los Angeles County medical examiner. At least 16 people were missing, a number authorities said was also likely to rise.

Fierce Santa Ana winds have been largely blamed for turning the wildfires sparked last week into infernos that leveled entire neighborhoods around the nation’s second-largest city where there has been no significant rainfall in more than eight months.

In less than a week, four fires around the nation’s second biggest city have ignited more than 62 square miles, roughly three times the size of Manhattan.

Most of that destruction has been from the Eaton Fire near Pasadena and the Palisades Fire, in a wealthy enclave along the Pacific Coast. Firefighters have made progress on both fronts in

recent days, with the Eaton Fire roughly one-third contained.

The returning high winds could trigger explosive growth of the existing fires and new outbreaks in areas untouched so far, creating new challenges for firefighting crews already stretched thin.

Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony C. Marrone said 70 additional water trucks arrived to help firefighters fend off flames spread by renewed gusts. “We are prepared for the upcoming wind event,” Marrone said.

Fire retardant dropped by aircraft will act as a barrier along hillsides, officials said.

Some residents have been able to return to their homes to survey the damage.

Jim Orlandini, who lost his hardware store in Altadena, a hard-hit neighborhood next to Pasadena, said his home of 40 years survived.

“Tuesday night we didn’t sleep at all because we figured the house was gone,” he said Sunday

as he recalled the moment the fires spread to his neighborhood.

In the meantime, LA city Fire Chief Kristin Crowley urged people to stay away from scorched neighborhoods.

“There are still active fires that are burning within the Palisades area, making it extremely, extremely dangerous for the public,” Crowley said Sunday. “There’s no power, there’s no water, there’s broken gas lines, and we have unstable structures.”

About 50,000 people in Los Angeles County remained under evacuation orders, with more than 700 residents taking refuge in nine shelters, Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said. Officials said most of the orders in the Palisades area were unlikely to be lifted before the red flag warnings expire Wednesday evening.

The fires that began Tuesday just north of downtown LA have burned more than 12,000 structures.

Zelenskyy offers to swap N. Korean POWs for Ukrainians

BY DAVID CHOI

Stars and Stripes

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has released a video of the first North Korean soldiers captured in Russia’s Kursk region and said Kyiv is willing to swap the prisoners of war for its troops held by Moscow.

In a video posted Sunday on Zelenskyy’s Facebook and X accounts, two bedridden and apparently injured North Korean soldiers are questioned by Ukrainian forces through an interpreter.

The unnamed soldiers were

captured by Ukrainian special operations forces in the past week and were receiving medical care in Kyiv, Zelenskyy wrote.

One of the soldiers, with cuts on his lip and a bandage across his face, nodded his head in agreement when asked if he had family in North Korea. He also nodded after being asked if he wanted to return to the North.

A second soldier with a bandage on his hand shook his head in disagreement when asked if he knew where he was and if he knew he was fighting against Ukraine.

“They said it was realistic training,” the soldier said in an accent primarily used in North Korea.

The soldier said he wanted to stay in Ukraine, but added, “If they tell me to leave, I’ll leave.”

The soldiers have not expressed a desire to defect to South Korea, South Korean Reps. Lee Seong-kweun and Park Sun-won said Monday during a press conference in Seoul. They cited a closed-door briefing from National Intelligence Service officials earlier that day.

North Korean soldiers from the battlefield also possessed

notes that indicate they were encouraged to kill themselves, rather than be captured, the lawmakers said, citing the intelligence briefing.

Ukraine “is ready to hand over Kim Jong Un’s soldiers to him if he can organize their exchange for our warriors” held in Russia, Zelenskyy wrote in a statement with the video, referring to the North Korean leader.

Zelenskyy wrote “there will undoubtedly be more” North Korean prisoners of war and “there may be other options available” for those who do not want to return to their country.

DOD still struggling with mental health stigmas

The Washington Post

The fiery New Year's Day suicide of an Army Green Beret exposed the Pentagon's struggle to identify and treat brain injuries and mental health issues, raising alarm among some lawmakers, medical experts and former military personnel who question if enough is being done to improve care and prevent similar tragedies.

Matthew Livelsberger, 37, a career Special Forces soldier with extensive wartime service in Afghanistan, died from a self-inflicted gunshot moments before the rented Tesla Cybertruck he was driving exploded outside the Trump International Hotel Las Vegas, authorities have said. Livelsberger had struggled with what he endured in combat and confided in an ex-girlfriend that he experienced health problems linked to repeated concussions.

Such invisible wounds can hinder a person's ability to regulate their behavior and lead to substance abuse, insomnia and other serious problems such as suicide, experts have said. Recent legislation and Pentagon programs have emphasized screening and self-reporting for such injuries, but critics have cast doubt on whether the Defense Department and individual commanders are moving with suitable alacrity.

A particular concern, they said, is the culture inherent to Green Berets and other Special Operations forces, a high-speed, secretive working environment where Livelsberger spent the majority of his military career. Operators pride themselves on toughness and resiliency, and often elect to gut out mental and physical ailments for fear that acknowledging they need help will put them at risk of being pulled from their duties.

While senior leaders have sought to change that culture, such efforts do not always take hold among rank-and-file troops, for whom reliability is important social currency, said Katherine L. Kuzminski, a military policy expert at the Center for a New American Security.

"I don't think that permeates to the interpersonal relationships between those in Special Operations," Kuzminski said of the institutional push to destigmatize behavioral health care. "There is always the risk that your personal reputation could be harmed if it's known that you're really having a problem."

The FBI and local authorities in Las Vegas have said Livelsberger is "likely" to have suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, a condition that can include depression, anxiety or other behaviors, but they did not say how they arrived at that conclusion.

Military officials have not made such a declaration, citing privacy laws.

Law enforcement authorities have not disclosed a motive, but recovered writings from Livelsberger's phone and other messages he wrote indicating he wanted to "relieve myself of the burden of the lives I took" and draw attention to alleged war crimes in Afghanistan.

At the time of his death, Livelsberger was on authorized leave from his duty station in Germany with the Army's 10th Special Forces Group, where he had recently begun a specialization in drone warfare.

He had access to and used a program for Special Operations troops that provides "holistic care in physical, cognitive, medical and support resources as appropriate to each individual," said the Army's chief spokesperson, Brig. Gen.

Amanda Azubuike. He did not display any "concerning behavior" before being granted time off, she said.

The Army is conducting its own investigation of the circumstances surrounding Livelsberger's suicide, officials said, which is standard when soldiers die in uniform. The inquiry is expected to scrutinize whether leaders or fellow soldiers in his unit, or his health care providers, missed signs of distress.

A military official familiar with the matter, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to be candid, defended Livelsberger's leaders, calling them "engaged," and sought to distance his care team from what happened outside the Trump hotel.

"No one tells their mental health provider they plan to blow up a building," the official said. "I truly think that was a snap decision."

Col. Allie Weiskopf, the director of public affairs for U.S. Special Operations Command, said personnel assigned to elite military units are screened annually to assess their psychological health. Additionally, once every three months, senior leaders are expected to discuss with their troops the resources available to them and work to dispel persistent myths about seeking behavioral health care, she said.

Typically, providers can see patients in less than two weeks, often within three days, or the same day if they have an emergency, Weiskopf said.

"Our data shows that service members are seeking help," Weiskopf said. The Washington Post requested the command's data but was told it was not readily releasable.

The deep bonds forged within such units are vital for completing the complex missions they are assigned, but that codepen-

dency can exact a cost, former Special Operations troops said, describing feelings of guilt that can occur if they were to miss a combat deployment or important training. That leads many to downplay or ignore mental and physical ailments, they explained. Rather, people who need help often wait until the end of their military service to seek care.

"Sometimes you don't necessarily get the full military medical treatment that you should because you're worried about how it could impact you while you're in service," said a former Special Forces officer who served with Livelsberger in Afghanistan.

"Stigma," he said, "still exists for mental health help."

A recent study funded by the military's Special Operations Command set out to understand why some troops may or may not seek care, Weiskopf said. The results are not finalized, but preliminary findings "do not indicate that the stigma of behavioral health was a primary barrier," she said.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., who co-led legislation intended to improve treatment and screening for head trauma among service members, told The Post that Congress must "take a closer look at how Master Sgt. Livelsberger's apparent brain injuries may have contributed to the tragedy" in Las Vegas. Bipartisan reforms passed last year were a start, she added, "but we need to do much more."

An initiative launched last year will screen all incoming troops and establish a baseline of brain health that can be followed over time to better inform treatment, DOD spokesman Joshua Wick said, and those with increased exposure will be tested more frequently.

Trump team questions NSC on loyalty

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Incoming senior Trump administration officials have begun questioning career civil servants who work on the White House National Security Council about who they voted for in the 2024 election, their political contributions and whether they have made social media posts that could be considered incriminating by President-elect Donald Trump's team, according to a U.S. official familiar with the matter.

At least some of these nonpo-

litical employees have begun packing up their belongings since being asked about their loyalty to Trump — after they had earlier been given indications that they would be asked to stay on at the NSC in the new administration, the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive personnel matters.

Trump's pick for national security adviser, Florida Rep. Mike Waltz, in recent days publicly signaled his intention to get rid of all nonpolitical appointees and career intelligence officials

serving on the NSC by Inauguration Day to ensure the council is staffed with those who support Trump's agenda.

A wholesale removal of foreign policy and national security experts from the NSC on Day 1 of the new administration could deprive Trump's team of considerable expertise and institutional knowledge at a time when the U.S. is grappling with difficult policy challenges in Ukraine, the Mideast and beyond.

Such questioning could also make new policy experts brought in to the NSC less likely

to speak up about policy differences and concerns.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan is making a robust case for the incoming Trump administration to hold over career government employees assigned to the NSC at least through the early going of the new administration.

"Given everything going on in the world, making sure you have in place a team that is up to speed, and, you know, ready to continue serving at 12:01, 12:02, 12:03 p.m. on the 20th is really important," Sullivan said.

Vance says violent Jan. 6 rioters shouldn't get pardon

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Vice President-elect JD Vance says people responsible for the violence during the Capitol riot "obviously" should not be pardoned, as President-elect Donald Trump is promising to use his clemency power on behalf of many of those who tried on Jan. 6, 2021, to overturn the results of the election that Trump lost.

Vance insisted in an interview on "Fox News Sunday" that the pardon question is "very simple," saying those who "protested peacefully" should be pardoned and "if you committed violence on that day, obviously you shouldn't be pardoned." He later said there was a "bit of a gray area" in some cases.

Trump said he would issue pardons to rioters on "Day 1" of his presidency, which begins Jan. 20. "Most likely, I'll do it very quickly," he said recently on NBC's "Meet the Press." He added that "those people have suffered long and hard. And there may be some exceptions to it. I have to look. But, you know, if somebody was radical,

crazy."

More than 1,500 people have been charged with federal crimes stemming from the siege that left more than 100 police officers injured and sent lawmakers running into hiding as they met to certify Democrat Joe Biden's 2020 victory.

Hundreds of people who did not engage in destruction or violence were charged only with misdemeanor offenses for illegally entering the Capitol. Others were charged with felony offenses, including assault for beating police officers. Leaders of the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys extremist groups were convicted of seditious conspiracy for what prosecutors described as plots to use violence to stop the peaceful transfer of power from Trump, the Republican incumbent, to Biden.

"The president saying he'll look at each case (and me saying the same) is not some walk-back," Vance said. "I assure you, we care about people unjustly locked up. Yes, that includes people provoked and it includes people who got a garbage trial."

Industry upset by plan for AI chip export rules

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is proposing a new framework for the exporting of the advanced computer chips used to develop artificial intelligence, an attempt to balance national security concerns about the technology with the economic interests of producers and other countries.

But the framework proposed Monday also raised concerns of chip industry executives who say the rules would limit access to existing chips used for video games and restrict in 120 countries the chips used for data centers and AI products. Mexico, Portugal, Israel and Switzerland are among the nations that could have limited access.

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said on a call with reporters previewing the framework that it's "critical" to preserve America's leadership in AI and the development of AI-related computer chips. The fast-evolving AI technology enables computers to produce novels, make scientific research breakthroughs, automate driving and foster a range of other transformations that

could reshape economies and warfare.

"As AI becomes more powerful, the risks to our national security become even more intense," Raimondo said. The framework "is designed to safeguard the most advanced AI technology and ensure that it stays out of the hands of our foreign adversaries but also enabling the broad diffusion and sharing of the benefits with partner countries."

A tech industry group, the Information Technology Industry Council, warned Raimondo in a letter last week that a hastily implemented new rule from the Democratic administration could fragment global supply chains and put U.S. companies at a disadvantage.

"While we share the U.S. government's commitment to national and economic security, the rule's potential risks to U.S. global leadership in AI cannot be emphasized enough," said a statement from Naomi Wilson, the group's senior vice president for Asia and global trade policy. She called for a more extensive consultation with the tech industry.

Exiting Wray decries China's cyber 'havoc'

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

China's cyber program has already infiltrated critical American infrastructure and is poised to "wreak havoc" at a whim, the outgoing FBI director told "60 Minutes" on Sunday.

Christopher Wray, who plans to resign as President-elect Donald Trump takes office later this month, described the Chinese government as "the greatest-long-term threat" and the "defining threat of our generation," due in part to its massive, state-funded cyber program.

During the interview with CBS's Scott Pelley, Wray said Beijing can leverage those programs to target water treatment plants, the electrical grid,

natural gas pipelines, telecommunications and other systems.

China has already pre-positioned malware to "lie in wait on those networks," where it can "inflict real-world harm at a time and place of their choosing," he said.

The FBI also believes that Beijing has already listened in on communications by high-level officials.

Wray didn't confirm whom he suspects China has surveilled, but "60 Minutes" said it independently confirmed Beijing spied on communications from Donald Trump, Kamala Harris' presidential campaign and U.S. national security figures, according to the televised interview.

The program did not dis-

close how it confirmed those statements.

China is the "most active and persistent cyber threat to U.S. Government, private-sector, and critical infrastructure networks," according to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's annual threat assessment released Feb. 5.

"If Beijing believed that a major conflict with the United States were imminent, it would consider aggressive cyber operations against U.S. critical infrastructure and military assets," the report said. A cyber strike of that scale would aim to impede the deployment of U.S. troops, induce societal panic and otherwise interfere with U.S. military actions, according to the report.

China over the past decade

has been accused of multiple state-sponsored hacking campaigns aimed at the U.S. — as well as European and Asian countries — but it routinely denies involvement.

The U.S. Treasury on Jan. 3 sanctioned Integrity Technology Group Inc., a Beijing-based cybersecurity company, for its alleged involvement in multiple hacking attempts against the U.S.

The hacks were connected to Flax Typhoon, which the Treasury described as "a Chinese malicious state-sponsored cyber group that has been active since at least 2021, often targeting organizations within U.S. critical infrastructure sectors," according to the Treasury news release announcing the sanctions.

Ukraine: Russians bypass key city to cut off supplies

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian forces are bypassing a key stronghold in eastern Ukraine that they have fought for months to capture and are focusing instead on cutting supply lines to it, a Ukrainian official said Monday.

Russian troops are going around the vital logistics hub of Pokrovsk, where a steadfast Ukrainian defense has kept them at bay, and are taking aim at a highway that leads from there to the central Ukraine city of Dnipro, Maj. Viktor Trehubov, a local Ukrainian army spokesperson, told The Associated Press.

That route is crucial for supplies feeding Ukrainian forces in the entire region. Cutting the highway traffic would also severely weaken Pokrovsk.

"So far, they have not achieved their goal and (Ukrainian forces) are working to ensure that they do not achieve it in the future — just as they have not been successful in other attempts to bypass the

city," Trehubov said in a WhatsApp message.

Ukraine's army is under severe strain along parts of the approximately 600-mile front line, especially in the eastern Donetsk region where Pokrovsk is located.

After almost three years of war, Ukrainian units are depleted and are outnumbered by Russian forces. Though its battlefield progress has been slow and costly, momentum is in Russia's favor and its onslaught has gradually swallowed up towns and villages.

In his daily video address to the nation late Sunday, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said fighting around Pokrovsk was "the most intense" in recent days.

In 2022, Moscow illegally annexed the Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk regions, which make up the economically important Donbas industrial area, together with the southeastern provinces of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. But Russian forces don't fully control any of them.

Officials: Progress made in Israel-Hamas talks

Associated Press

CAIRO — U.S. and Arab mediators made significant progress overnight toward brokering a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war and the release of scores of hostages held in the Gaza Strip, but a deal hasn't been reached yet, officials said Monday.

Four officials acknowledged that progress has been made and said the coming days would be critical for ending more than 15 months of fighting that has destabilized the Middle East. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the talks.

A U.S. official briefed on the negotiations said all sides are "closer than we've ever been, but it could still fall apart." The official declined to predict the timing of a potential agreement because he said it is just too uncertain, with multiple moving parts still in play.

Two other officials, including one associated with Hamas, said

that there were still a number of hurdles to clear. On several occasions over the past year, U.S. leaders have said that they were on the verge of reaching a deal, only to have the talks stall.

Another person familiar with the talks said there had been a breakthrough overnight and that there was a proposed deal on the table. Israeli and Hamas negotiators will now take it back to their leaders for final approval, the person said.

The person said that mediators from the Gulf country of Qatar had put renewed pressure on Hamas to accept the agreement, while U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, was pressing the Israelis. Witkoff recently joined the negotiations and has been in the region in recent days.

The person said that the mediators had handed off the draft deal to each side and that the next 24 hours would be pivotal.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Americans can't run on Dunkin's donut shortage

NE OMAHA — Dunkin' dropped the "Donuts" from its brand name years ago. Now — at least across Nebraska, New Mexico and some other states — it doesn't have doughnuts on the shelves either.

Dunkin' stores in Omaha, Lincoln and Grand Island in Nebraska all had no doughnuts in their cases Thursday and Friday and put up signs on their doors and drive-thru kiosks informing customers that the pastries were unavailable "due to a manufacturing error." Some locations did offer "Munchkins," or doughnut holes, on Friday.

Some employees chalked it up to a supply chain issue and others said simply that delivery trucks had been arriving without the cargo that the chain is most famous for. Employees said they hoped stocks would be replenished by this week.

But checks of locations in other regions, including St. Joseph, Mo., and Boston — where Dunkin' has a near cult-like following — found no shortage of the sweet treats.

Students could get free meals under new plan

NY ALBANY — Every student in New York could get free breakfast and lunch at school under a proposal announced by Gov. Kathy Hochul.

If approved by state lawmakers, the plan would cover more than 2.7 million students in the state regardless of income, the Democratic governor said.

Students in New York can already receive free or discounted meals at school through a

federal program that is dependent on a family's income level. Hochul's proposal would remove any income requirements, expanding free meals to about 300,000 more kids in New York, her office said.

"To be singled out and your classmates know that you are the one who has to get subsidized help for your meals, that's a mark on you. Our kids don't need that, right?" the governor said at a news conference.

At least eight states have their own universal school meals programs. New York City, the largest school district in the country, also offers free breakfast and lunch to students.

Largest health care strike in state's history begins

OR PORTLAND — Some 5,000 hospital health care workers walked off the job as they picketed all eight Providence hospitals in Oregon, in what the state health workers union described as the largest health care strike in Oregon history — and the first to involve doctors.

Most of those participating in the open-ended strike are nurses. But in a rare move, dozens of doctors at a Portland hospital and at six women's health clinics are also partaking, making it the state's first physicians strike, according to the Oregon Nurses Association union.

The strike came after more than a year of negotiations failed to produce an agreement over staffing levels, pay and benefits.

Providence said it expected up to 70 doctors to strike at Providence St. Vincent in Portland, including hospitalists, obstetrics hospitalists who pro-

vide care for pregnant women and palliative care physicians working with patients with serious illness or injury. It added that surgeons and emergency doctors were not on strike.

Altice to spend millions on internet upgrades deal

WV CHARLESTON — The parent company of one of West Virginia's largest internet providers has reached a settlement with the state to resolve thousands of consumer complaints.

Under the settlement announced by Attorney General Patrick Morrisey, Altice USA will make \$40 million in additional upgrades in West Virginia through 2027, provide \$4 million in credits to customers' accounts and pay the state \$500,000.

Altice entered into the agreement without admitting that its practices violated the state Consumer Credit and Protection Act.

Altice operates in West Virginia under the Optimum brand. Suddenlink Communications, Optimum's former name, was fined \$2.2 million in 2022 by the state Public Service Commission. The PSC found that Suddenlink ignored customer complaints, reduced the number of full-time employees and its maintenance work and budget, and changed its method of communicating with customers.

4 hurt after Delta jet aborts takeoff

GA ATLANTA — Four passengers were injured at the Atlanta airport after a Delta Air Lines jet bound for Minneapolis aborted its takeoff.

The plane had experienced

an engine problem, Delta spokesperson Morgan Durrant said. The incident happened while a snowstorm was causing widespread cancellations and delays in Atlanta, the world's busiest airport. But officials can't say if the problem had anything to do with the weather.

The 201 passengers, two pilots and five flight attendants aboard evacuated the Boeing 757-300 using inflatable slides and were bused back to a concourse. One of the injured passengers was taken to a hospital, while three were treated at the airport for minor injuries.

Durrant said the flight crew "followed established procedures to suspend the takeoff."

Workers try to stabilize sinkhole that killed 1

PA UNITY — A sinkhole where a Pennsylvania woman fell to her death last month is now being filled with hundreds of cubic yards of grout in a bid to stabilize the site.

The work in the village of Marguerite, about 40 miles east of Pittsburgh, started just days after emergency responders found the remains of 64-year-old Elizabeth Pollard on Dec. 6, four days after she went missing while searching for her cat. The sinkhole was near a restaurant about half a mile from her home.

Crews have since pumped more than 3,300 cubic yards of grout into the site, the Pittsburgh-Tribune-Review reported, but it's not yet known when the work will be completed. The work was put on hold recently due to snow and extremely cold temperatures, but officials hope to resume working soon.

— From wire reports

STARS  STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Commanders get elusive playoff win

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — New owners. New general manager. New coach. New franchise quarterback.

That's the formula — with an emphasis on the QB — that Washington rode to playoff success after nearly two decades of futility.

Jayden Daniels ran for a critical first down to set up Zane Gonzalez's 37-yard field goal that clanged off the right upright and went through as time expired, and the Commanders beat the Tampa Bay Buccaneers 23-20 in an NFC wild-card game Sunday night for the franchise's first playoff victory in 6,945 days.

Daniels, playing with a bandage beneath his right eye after his face was bloodied, became the third rookie quarterback in three years to win a playoff game.

The Commanders (13-5) will face the No. 1 seed Detroit Lions (15-2) in the divisional round.

"It means a lot, man," Daniels said. "You could just see all the fans over here, man, they're wait-

ing for us. They've waited a long time for this moment and this feeling, so I'm just so happy for them."

Baker Mayfield and the Buccaneers (10-8) missed several opportunities and the veteran quarterback committed a costly turnover in the fourth quarter. The Bucs couldn't get 1 yard on two tries from the Commanders 12 and settled for a tying field goal before Washington's winning drive.

Daniels threw for 268 yards and two touchdowns, joining C.J. Stroud and Brock Purdy as rookie QBs to win playoff games in the past three seasons.

Washington hadn't won in the postseason since beating the Buccaneers in Tampa Bay 17-10 in a wild-card game on Jan. 7, 2006.

The turnaround for the organization began when Daniel Snyder sold the team in 2023 to a group led by Josh Harris that includes NBA Hall of Famer Magic Johnson. They hired GM Adam Peters and coach Dan Quinn after their

first season in control and selected Daniels with the No. 2 pick in the draft in April.

"You gotta give Josh a lot of credit because we picked the right people," Johnson said. "When you pick Adam Peters and you pick coach Quinn and they picked the right players, the culture changed. You went from a losing culture to a winning culture. But it's about those players. They decided they wanted to win. They didn't worry about what all the analysts said. And, the right quarterback. Enough said right there."

The Buccaneers opened the season with a 37-20 victory at home against the Commanders in Daniels' first game. Daniels went on to have an outstanding season, was selected to the Pro Bowl and helped Washington improve from 4-13 to 12-5.

Now, he has them headed to Detroit to face Jared Goff and the Lions' high-octane offense.

After Tampa Bay's defense held inside the 5 in the opening minute of the fourth quarter to

preserve a 17-13 lead, Mayfield gave the Commanders the ball right back when he fumbled an exchange on a handoff to Jalen McMillan. Washington recovered at the Buccaneers 13. On fourth-and-2 from the 5, Daniels connected with Terry McLaurin in the back of the end zone for a 20-17 lead.

"It's disappointing because I believe in this team because we have the talent and the coaching staff to go far," Mayfield said. "I did some dumb stuff and it'll wear on me for a while."

Mayfield drove the Bucs to a second-and-1 at the Commanders 12 but they settled for a 32-yard field goal by Chase McLaughlin that tied it at 20-20 with 4:41 left.

The Bucs never got the ball back, thanks to Daniels, who calmly led his team downfield. With less than a minute left, he was hit behind the line of scrimmage but scrambled for 4 yards on third-and-2, allowing him to take a knee to set up Gonzalez's winning kick.

Hurts, Goedert lift Eagles over banged-up Packers

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Dallas Goedert fired one stiff-arm to a Packers defender, smacked him again and then — in a sports city known for its Broad Street Bully — dispatched one final shot to the face on his way to end zone.

Goedert refused to be stopped — and neither were the Philadelphia Eagles in game in which they welcomed back Jalen Hurts and had the book on a Green Bay team that couldn't get past myriad injuries.

Hurts tossed two touchdown passes in his first game since a late-season concussion, Goedert threw those three stiff-arms on a rugged TD catch and the Eagles rode their NFL-best defense to a 22-10 wild-card playoff win Sunday night.

Hurts threw for a modest 131 yards, but played with no hesitation in his return from a three-week layoff after a concussion in December. He started strong — six straight completions to open the game — and held off the Packers with a 24-yard TD pass to Goedert in the third quarter that will be forever stamped on the franchise's postseason highlight reel as he pushed around Carrington Valentine on his way for the score.

"That was a really fun play. It might [be] my favorite touchdown of my career," Goedert said. "I had one guy to beat and I was able to do that. I'm not ready to go home, and I was going to do whatever it took to help the team get the 'W.'"

Philadelphia's defense han-

dled the rest.

The Eagles turned a recovered fumble on the opening kickoff into Hurts' first TD pass three plays later and the defense picked off Jordan Love twice in the first half. Holding a 19-10 lead in the fourth, Philadelphia forced a turnover on downs when Green Bay had a fourth-and-3 on its own 41 with five minutes left in the game.

Quinyon Mitchell had one final interception of Love with 1:51 left that sealed the win for NFC East champion Philadelphia, which will host a divisional round game next Sunday against the winner of Monday night's wild-card game between the Minnesota Vikings and Los Angeles Rams in Arizona.

Hurts said the Eagles need to

"find our rhythm earlier in the game."

"I think it's been an odd year in a sense of how choppy it's been, and obviously me kind of being on leave the last couple weeks or so," Hurts said. "Being back and just getting into that rhythm and leaving it all out there right now, that's what it's about."

Saquon Barkley, who led the NFL in rushing with 2,005 yards, had 119 yards in his Eagles postseason debut.

"A year ago, I put out a tweet when I was on my couch watching playoff football that I gotta find a way to get back in it," said Barkley, who spent his first six NFL seasons with the New York Giants. "So I'm just happy to be here."

Bills rout Broncos, Allen leads balanced offense

Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Josh Allen and the Buffalo Bills' spread-the-wealth approach on offense that was so productive in the regular season proved unstoppable in their playoff opener.

Whether it was Allen completing a 24-yard touchdown pass to sliding running back Ty Johnson on fourth down, or James Cook racking up 120 yards rushing, including a 5-yard touchdown run, the Bills leaned on a balanced attack in a 31-7 victory over the Denver Broncos in a wild-card playoff game Sunday.

"I don't think there was one certain thing over another. We just wanted to come out and execute well," Allen said. "At the end of the day, we just wanted to come out and play our best football, and I feel like we did that today."

With Allen completing 20 of 26 attempts for 272 yards pass-

ing and two TDs, and the running game combining for 210 yards, Buffalo methodically wore down the Broncos by scoring on six of its first seven drives in a game where the Bills finished with a 23-minute edge in time of possession.

Allen completed passes to eight players, including getting receiver Curtis Samuel involved by essentially sealing the win with a 55-yard TD catch on the opening snap of the fourth quarter.

"I'll speak on behalf of Curtis. He probably didn't have the season that he wanted to have," Allen said of the eighth-year player who was limited to 31 catches for 253 yards and a touchdown. "But he just continued to work hard, and that's kind of the mentality we've had all year is everybody eats. And today was his day."

Five-time defending AFC East champion Buffalo, which

became the NFL's first team to score 30 touchdowns rushing and passing in a season, advanced to the divisional round for a fifth straight postseason, and will face the third-seeded Baltimore Ravens next Sunday night.

The Ravens, coming off a 28-14 win over Pittsburgh on Saturday, routed the Bills 35-10 at Baltimore in Week 4 this season. The outing will mark the second playoff meeting between Allen and Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson after Buffalo defeated Baltimore 17-3 in the 2020 divisional round.

"This is what everyone's been waiting for, right?" coach Sean McDermott said. "So it'll be a nice week and everyone will be looking forward to it, and they're a great football team. I mean they handled us pretty good the first go around and they're certainly playing well."

Seventh-seeded Denver was

outclassed in its first playoff appearance since its Super Bowl-winning season in 2015.

The Broncos' offense essentially stalled after rookie Bo Nix capped a five-play opening drive with a 43-yard touchdown pass to former college teammate Troy Franklin. Nix finished 13 of 22 for 144 yards in an outing where Denver punted four times and turned the ball over on downs twice.

The game served as a lesson in how much further the first-round pick and the Broncos still have to go after a promising season in which Nix threw 29 TD passes—two shy of the NFL rookie record.

"I'm really proud of these guys. We've overcome a lot and not really been counted in many games," Nix said. "But to make the playoffs was a special moment for this group. It's something we can build off of. ... Our goals are changing."

Djokovic wins at Australian Open with new coach Murray

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Novak Djokovic's first match with former rival Andy Murray as his coach did not start all that well, even against a 19-year-old making his Grand Slam debut.

Still, after dropping his opening set at the 2025 Australian Open on Monday night to Nishesh Basavareddy, an American who left Stanford University and turned pro last month, Djokovic eventually asserted himself for a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 victory to begin his bid for an 11th championship at Melbourne Park and a record 25th major title overall.

"I'm obviously thrilled to have him in my corner," Djokovic said about Murray. "I must say, it was a little bit of a strange experience to have him at courtside in my box. We played for over 20 years against each other at the highest level. Great to have him on the same side of the net. He gave me some great advice mid-match."

Before heading out into Rod Laver Arena, Djokovic and Murray chatted in the gym. They wrapped up the conversation with a fist bump, before Djokovic hopped

on the treadmill to warm up.

During the match, apart from an extended conversation before the fourth set, there was only the occasional interaction between player and coach — a pairing between 37-year-olds born a week apart, and opponents from the age of 12, including in a series of Slam finals as pros. Murray retired at the Paris Olympics in August; Djokovic proposed teaming up in November.

Djokovic showed some of his usual fire when that vital break came at the 1½-hour mark. He watched the 107th-ranked Basavareddy's forehand land wide and let out a yell, clenched a fist, pointed a finger at his ear. That was the beginning of the end for Basavareddy, who started stepping gingerly between points and grabbing at his legs, and took a medical timeout before the third set.

On a busy and warm Day 2, which included nine Grand Slam champions with a combined 43 major trophies in action plus another half-dozen players with runner-up showings, the winners included No. 2 Iga Swiatek, No. 3 Coco Gauff, No. 7 Jessica Pegula and Naomi Osaka among the wom-

en, and No. 1 Jannik Sinner and No. 3 Carlos Alcaraz among the men.

Osaka, who won two of her four major titles in Australia, defeated Caroline Garcia 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 in Monday's last match at Rod Laver Arena.

Noteworthy exits came from two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka, 2017 French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko and two-time major finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas. Ostapenko's 6-3, 7-6 (6) loss came against Tokyo Olympics gold medalist Belinda Bencic, who is ranked outside the top 400 after returning in October from maternity leave.

Also one-and-done, but not that surprisingly: Nick Kyrgios, who lost to Djokovic in the 2022 Wimbledon final and played one match the past two seasons because of injuries. Kyrgios dealt with a strained abdominal muscle in the lead-up to this week and was defeated by Jacob Fearnley 7-6 (3), 6-3, 7-6 (2).

"Sorry for Nick," said Fearnley, a 23-year-old from Scotland who played college tennis at TCU in Fort Worth, Texas. "I could tell he was dealing with some stuff."

Brunson has 44 as Knicks rout Bucks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jalen Brunson scored 44 points despite missing part of the third quarter with an apparent injury, and the New York Knicks beat the Milwaukee Bucks 140-106 on Sunday.

Brunson had 23 points in the first quarter, one off his career high for any period, and was off to another strong start in the third when he was slow to get up after having his shot blocked on a drive to the basket. Once he did stand up, he immediately motioned to the bench that he needed to come out and walked directly to the locker room area.

New York never announced an injury, and Brunson eventually emerged from the tunnel about six minutes later to a loud ovation and checked back into the game. He reached 40 points for the 17th time as a Knick, tying Carmelo Anthony for third on the franchise list.

Karl-Anthony Towns added 30 points and 18 rebounds for New York, which had lost four of five before shooting 58% from the field.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 24 points and 13 rebounds for

Milwaukee, which had its three-game winning streak snapped. Damian Lillard added 22 points.

Nuggets 112, Mavericks 101: Russell Westbrook had 21 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists and Nikola Jokic added 19 points, 18 rebounds and nine assists as visiting Denver rallied in the fourth quarter to beat Dallas.

The Nuggets won for the 12th time in 17 games.

Kings 124, Bulls 119: Domantas Sabonis had 22 points, 15 rebounds and eight assists, and visiting Sacramento beat Chicago to extend its season-high winning streak to seven games.

DeMar DeRozan got a warm reception in his return to Chicago and finished with 21 points. The six-time All-Star spent three seasons with the Bulls before leaving for Sacramento in a three-team trade in July.

Pacers 108, Cavaliers 93: Andrew Nembhard scored 19 points, Pascal Siakam had 18 points and nine rebounds and visiting Indiana ended NBA-leading Cleveland's winning streak at 12 games.

Cleveland lost for the first time since Dec. 8 at Miami. It is 33-5 overall and 20-2 at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse.

Celtics 120, Pelicans 119: Jayson Tatum scored 38 points with 11 rebounds and Kristaps Porzingis had 19 points and 11 rebounds as host Boston overcame the return of Zion Williamson to New Orleans' lineup to win.

Trey Murphy III scored 30 points and Williamson scored 16 in his return from a one-game suspension for being late to team activities. The 2019 draft lottery prize also had seven rebounds in 28 minutes.

Thunder 136, Wizards 95: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 16 of his 27 points from the foul line to overcome his worst shooting performance of the season and help visiting Oklahoma City to a rout of Washington.

Gilgeous-Alexander shot only 29.4% (5 of 17) from the floor over 30 minutes, well below his previous worst of 35% against San Antonio on Oct. 30.

Magic 104, 76ers 99: Cole Anthony had 27 points, Paolo Banchero scored seven points

in the final 1:32 and host Orlando beat Philadelphia.

Banchero finished with 20 points, eight rebounds and six assists in his second game back after being sidelined by a torn oblique.

Jazz 112, Nets 111 (OT): Isaiah Collier drove for the go-ahead layup with 2 seconds left to lift host Utah to an overtime victory over Brooklyn.

Collier finished with a career-high 23 points, seven rebounds and seven assists, and Collin Sexton added 21 points to lead the Jazz, snapping a three-game losing streak. Svi Mykhailiuk and Brice Sensabaugh chipped in 16 points apiece.

Evbuomwan led the Nets with 22 points and Ziaire Williams added 19. Ben Simmons and Nic Claxton each tallied 14 points. Simmons added nine assists and Claxton collected 12 rebounds.

Suns 120, Hornets 113: Devin Booker scored 30 points, Kevin Durant added 27 and host Phoenix rallied in the final minutes to beat Charlotte.

The Suns have won three straight and four of five. The Hornets have lost 10 of 11.

Red Wings cruise past Kraken to 7th straight win

Associated Press

DETROIT — Patrick Kane scored during Detroit's fast start, and the Red Wings beat the Seattle Kraken 6-2 on Sunday for their seventh consecutive victory.

Marco Kasper, J.T. Compher, Alex DeBrincat and Kane scored as Detroit opened a 4-0 lead 7:53 into the first period. Erik Gustafsson and Dylan Larkin added second-period goals for the Red Wings.

It's the longest win streak for Detroit in nearly 13 years. The Wings had two seven-game streaks in the 2011-12 season.

Oliver Bjorkstrand and Matty Beniers scored for Seattle.

Kraken goaltender Philipp Grubauer was replaced by Joey Daccord after giving up three goals in four shots. Daccord had 16 saves in Seattle's fifth loss in six games.

Lightning 5, Penguins 2: Nikita Kucherov had two goals and an assist, and visiting Tampa Bay beat Pittsburgh.

Brandon Hagel also scored for the Lightning, and Anthony Cirelli and Nick Paul had empty-net goals.

Jake Guentzel had two assists to become the second player in Tampa Bay history with at least 20 goals and 40 points in his first 40 games with the franchise.

Rickard Rakell scored his 22nd goal of the season for the Penguins, and Sidney Crosby recorded his 1,040th career assist to tie Marcel Dionne for 11th on the NHL's career list.

Senators 3, Stars 2: Leevi Merilainen made 24 saves in his home debut and visiting Ottawa ended Dallas' seven-game winning streak with a victory.

Merilainen was coming off his first NHL shutout Saturday in a 5-0 win in Pittsburgh. The 22-year-old Finn's five previous starts this season were on the road.

Ducks 3, Hurricanes 2 (OT): Cutter Gauthier scored two goals,

including one 1:52 into overtime, as visiting Anaheim beat Carolina.

Jansen Harkins also scored, and Lukas Dostal stopped 35 shots to help the Ducks snap a three-game losing streak. Jackson LaCombe added two assists.

Golden Knights 4, Wild 1: Pavel Dorofeyev had two power-play goals and added an assist and host Vegas broke open a tie game with three third-period goals to beat Minnesota.

The Golden Knights joined Washington and Winnipeg atop the NHL with 61 points, avoiding their first three-game losing streak of the season.