

## Pentagon pick pledges Pacific priorities

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — The prospective next Pentagon chief says he will prioritize a military buildup in the Pacific in connection with a global force review that will reassess how many troops are needed in other parts of the world.

Pete Hegseth offered a glimpse of his plans and approach to overseas operations in a 75-page written response to lawmaker questions ahead of his testimony Tuesday before the Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington.

During the hearing, Hegseth defended himself against a wide range of accusations related to his personal life and views on women in combat. But the U.S. military's missions abroad largely were glossed over.

However, in written testimony, Hegseth put the U.S. military role in the Pacific front and center.

"We need to accelerate efforts to strengthen our force posture

and increase operational capabilities in the Indo-Pacific, given China's historic and rapid military buildup and the urgent need to reestablish deterrence," Hegseth wrote in testimony released Tuesday.

Hegseth said he would take steps to "urgently strengthen deterrence" across the Pacific and seek funding to make a more formidable force there possible.

Hegseth stopped short of detailing what military assets he would like to move to the region, but his anticipated force posture review would impact Pentagon missions in Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

Combatant commands that oversee those regions also would be subjected to a review. Hegseth made no mention of adding or cutting resources to U.S. European, Central and Africa commands, saying instead that he would seek to get more support out of allies and partners in those areas.

But officials expected to have key roles in President-elect Do-

nald Trump's new administration have made clear that allies in Europe and elsewhere will need to pick up any slack that comes with a sharper military shift to the Pacific.

Hegseth reiterated that position. In the CENTCOM area, partners should be empowered to counter terrorist groups, he said.

"If confirmed, I would also look to increase regional and European cooperation in countering the Iranian (threat)," he said.

In Europe, Hegseth said allies face a threat from Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has "designs for expansion of Russian territory and influence and the degradation of the NATO Alliance."

The U.S. should seek to deter Russia from acting against U.S. interests in Europe but "also leverage the investments of our allies to provide for their own defense," he said.

Such views are in line with those of Elbridge Colby, whom Trump has nominated to serve as the Pentagon's undersecretary of

defense for policy. Colby was an architect of national defense strategy in Trump's first term, and if confirmed he will play a key role in shaping the look of the future military footprint overseas.

Colby's past stated position on the EUCOM mission, along with that of Vice President-elect JD Vance, is that European militaries must ramp up spending so they can provide the bulk of conventional defense forces for NATO.

While neither has called for a withdrawal from Europe, the U.S. military's focus on the Continent should be providing NATO with its nuclear deterrent and other high-end capabilities, they argue.

Hegseth echoed that outlook.

"At a time when the NATO Alliance faces nuclear saber-rattling from Russia, the presence of U.S. nuclear weapons serves as an important political, strategic, and military link between America and its European allies," Hegseth's testimony said.

## Impeached President Yoon taken to detention center

*Associated Press*

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea's impeached president, Yoon Suk Yeol, was sent to a detention center near Seoul on Wednesday night, after being questioned by anti-corruption officials who took him into custody over his imposition of martial law last month.

Yoon was detained in a major law enforcement operation at the presidential compound earlier in the day. Yoon defiantly insisted that the country's anti-corruption agency, which led the raid with police, didn't have

the authority to investigate his actions, but said he complied to prevent violence.

Yoon, the country's first sitting president to be apprehended, now faces the prospect of a lengthy prison term over potential rebellion charges.

In a video message recorded shortly before he was escorted to the headquarters of the anti-corruption agency, Yoon lamented the "rule of law has completely collapsed in this country."

Yoon had been holed up in the Hannam-dong residence in the

capital, Seoul, for weeks while vowing to "fight to the end" the efforts to oust him. He has justified his declaration of martial law Dec. 3 as a legitimate act of governance against an "anti-state" opposition employing its legislative majority to thwart his agenda.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials said Yoon was brought into custody about five hours after investigators arrived at the presidential compound and about three hours after they successfully entered the resi-

dence, in their second attempt to detain him over his imposition of martial law.

Hundreds of Yoon's conservative supporters rallied near the anti-corruption agency's office as he underwent questioning, shouting slogans and holding signs that read: "We will fight alongside President Yoon Suk Yeol."

Also on Wednesday, an unidentified man was in life-threatening condition after an apparent self-immolation near the site, according to the Gyeonggi provincial fire department.

# Israel, Hamas agree to ceasefire deal

*Associated Press*

DOHA, Qatar — Israel and Hamas agreed to a ceasefire deal, mediators announced Wednesday, pausing a devastating 15-month war in the Gaza Strip and raising the possibility of winding down the deadliest and most destructive fighting between the bitter enemies.

The deal, coming after weeks of painstaking negotiations in the Qatari capital, promises the release of dozens of hostages held by Hamas in phases, the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israel and would allow hundreds of thousands of people displaced in Gaza to return to what remains of their homes. It also would flood badly needed humanitarian aid into a

devastated territory.

Three officials from the U.S. and one from Hamas confirmed that a deal had been reached, while a senior Israeli official said details are still being ironed out.

All three U.S. officials and the Hamas official requested anonymity to discuss the contours of the deal before the official announcement by mediators in Doha.

Any agreement still needs to be approved by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Cabinet, but is expected to go into effect in the coming days.

The deal is expected to deliver an initial six-week halt to fighting that is to be accompanied by the opening of negotia-

tions on ending the war altogether.

Over six weeks, 33 of the nearly 100 hostages are to be reunited with their loved ones after months in captivity with no contact with the outside world, though it's unclear if all are alive.

It remained unclear exactly when and how many displaced Palestinians would be able to return to what remains of their homes and whether the agreement would lead to a complete end to the war and the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza—key Hamas demands for releasing the remaining captives.

Many longer-term questions about postwar Gaza remain, in-

cluding who will rule the territory or oversee the daunting task of reconstruction.

Still, the announcement offered the first sign of hope in months that Israel and Hamas may be winding down the war.

Hamas triggered the war with its Oct. 7, 2023, cross-border attack, which killed some 1,200 Israelis and took 250 others hostage. Israel responded with a fierce offensive that has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, displaced an estimated 90% of Gaza's population and sparked a humanitarian crisis.

The U.S., along with Egypt and Qatar, have brokered months of indirect talks between the bitter enemies.

## 5th Fleet honored for work to disrupt smuggling

**BY MATTHEW ADAMS**

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The 5th Fleet was awarded the Navy Expeditionary Medal on Tuesday for actions disrupting smuggling efforts during a three-year period.

Operation Unified Takedown is an effort to disrupt smuggling networks that fund extremism and contribute to the global circulation of illegal substances.

Sailors and Marines who participated in the operation from Oct. 1, 2021, to Sept. 30, 2024,

seized more than 70 tons of explosive propellants, 1,400 weapons, 226,000 rounds of ammunition and 43,000 kilograms of narcotics, the service said in a news release.

"The sailors and Marines of U.S. 5th Fleet have set an extraordinary standard of excellence and

perseverance," Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said in a statement. "Their success in Operation Unified Takedown has not only enhanced maritime security but also strengthened global partnerships and fostered long-term regional stability."

## Russian attack forces Ukraine to shut down power grid

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia on Wednesday launched a major ballistic and cruise missile attack on regions across Ukraine, targeting energy production and compelling authorities to shut down the power grid in some areas despite freezing winter weather, officials said.

The Russian Defense Ministry said that it launched a strike on "critically important facilities of gas and energy infrastructure that ensure the functioning of

Ukraine's military industrial complex." It didn't give the target locations or other details. The barrage came a day after the Russian Defense Ministry vowed a response to what it said was an attack on Russian soil using multiple Western-supplied missiles.

Kyiv hasn't confirmed that attack, though it said Tuesday that it hit an oil refinery and a fuel storage depot, a chemical plant producing ammunition and two anti-aircraft missile systems, in a

missile and drone attack that reached around almost 700 miles into Russia.

Long-range attacks have been a feature of the nearly three-year war, where on the front line snaking about 600 miles from northeast to southern Ukraine, the armies have been engaged in a war of attrition. Russia has been advancing on the battlefield over the past year, though its progress has been slow and costly.

Russia attacked Ukraine with 43 missiles and 74 drones over-

night, the Ukrainian Air Force said. A total of 30 missiles and 47 drones were shot down, and 27 drones failed to reach their target, it said.

The Russian missiles sought out targets from the Lviv region in western Ukraine near Poland to Kharkiv in northeast Ukraine bordering Russia. The state energy company Ukrenergo reported emergency power outages in six regions. It often shuts down production during attacks as a precaution.

# If top diplomat, Rubio vows to put US 'above all else'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Florida Sen. Marco Rubio received a warm welcome from Senate colleagues Wednesday as he sketched out his plans for implementing President-elect Donald Trump's "America First" vision as secretary of state.

"I hope I can earn your support, whether it's because you believe I would do a good job, or because you want to get rid of me," Rubio joked in testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where he served for 14 years.

But in between the niceties, Rubio painted a dark image of the dangers of facing the U.S., most specifically from China, who he said is America's "biggest threat."

He blamed this growing risk on America's shift to globalism, which he says "is now a weapon being used against us."

He said the U.S. must begin placing "our core national in-

terests above all else."

It's a remarkable opening salvo from Rubio, who was born in Miami to Cuban immigrants and who, if confirmed, would become the first Latino to serve as the nation's top diplomat.

The confirmation hearing begins a new chapter in the political career of the 53-year-old Florida Republican, whose relationship with Trump has evolved over the last decade.

Once rivals trading schoolyard insults as they campaigned for president in 2016, the two men became close allies as Trump campaigned for another White House term last year.

Unlike many of Trump's Cabinet selections, Rubio is expected to easily win confirmation, notching support not only from Republicans but also Democrats who endorse him as a "responsible" pick to represent the U.S. abroad.

Many expect he will be among the first of Trump's Cabinet picks approved.

Democratic Sen. Brian Schatz, who served alongside Rubio on the Foreign Relations Committee, said he has high hopes that the Florida Republican will reject the isolationist approach of other Trump allies.

Rubio's approach to foreign affairs is grounded in his years of service on the Foreign Relations committee and the Senate Intelligence panel.

In his speeches and writings, he's delivered increasingly stern warnings about growing military and economic threats to the United States, particularly from China, which he says has benefited from a "global world order" that he characterizes as obsolete.

China, Rubio told the committee, has "lied, cheated, hacked, and stolen their way to global superpower status, at our expense."

## Nominee: CIA must do a better job

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump's pick to lead the CIA told senators during his confirmation hearing Wednesday that the nation's premier spy agency must do a better job of staying ahead of global threats posed by Russia, China and other adversaries.

John Ratcliffe, who served as director of national intelligence during Trump's first term, told lawmakers that if confirmed, he would push the agency to do more to use technologies like artificial intelligence while also expanding the agency's use of human intelligence collection.

"We're not where we're supposed to be," Ratcliffe told the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Republicans praised Ratcliffe's experience, but Democrats struck a more skeptical tone, asking Ratcliffe if his loyalty to Trump would conflict with his duties to follow intelligence wherever it leads.

Ratcliffe assured the lawmakers that he would put the CIA's mission first.

"My record of speaking truth to power and defending the intelligence community .... is very clear," he said.

Ratcliffe is a former federal prosecutor and conservative member of Congress representing a district in Texas.

His hearing before the Senate Intelligence Committee is part of a weeklong marathon as the Republican-led Senate rushes to have some of Trump's nominees ready to be confirmed by the full Senate as soon as Inauguration Day on Monday.

Ratcliffe's experience as director of national intelligence, and his Senate confirmation for that post, are expected to boost his chances in the Senate this year, especially compared with Trump's nomination of Tulsi Gabbard as intelligence chief.

## Attorney general nominee says Trump was 'targeted' by Department of Justice

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pam Bondi, Donald Trump's pick for attorney general, insisted at her Senate confirmation hearing Wednesday that the president-elect had been targeted by years of investigations and pledged that she would not "politicize" the Justice Department if confirmed as the country's chief federal law enforcement officer.

The statements echoed Trump's claims that the Justice Department had been weaponized against him and came as Democrats express concern that the president-elect will look

to use the agency's law enforcement powers to exact retribution against his adversaries, including the investigators who investigated him.

"They targeted Donald Trump," Bondi said. "They went after him — actually starting back in 2016, they targeted his campaign. They have launched countless investigations against him." She added: "If I am attorney general, I will not politicize that office."

The suggestion that the investigations into Trump were politically motivated has been sharply contested by Attorney General Merrick Garland and by spe-

cial counsel Jack Smith, who in a report released this week said politics played no part in his decisions and that the evidence his team gathered was sufficient for Trump to have been convicted at trial on charges of scheming to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Democrats focused their questions on whether Bondi, a former Florida attorney general, would be prepared to say "no" to Trump if asked to do something unethical or illegal. She sought to allay those concerns by saying that her only client was the American people, not the president.



# Firefighters report gains as LA winds pick up

*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — Millions of Southern Californians nervously kept watch as winds began picking up Wednesday during a final round of dangerous wildfire weather forecast for the region where two massive blazes have killed at least 25 people and destroyed thousands of homes.

A day after firefighters got a reprieve with lighter winds than expected, gusts were hitting up to 35 mph on the coast and in valleys and 55 mph in the mountains before dawn, National Weather Service meteorologist Todd Hall said. They were expected to increase through the morning.

"This is really just the last push of these winds here today," Hall said. "Hopefully, if we get through today, we're going to have some better conditions for late week, especially into Friday and Saturday."

The more manageable winds on Tuesday allowed firefighters to make headway on controlling the most deadly and destructive fires that have been burning for just over a week. Almost half of the Eaton Fire just north of Los Angeles has been contained, and one-fifth of the fire that destroyed much of the seaside LA neighborhood of Pacific Palisades is now surrounded.

Both of those fires broke out Jan. 7 in conditions similar to what's expected Wednesday. High winds last week pushed flames at remarkable speed and carried fire-sparking embers for miles.

The weather service issued red-flag warnings — indicating temperatures are warm, humidity is low and strong winds are expected — from 3 a.m. to 3 p.m. from the Central Coast 275 miles south to the border with Mexico.

A "particularly dangerous situation" was in effect for an area that includes parts of Los Angeles and Ventura counties.

Weary and anxious residents were told to be ready to flee at a moment's notice. They remained vigilant, keeping an eye on the skies and on each other: Police announced roughly 50 arrests, for looting, flying drones in fire zones, violating curfew and other crimes.

Of those, three people were arrested on suspicion of arson after being seen setting small fires that were immediately extinguished, LA Police Chief Jim McDonnell said. One was using a barbecue lighter, another ignited brush and a third tried to light a trash can, he said. All were far outside the disaster zones. Authorities have not determined a cause for any of the major fires.

Among nine people charged

with looting was a group that stole an Emmy award from an evacuated house, Los Angeles County District Attorney Nathan Hochman said.

The biggest worry remained the threat from intense winds. Now backed by firefighters from other states, Canada and Mexico, crews were deployed to attack flareups or new blazes. The firefighting force was much bigger than a week ago, when the first wave of fires began destroying thousands of homes in what could become the nation's costliest fire disaster.

The two biggest fires haven't spread very much in the past couple days. Planes have been dousing homes and hillsides with bright pink fire-retardant chemicals, while crews and fire engines deployed to particularly vulnerable spots with dry brush in case new fires broke out.

## Official warns of ongoing terror threats to the US

*Associated Press*

McLEAN, Va. — Brett Holmgren got woken up early on New Year's Day by alerts that a driver had plowed into a crowd of revelers in New Orleans.

The rampage, which killed 14 people, was the deadliest attack on U.S. soil in years and was inspired by Islamic State. The National Counterterrorism Center, which Holmgren leads, sprang into action to help the FBI run down information on the culprit from Texas and his plot.

It was a rare recent example of a mass attack motivated by religious extremism to hit the U.S. homeland. But it didn't occur in a vacuum, coming at a time when a terror threat that has waxed and waned in the two decades since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks is decidedly on the rise around the world.

"We are in a period where we are facing an elevated threat environment," Holmgren said.

The NCTC emerged in the aftermath of 9/11 as a centralized U.S. government hub to collect and analyze data and intelligence on the international terrorism threat, providing information to the White House and other agencies to shape policy decisions.

A former counterterrorism analyst and assistant secretary of state, Holmgren was named its acting director last July and intends to step aside at the conclusion of the Biden administration. At that point, new leadership under President-elect Donald Trump will grapple with managing global hot spots.

Holmgren cites multiple factors for why the threat is higher than before, including passions arising from the Israel-Hamas war. He also points to mass migration from the Russia-Ukraine war that has sent central Asians, some with ties to ISIS, to Turkey, Syria, Iraq and even the U.S.

## Trump announces entity to collect new tariff funds

*The Washington Post*

President-elect Donald Trump said Tuesday that he will create an "External Revenue Service" to collect revenue from tariffs, a signal of his determination to impose sweeping duties on imports.

In a post on Truth Social, his social media platform, Trump said the External Revenue Service will collect revenue from tariffs starting Monday, after he is inaugurated for a second term.

The structure of the new government operation was unclear from his post, although two outside advisers, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss matters they weren't authorized to share publicly, suggested it could involve renaming an existing office within the Treasury Department.

Trump's statement reflected his long-standing desire to enact far-reaching tariffs on imports, despite numerous reports that his

advisers are discussing more-limited plans than he proposed during the 2024 presidential campaign. Trump campaigned on tariff rates as high as 20% on every imported good. Some estimates have projected that those could raise hundreds of billions of dollars in new revenue, although economists warn they could also reignite inflation and raise prices.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection currently administers tariff policy, which is set by the president and Congress. Importers self-classify and declare the value of their goods, and CBP officials review that paperwork before collecting any duties, penalties and fees, according to the Congressional Research Service. Those funds go into the U.S. General Fund, run by the Treasury Department. The government collected about \$80 billion in tariffs and duties in 2023, according to a White House estimate.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Owner: Bird flu in raw milk killed 2 cats

**CA** SAN BERNARDINO — A California man whose two cats died after drinking raw milk recalled for bird flu risk says he meant to keep his beloved pets healthy, but his efforts tragically backfired.

"It's horrible when you realize that you're the one that actually gave them the milk that killed them," said Joseph Journell, 56, of San Bernardino.

Journell lost his 14-year-old tabby, Alexander, and Tuxsie, a 4-year-old tuxedo cat, in late November. A third cat, 4-year-old Big Boy, was hospitalized for a week before tests showed the animal was infected with the H5N1 bird flu virus.

The cats drank unpasteurized milk from lots recalled by Raw Farm, of Fresno, whose dairy products were pulled from California store shelves in December after health officials found the virus in milk for sale, he said. The animals' deaths were confirmed by state and county health officials. The cats were kept indoors, with no access to potentially infected birds, and ate conventional, not raw, pet food, the owner said.

Journell said he had been drinking Raw Farm milk himself for several months because he heard it had "better immunity and healing properties" than pasteurized milk.

### Basketball fans' vehicles broken into near campus

**MI** ANN ARBOR — More than two dozen vehicles in a high school parking lot had their windows smashed and were broken into

during a men's college basketball game at nearby University of Michigan.

Ann Arbor police said the break-ins occurred Sunday, WXYZ-TV reported. Damage was reported to 27 vehicles. No arrests have been made.

Fans watching the Wolverines defeat the Washington Huskies at Crisler Arena discovered the damage as they returned to the lot at Pioneer High School. Cash, purses, wallets and other items were taken from the vehicles, police said.

"Everything was great until we got back out to the car after the game and saw glass everywhere," Joe Weitz told the TV station.

### Governor plans to add to fireworks infractions

**HI** HONOLULU — Hawaii Gov. Josh Green on Monday proposed a range of new penalties to crack down on those who flout the state's fireworks laws, nearly two weeks after a fireworks explosion at a Honolulu home on New Year's Eve killed four people and injured about 20 others.

The potential new measures include \$300 tickets police could issue to those who shoot off fireworks and class A felony charges and decades in prison for those whose use of fireworks leads to serious injury or death. The governor planned to include the proposals in a bill he will send lawmakers for the new legislative session beginning Wednesday.

State and county officials have struggled for years to contain illegal fireworks in Hawaii. Law enforcement officers have seized 227,000 pounds of fireworks since 2023.

### Florida schedules first execution of 2025

**FL** TALLAHASSEE — A Florida man convicted of murdering a husband and wife during a fishing trip nearly 30 years ago is set to be executed next month in the state's first scheduled execution of 2025.

Gov. Ron DeSantis signed the death warrant for James Ford on Friday. Ford is slated to be put to death on Feb. 13 at Florida State Prison.

Ford was given the death penalty for the killings of Greg and Kimberly Malnory, whose bodies were found at the South Florida Sod Farm in a remote part of Charlotte County on April 7, 1997. According to court documents, the Malnorys had been bludgeoned and shot, with both suffering multiple blunt force head injuries.

Kimberly had also been raped. Her body was found near the couple's truck, where their 22-month-old baby had been left for more than 18 hours, exposed to the elements and covered in her mother's blood. Ford was also convicted of sexual battery and child abuse.

Ford's execution would be the first in Florida in 2025. One person was put to death in 2024, down from six in 2023, when DeSantis was campaigning for the Republican presidential nomination. During the previous three years, the governor didn't sign off on any executions.

### Ex-university worker gets 1 year for bomb hoax

**MA** BOSTON — A former Northeastern University employee who lied to the FBI about a package

blowing up in his arms at the Boston campus has been sentenced to just over a year in prison for the hoax.

Jason Duhaime, 47, from San Antonio, was convicted on the federal charges in June of intentionally conveying false and misleading information related to an explosive device and two counts of making materially false statements to a federal law enforcement agent. He was sentenced Monday.

Duhaime worked as the university's new technology manager and director of the Immersive Media Lab. In September 2022, he called the university police to say he'd collected several packages from a mail area, including two Pelican hard plastic cases, and that when he opened one of the cases, it exploded and sharp objects flew out and injured his arms.

### City closing complex where armed gang seen

**CO** AURORA — A Colorado apartment complex where armed members of a Venezuelan gang were caught on video entering a unit last summer is expected to close in about a month under an emergency court order, city officials said Monday.

The city of Aurora had pursued a lawsuit to declare all but one building at the complex a criminal nuisance. Officials last week asked a judge to close the property in the meantime, arguing the situation reached a "breaking point" following the violent kidnapping and assault of two residents last month.

The city's request was granted Friday ahead of a court hearing Monday.

— From wire reports

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# Even without Broome, Auburn cruises

*Associated Press*

AUBURN, Ala. — Chad Baker-Mazara scored 20 points as No. 1 Auburn beat No. 15 Mississippi State 88-66 on Tuesday night in its first game without star center Johni Broome.

Chaney Johnson, who replaced Broome in the starting lineup, had 17 points, eight rebounds and four blocks for Auburn (16-1, 4-0 Southeastern Conference). Broome is out indefinitely with a left ankle sprain that he sustained last Saturday in Auburn's 66-63 victory at South Carolina.

Auburn set the tone early by going on a 10-0 run to open the game, with Baker-Mazara scoring the final eight points.

Baker-Mazara shot 8-for-11, including 3-for-5 on 3-pointers. Miles Kelly and Denver Jones both scored 13, while Tahaad Pettiford added 12.

Auburn had as many blocks (9) as Mississippi State had made field goals in the first half, allowing the Tigers to go into the break with a 19-point lead.

Mississippi State (14-3, 2-2) shot just 35%. Josh Hubbard scored 17 points but was only 2-for-12.

**No. 3 Duke 89, Miami 54:** Freshman Kon Kneuppel had season highs of 25 points and six

3-pointers to help the host Blue Devils stay unbeaten in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Khaman Maluach had 12 points and 15 rebounds for Duke (15-2, 7-0), which shot 54.8% and made 17 of 32 3-pointers, with 11 coming before halftime. Duke led by 24 at the break and never let Miami closer than 19 again.

Duke's Cooper Flagg—named The Associated Press men's college basketball national player of the week earlier Tuesday after scoring an ACC freshman record 42 points against Notre Dame—had 13 points, seven rebounds and six assists.

**No. 21 Mississippi 74, No. 4 Alabama 64:** Malik Dia's 23 points, 19 rebounds and two blocks led the visiting Rebels to a win over the Crimson Tide.

Sean Pedulla scored 12 points and had three steals and Matthew Murrell scored 11. Jaylen Murray and Jaemyn Brakefield each scored 13 points off the bench for Ole Miss (15-2, 4-0 Southeastern Conference).

Aden Holloway led Alabama (14-3, 3-1) with 15 points, and Mark Sears added 11.

**Missouri 83, No. 5 Florida 82:** Caleb Grill scored 22 points, including two free throws with 5 seconds remaining, and the Tigers stunned the Gators, ending

their 16-game home winning streak.

Mark Mitchell added 15 points and eight rebounds for the Tigers (14-3, 3-1 Southeastern Conference), who notched their first road win against a top-five team since 2012.

Anthony Robinson II chipped in 12 points for Mizzou, which dominated the first half while building a 19-point lead.

**No. 7 Marquette 85, DePaul 83 (OT):** David Joplin made two of his seven 3-pointers in overtime, and the visiting Golden Eagles outlasted the Blue Demons for a rugged victory.

Joplin finished with 30 points on 9-for-17 shooting. Kam Jones had 18 points and 11 assists for Marquette (15-2, 6-0 Big East), which earned its sixth consecutive win.

Joplin's two 3s at the beginning of overtime lifted the Golden Eagles to a 73-67 lead. Two second-chance baskets by Stevie Mitchell made it 77-69 with 1:22 to go.

Chase Ross had 15 points for Marquette, and Ben Gold finished with 14.

**No. 8 Kentucky 81, No. 11 Texas A&M 69:** Jaxson Robinson scored 22 points to lead the host Wildcats to a victory over the Aggies.

Robinson made five of Ken-

tucky's nine 3-pointers, including four in the first half as the Wildcats (14-3, 3-1 Southeastern Conference) improved to 5-0 against ranked opponents this season.

Andrew Carr added 13 points and Otega Oweh finished with 11 for Kentucky.

Zhuric Phelps led the Aggies (13-4, 2-2) with 21 points, followed by Pharrel Payne with 15 and Manny Obaseki with 12.

**No. 19 Illinois 94, Indiana 69:** Kylan Boswell scored 22 points, Kasparas Jakucionis added 21 and the visiting Illini opened a 28-point halftime lead in a blowout of the Hoosiers.

Tomislav Ivisic had 17 points and 11 rebounds as Illinois (13-4, 5-2 Big Ten) bounced back from a double-digit loss at home to Southern California.

**No. 24 Wisconsin 70, Ohio State 68:** John Tonje scored 17 points and the host Badgers staved off a late rally by the Buckeyes, extending their winning streak to six.

Ohio State trailed 37-20 at the half but cut it to 65-64 on Micah Parrish's layup with 16 seconds left before Tonje helped the Badgers stay ahead from the foul line.

Tonje's 3-pointer put Wisconsin up 65-57 with just over four minutes remaining.

## Ewers entering draft, starting Manning era at Texas

*Associated Press*

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas junior quarterback Quinn Ewers declared for the NFL Draft on Wednesday, ending a Longhorns career in which he led the program to a Big 12 championship and twice to the College Football Playoff but was not always embraced by a fan base eagerly waiting for Arch Manning to take over.

Ewers passed for 9,128 yards and 68 touchdowns in a career that few Texas quarterbacks can match. He had hinted before

the season ended that it would be his last in college.

"These past three years have been some of the best years I could have imagined," Ewers said in social media post announcing his decision. "The relationships I've built between coaches and teammates will last forever."

His 27 career wins rank fourth as a starting quarterback at Texas, and he led the Longhorns to their first Big 12 title in 14 years in 2023 before the program moved to the Southeastern

Conference. In their first season in the SEC, the Longhorns rose to their first No. 1 ranking since 2008 and played in the league championship game.

Ewers' biggest legacy will be leading the program to the playoff semifinals in consecutive years, though it fell short of the championship game.

Ewers' departure sets the stage for Manning to take over in 2025.

The son of Cooper Manning, the grandson of former NFL quarterback Archie Manning

and the nephew of Super Bowl-winning QBs Peyton and Eli Manning passed for 939 yards and nine touchdowns and ran for four TDs this season but has seen only limited playing time since September.

Texas fans have been eagerly awaiting his chance to be the full-time starter. Manning will get it with a rebuilt offense.

Top receivers Matthew Golden and Isaiah Bond have declared for the draft and senior tight end Gunnar Helm completed his eligibility.



# Murray scores 45, Nuggets beat Mavs

Associated Press

DALLAS — Jamal Murray scored 32 of his season-high 45 points in the first half and led the Denver Nuggets to a 118-99 victory over the Dallas Mavericks on Tuesday night.

Murray surpassed his previous season-best of 34 points, scored against Detroit on Dec. 28.

Murray shot 18-for-26 from the floor, including 5-for-9 from 3-point distance, and added six assists and two steals. He headed to the bench with just under four minutes remaining, five points shy of his career high of 50 points against Cleveland on Feb. 19, 2021.

Michael Porter Jr. scored 13 points and Nikola Jokic had 10 points and 14 rebounds.

Kyrie Irving was back in the lineup after missing five games with a lumbar back sprain. He finished with 11 points on 4-for-18 shooting for Dallas. Daniel Gafford scored 13 points and Naji Marshall had 11.

**Thunder 118, 76ers 102:** Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 32 points and Jalen Williams had 24 to lead visiting Oklahoma City to a victory over a Philadelphia team missing three All-Stars.

Joel Embiid, Tyrese Maxey and Paul George sat out with injuries as the Sixers continued their slide down the Eastern Conference standings.

The Thunder built a 21-point lead and have won 18 of 19 games headed into Thursday's rematch against Cleveland in a matchup of teams with the best records in each conference.

With the stars out, Justin Edwards led the 76ers with 25 points, and Jeff Dowtin Jr. had 18.

**Hawks 122, Suns 117:** Trae Young scored a season-high 43 points and Atlanta overcame Devin Booker's 35 to beat visiting Phoenix.

Kevin Durant scored 14 of his 31 points in the third quarter for Phoenix (19-20), which lost for the 11th straight time in Atlanta. Durant added nine rebounds.

The Suns are still looking for their first win in Atlanta since March 24, 2014.

The Hawks (20-19) were without forwards De'Andre Hunter (left foot soreness), Larry Nance Jr. (right hand) and Jalen Johnson (right shoulder inflammation), who missed his fourth consecutive game.

The injuries left Atlanta rookie Zaccharie Risacher with the

challenge of guarding Durant. Hawks coach Quin Snyder described the matchup before the game as an "unique experience."

Young, whose status was listed as questionable with an illness, made six 3-pointers and 11 of 14 free throws to carry the Hawks.

**Cavaliers 127, Pacers 117:** Donovan Mitchell scored 35 points as Cleveland won at Indiana.

Darius Garland scored 24 points and Evan Mobley added 22 points and 13 rebounds for the Cavaliers.

Pascal Siakam scored 23 points and Bennedict Mathurin 19 for the Pacers, who had their six-game winning streak halted. Myles Turner added 17 points.

The Cavaliers led 82-77 in the third quarter before going on a 10-0 run that included 3-pointers by Max Strus, Georges Niang and Mobley. Cleveland led 100-89 after three periods.

Indiana cut its deficit to 11-106, but could get no closer.

**Bucks 130, Kings 115:** Giannis Antetokounmpo had 30 points, 13 assists and 11 rebounds for his 50th career triple-double as Milwaukee snapped visiting Sacramento's

seven-game winning streak.

Antetokounmpo's triple-double was his fifth of the season. He had a sixth in the Bucks' NBA Cup championship victory over Oklahoma City, but players' statistics from that game aren't official.

Damian Lillard had 24 points, Brook Lopez 21 and A.J. Green 16 for the Bucks, who never trailed and led by as many as 28.

DeMar DeRozan scored 28 and De'Aaron Fox 20 for Sacramento. Domantas Sabonis had 16 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists.

**Pelicans 119, Bulls 113:** Trey Murphy III scored 32 points and Zion Williamson added 21 as New Orleans beat host Chicago.

Zach LaVine, limited to two points in the first half, finished with 25 points for the Bulls. Nikola Vucevic had 22 points and 15 rebounds, and Coby White scored 22.

**Nets 132, Trail Blazers 114:** Cam Johnson returned from a five-game absence with a right ankle sprain and scored 24 points in Brooklyn's victory at Portland.

Scot Henderson had a career-high 39 points for the Blazers.

# Gauff advances to 3rd round at Australian Open

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Coco Gauff stretched her unbeaten start to 2025 to seven matches and 14 sets by moving into the third round at the Australian Open with a 6-3, 7-5 victory over 173rd-ranked Jodie Burrage of Britain at Rod Laver Arena on Wednesday.

Gauff, the 2023 U.S. Open champion and a semifinalist at Melbourne Park a year ago, went through a bit of a rough patch in the second set, struggling with double-faults and dropping four games in a row to go from a break

up at 3-1 to a break down at 5-3.

But when Burrage served for the second set, Gauff got back in control, using a four-game run of her own to end the contest.

"It was tough. She was serving really well, so I was just trying to manage that, honestly," the No. 3-seeded Gauff said. "She really stepped her level up in the middle of the second set, so I was just trying to be offensive when I could."

Gauff hit six of her seven double-faults in the second set, but was far steadier at the baseline overall, finishing the 1½-hour

match with 11 groundstroke unforced errors, compared to 37 for Burrage.

Each of Burrage's final two service games ended with a double-fault; there were two in a row that made it 6-5.

From there, Gauff finished the job as she continues to try to find improvements with her serve and forehand, two shots she has been focusing on since late last season.

"She was returning well, so it put pressure on me on my serve," Gauff said. "If I landed anything short, she was landing a winner."

Add in four wins in a row en route to the title at the WTA Finals in November — including straight-set victories over No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka and No. 2 Iga Swiatek — and Gauff's winning streak is now at 11 matches.

Also a part of that run was a win at the United Cup team competition against the 20-year-old American's next opponent: No. 30 Leylah Fernandez, who was the runner-up to Emma Raducanu at the 2021 U.S. Open.

Fernandez came back to defeat Cristina Bucsa 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 on Wednesday.

# Connor's natural hat trick lifts Jets

*Associated Press*

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Kyle Connor scored a natural hat trick in the first period to spark the Winnipeg Jets to a 6-1 victory over the Vancouver Canucks on Tuesday night.

The left-winger's sixth career hat trick came in a span of 6:38, making it the third fastest in Jets-Thrashers' history.

Mark Scheifele, Neal Pionk and Nino Niederreiter each had a goal and assist for the Jets, who became the first team to win 30 games this season.

Gabriel Vilardi recorded three assists and Cole Perfetti added two to give him 100 NHL career points.

Connor Hellebuyck made 23 saves to pick up his league-leading 27th win of the season for Winnipeg, which is 3-1-2 in its season-long, eight-game homestand.

Nils Hoglander scored a third-period goal for the Canucks, who finished a five-game road trip going 1-2-2. Kevin Lankinen stopped 27 shots for Vancouver.

**Blue Jackets 3, Flyers 2 (SO):** Kent Johnson and Kirill Marchenko scored in the shootout as Columbus rallied to defeat visiting Philadelphia.

Zach Werenski scored twice for Columbus, including the tying goal with 4:37 left in regulation. The Blue Jackets earned their first win against Philadelphia in three matchups this season.

Daniil Tarasov made 23 saves, helping the Blue Jackets earn a season-high fifth straight victory, their longest streak since the 2019-20 season.

**Capitals 3, Ducks 0:** Logan Thompson stopped all 18 shots he faced for his first shutout of the season as host Washington beat Anaheim.

Making a second consecutive start and playing in his third in a row since Charlie Lindgren was injured, Thompson made a handful of saves on quality

scoring chances and many timely ones to improve to 19-2-3 since joining the Capitals.

Brandon Duhaime had a goal and an assist and John Carlson and Ethen Frank also scored for the Capitals, who have won two games in a row after alternating wins and losses in their previous nine dating to Dec. 23.

**Sharks 6, Red Wings 3:** William Eklund had a goal and two assists and San Jose ended host Detroit's seven-game win streak.

Nico Sturm scored a short-handed goal, and Jan Rutta, Mikael Granlund, Tyler Toffoli and Mario Ferraro added goals for San Jose, which snapped a three-game losing streak. Rookie Macklin Celebrini had two assists as the Sharks won for just the fourth time in 18 games. Alexandar Georgiev made 25 saves.

Vladimir Tarasenko ended an 18-game scoreless drought with two goals for Detroit. He last scored on Dec. 1 against Vancouver. Lucas Raymond also scored and Ville Husso stopped 18 shots.

**Kraken 4, Penguins 2:** Jamie Oleksiak and Eeli Tolvanen scored 49 seconds apart in the third period to erase a one-goal deficit and rally visiting Seattle past Pittsburgh.

Joey Daccord stopped 31 shots and assisted on Chandler Stephenson's short-handed goal. Kaapo Kakko added an empty-netter as Seattle won for just the second time in seven games.

The Penguins lost in regulation for the first time this season when leading after two periods thanks to a couple of defensive breakdowns.

**Stars 4, Maple Leafs 1:** Logan Stankoven had two goals and an assist to lead Dallas to a victory at Toronto.

Matt Duchene added a goal and two assists, and Mavrik Bourque also scored for Dallas, which bounced back with a vic-

tory after having its seven-game win streak halted against Ottawa on Sunday. Jake Oettinger made 27 saves.

Auston Matthews scored for Toronto. Joseph Woll stopped 19 shots.

**Bruins 6, Lightning 2:** David Pastrnak had a goal and two assists and Parker Wotherspoon scored his first NHL goal to help host Boston open a four-goal lead and hold on to beat Tampa Bay.

Jeremy Swayman made 43 saves for the Bruins, who have won back-to-back games after losing six in a row — their longest losing streak in a decade.

Conor Geekie and Victor Hedman scored in the second period to cut a four-goal deficit in half. Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 18 shots for Tampa Bay, which had won three of its previous four games.

**Senators 2, Islanders 0:** Leevi Merilainen made 24 saves for his second shutout in three games as Ottawa won at New York.

Adam Gaudette and Artem Zub scored as the Senators won their third in a row while stopping New York's winning streak at three.

Marcus Hogberg stopped 23 shots in his second consecutive start for the Islanders, who dropped the opener of a seven-game homestand. Ilya Sorokin was available but didn't play due to illness, and Semyon Varlamov is on injured reserve.

**Panthers 2, Devils 1 (SO):** Anton Lundell scored the shootout winner and Spencer Knight made 26 saves as Florida downed host New Jersey.

After Florida's Aleksander Barkov and New Jersey's Paul Cotter traded goals to start the shootout, Lundell beat Devils goalie Jacob Markstrom in the third round to end New Jersey's six-game home winning streak.

Following two scoreless periods, Jesper Boqvist gave Flor-

ida a 1-0 lead 41 seconds into the third with his 10th goal of the season. Boqvist played four seasons with the Devils after he was drafted by New Jersey in 2017.

**Predators 5, Golden Knights 3:** Steven Stamkos scored two goals and assisted on another to lead Nashville past visiting Las Vegas.

Filip Forsberg had a goal and an assist, Justin Barron and Ryan O'Reilly also scored and Justus Annunen made 19 saves for the Predators, who snapped a two-game skid.

Pavel Dorofeyev had his first career hat trick and Ilya Samsonov made 18 saves for Vegas, which has lost three of four.

**Blues 2, Flames 1:** Radek Faksa scored the tiebreaking goal in the third period as St. Louis beat visiting Calgary.

Faksa tipped in a shot by Tyler Tucker with 8:49 left. It was Faksa's third goal of the season and first since Nov. 17.

Colton Parayko also scored and Jordan Binnington made 26 saves as the Blues won their fifth straight against the Flames. St. Louis is 9-1-0 in its last 10 games against Calgary.

**Avalanche 3, Rangers 2 (OT):** Devon Toews scored 4:23 into overtime after Artturi Lehkonen tied the game late in regulation, and Colorado began a five-game homestand by beating New York.

Cale Makar had an assist to reach 50 points for the fifth time in his career. It's the most 50-point seasons by a defenseman in franchise history.

**Canadiens 5, Utah 3:** Kirby Dach scored twice as Montreal won at Utah.

Mike Matheson, Patrik Laine and Cole Caufield also scored for Montreal, which has won eight of its last 10.

Logan Cooley, Josh Doan and Nick Bjugstad scored for Utah. Clayton Keller had two assists. Karel Vejmelka made 21 stops.