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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Drama over Greenland dominates Davos

Associated Press

DAVOS, Switzerland — President Donald Trump's pledges to provoke a sweeping tariff fight with Europe to get his way in taking control of Greenland have left many of America's closest allies warning of a rupture with Washington that would shatter the NATO alliance that had once seemed unshakable.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Tuesday called Trump's planned new tariffs over Greenland a "mistake" and questioned Trump's trustworthiness. French President Emmanuel Macron said the EU could retaliate against its long-standing ally by deploying one of its most powerful economic tools, known colloquially as a trade "bazooka."

Trump prides himself on ratcheting up major maximum pressure to try and negotiate through a position of strength. He was slated to leave on Tuesday — the anniversary of his inauguration — for the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

land, a venue that could give him the chance to defuse tensions as quickly as he has sought to stir them up.

But European leaders — digging in and vowing to defend Denmark and its semiautonomous control over Greenland — may be seeking just as hard to meet an extraordinary moment with their own demonstration of fierce resolve.

That could hurt the chances of Trump finding a quick way to turn around the crisis. And, even as the furor over Trump's escalating calls for U.S. control of the vast Arctic island seems ready to engulf the elite annual meeting in Switzerland, Greenland's leader insisted on respect for its territorial integrity and said recognition of international law is "not a game."

Von der Leyen pushed back against Trump's announcement that, starting February, a 10% import tax will be imposed on goods from eight European nations that have rallied around NATO ally Denmark. Greenland is a semiautonomous territory of Denmark.

"The European Union and the United States have agreed to a trade deal last July," von der Leyen said in Davos. "And in politics as in business — a deal is a deal. And when friends shake hands, it must mean something."

"We consider the people of the United States not just our allies, but our friends. And plunging us into a downward spiral would only aid the very adversaries we are both so committed to keeping out of the strategic landscape," she added.

She vowed that the EU's response "will be unflinching, united and proportional."

The harder stance seemed to defy the approach that many European leaders have taken since Trump returned to office, which mostly had been to say nice things about Trump to try to stay in his good graces, while working furiously through other avenues to find compromise. The president's continued insistence in recent weeks, however, that nothing short of the U.S. somehow owning Greenland being unacceptable, is testing the

limits of the softer approach.

Trump says the U.S. needs the territory to deter possible threats from China and Russia. Set to speak in Davos on Wednesday, Trump said on social media that he had agreed to "a meeting of the various parties" there. U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent insisted, meanwhile, that America's relations with Europe "have never been closer" and urged trading partners to "take a deep breath."

Still, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, speaking in the Danish parliament, said that "the worst may still be ahead of us." She said that "we have never sought conflict. We have consistently sought cooperation."

Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen said at a news conference in the island's capital, Nuuk, that "we need to have respect for international law and territorial integrity." He said those principles should unite Western democratic countries, and said he was grateful for support from EU allies.

"International law, it's not a game," he said.

Trump slams UK over Chagos Islands handover deal

Associated Press

LONDON — A startled British government on Tuesday defended its decision to hand sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, after President Donald Trump attacked the plan, which his administration had previously supported.

Trump said that relinquishing the remote Indian Ocean archipelago, home to a strategically important American naval and bomber base, was an act of stupidity that shows why he needs to take over Greenland.

"Shockingly, our 'brilliant' NATO Ally, the United Kingdom, is currently planning to give away the Island of Diego Garcia, the site of a vital U.S. Military Base, to Mauritius, and to do so FOR NO REASON WHATSOEVER," he said in a post on his social media platform Truth Social. "There is no doubt that China and Russia have noticed this act of total weakness."

"The UK giving away extremely important land is an act of GREAT STUPIDITY, and is

another in a very long line of National Security reasons why Greenland has to be acquired," Trump said.

The blast from Trump was a rebuff to efforts by Prime Minister Keir Starmer to calm tensions over Greenland and patch up a frayed trans-Atlantic relationship.

Starmer on Monday called Trump's statements about taking over Greenland "completely wrong," but called for the rift to be "resolved through calm discussion."

The British government said Tuesday that despite the president's post, it believes the U.S. still supports the Chagos deal.

The United Kingdom and Mauritius signed a deal in May to give Mauritius sovereignty over the Chagos Islands after two centuries under British control, though the U.K. will pay Mauritius at least 120 million pounds (\$160 million) a year to lease back the island of Diego Garcia, where the U.S. base is located, for at least 99 years.

US vessels pass through Taiwan Strait

BY BRIAN McELHINEY

Stars and Stripes

A U.S. Navy guided-missile destroyer and a survey vessel sailed through the Taiwan Strait over the weekend, the first such crossing confirmed this year.

The USS John Finn and the USNS Mary Sears made a “routine” transit of the 110-mile-wide strait on Friday and Saturday, according to an unsigned email Tuesday from the U.S. 7th Fleet. The strait separates Taiwan from mainland China.

The transit occurred in an area “beyond the territorial sea of any coastal state,” the message said.

“The transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the United States’ commitment to

upholding freedom of navigation for all nations as a principle,” 7th Fleet said. “The United States rejects any assertion of sovereignty or jurisdiction that is inconsistent with freedoms of navigation, overflight, and other lawful uses of the sea and air.”

China until 2022 recognized an international waterway in the strait but since then claims it entirely as sovereign territory and regularly condemns the passages of U.S. and allied warships.

Naval and air forces of China’s Eastern Theater Command monitored and tracked the U.S. vessels’ movements, “ensuring effective response and management,” said spokesman Senior

Col. Xu Chenghua, according to a Saturday news release from China’s Ministry of National Defense.

“The troops remain on high alert to resolutely safeguard China’s national sovereignty and security, as well as regional peace and stability,” he said.

China views self-governing Taiwan as a breakaway province that must be unified with the mainland, by force if necessary.

Meanwhile, a Chinese surveillance drone entered Taiwanese airspace at 5:44 a.m. Saturday around the Taiwan-administered Pratas Island, a coral atoll in the northern part of the South China Sea, according to a news release from the Taiwan

Ministry of National Defense that day.

The drone left after four minutes following a warning from Taiwan broadcast on international channels, according to the release.

“Such highly provocative and irresponsible behavior of the communist army has seriously undermined regional peace and stability, violated international law and norms, and is bound to be condemned,” the release said.

The drone was engaged in routine flight training that was “completely legitimate and lawful,” Senior Col. Tian Junli, spokesman for China’s Southern Theater command, said in a Saturday news release.

Fuel supplier for US Navy found guilty in \$4.5M fraud

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

A Florida man whose company supplied fuel to Navy and Coast Guard ships faces the prospect of a long prison term for bilking the services out of about \$4.5 million.

Jasen Butler, 37, was convicted Thursday in federal court in West Palm Beach on all but one of the 35 total counts against him. The charges included wire fraud, forgery and money laundering, according to court records.

As the owner of Independent Marine Oil Services, he had been contracted to supply fuel to U.S. warships in Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Croatia, a Justice Department statement Friday said.

The ships included the mine-sweeper USS Patriot, the Arleigh-Burke class guided missile destroyer, USS Thomas Hudner, the USNS Puerto Rico,

and the Coast Guard cutter Douglas Denman, according to a copy of the indictment.

Starting in August 2022, Butler submitted dozens of falsified documents for services rendered under a program that allows U.S. vessels to purchase fuel in various countries around the world, the court documents state.

After Navy officials became suspicious, Butler created a false identity and faked employment at a different company to continue the scheme, the statement said.

He received over \$4.5 million in payments for the phony expenses and bought multimillion-dollar properties in Florida and Colorado with at least a portion of the ill-gotten gains, prosecutors said.

Butler’s sentencing is scheduled for April 8. He faces a maximum of over 600 years in prison, the indictment said.

US: South Africa ‘cozying up’ to Iran with naval exercises

Bloomberg News

The U.S. criticized South Africa for allowing Iran to participate in naval drills off the coast of Cape Town, after conflicting reports about the Islamic Republic’s involvement in the exercises.

Iran’s “inclusion in joint exercises — in any capacity — undermines maritime security and regional stability,” the U.S. Embassy said in a post on X Thursday night. “South Africa can’t lecture the world on justice while cozying up to Iran.”

Warships from some members of the BRICS group of developing nations, including Iran, Russia and China, arrived in South African waters last week for a naval exercise that continued until Friday.

The statement is the latest U.S. criticism of South Africa, whose relations with its second-biggest trading partner have been strained since President Donald Trump returned to the

White House last year. Pretoria’s ties to Iran are among the issues that have elicited anger in Washington.

Trump threatened to attack Iran over a violent crackdown against protesters, and last week said the U.S. will impose a 25% tariff on goods from countries “doing business” with the Islamic Republic.

South Africa is “following the developments in Iran with concern,” the presidency said in a statement on Thursday, calling on authorities in Tehran “to ensure that citizens exercise their right to protest in peace.”

While local news outlet News24 reported that Pretoria had persuaded Iran to withdraw from the war games, pictures on the South African National Defence Force’s Facebook page showed captains of participating vessels docked in the South African naval base in Simon’s Town, with Iranian officials present.

US citizen removed from home in underwear

AP/Report for America

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Federal immigration agents forced open a door and detained a U.S. citizen in his Minnesota home at gunpoint without a warrant, then led him out onto the streets in his underwear in subfreezing conditions, according to his family and videos reviewed by The Associated Press.

ChongLy "Scott" Thao told the AP that his daughter-in-law woke him up from a nap Sunday afternoon and said U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents were banging at the door in St. Paul. He told her not to open it. Masked agents then forced their way in and pointed guns at the family, yelling at them, Thao recalled.

"I was shaking," he said. "They didn't show any warrant;

they just broke down the door."

Amid a massive surge of federal agents into the Twin Cities, immigration authorities are facing backlash from residents and the local leaders for warrantless arrests, aggressive clashes with protesters and the fatal shooting of mother of three Renee Good.

"ICE is not doing what they say they're doing," St. Paul Mayor Kaohly Her, a Hmong American, said in a statement about Thao's arrest. "They're not going after hardened criminals. They're going after anyone and everyone in their path."

Thao, who has been a U.S. citizen for decades, said that as he was being detained he asked his daughter-in-law to find his identification, but the agents told him they didn't want to see it.

Instead, as his 4-year-old

grandson watched and cried, Thao was led out in handcuffs wearing only sandals and underwear with just a blanket wrapped around his shoulders.

Videos captured the scene, which included people blowing whistles and horns and neighbors screaming at the more than a dozen gun-toting agents to leave Thao's family alone.

Thao said agents drove him "to the middle of nowhere" and made him get out of the car in the frigid weather so they could photograph him. He said he feared they would beat him. He was asked for his ID, which agents earlier prevented him from retrieving.

Agents eventually realized that he was a U.S. citizen with no criminal record, Thao said, and an hour or two later, they

brought him back to his house. There they made him show his ID and then left without apologizing for detaining him or breaking his door, Thao said.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security described the ICE operation at Thao's home as a "targeted operation" seeking two convicted sex offenders.

"The US citizen lives with these two convicted sex offenders at the site of the operation," DHS said. "The individual refused to be fingerprinted or facially ID'd."

Thao's family said in a statement that it "categorically disputes" the DHS account and "strongly objects to DHS's attempt to publicly justify this conduct with false and misleading claims."

Church service disrupted by anti-ICE protests

Associated Press

Several faith leaders called urgently for protecting the rights of worshippers while also expressing compassion for migrants after anti-immigration enforcement protesters disrupted a service at a Southern Baptist church in Minnesota.

About three dozen protesters entered the Cities Church in St. Paul during Sunday service, some walking right up to the pulpit, others loudly chanting "ICE out" and "Renee Good," referring to a woman who was fatally shot on Jan. 7 by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer in Minneapolis.

One of the church's pastors, David Easterwood, leads the local ICE field office, and one of the leaders of the protest and prominent local activist Nekima Levy Armstrong said she's also an ordained pastor.

The Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention called what

happened "an unacceptable trauma," saying the service was "forced to end prematurely" as protesters shouted "insults and accusations at youth, children, and families."

"I believe we must be resolute in two areas: encouraging our churches to provide compassionate pastoral care to these (migrant) families and standing firm for the sanctity of our houses of worship," Trey Turner, who leads the convention, told The Associated Press on Monday. Cities Church belongs to the convention.

The U.S. Department of Justice said it has opened a civil rights investigation.

The recent surge in operations in Minnesota has pitted more than 2,000 federal immigration officers against community activists and protesters. The Trump administration and Minnesota officials have traded blame for the heightened tensions.

Judge allows ICE visitation policy for now

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal judge refused Monday to temporarily block the Trump administration from enforcing a new policy requiring a week's notice before members of Congress can visit immigration detention facilities.

U.S. District Judge Jia Cobb in Washington, D.C., concluded that the Department of Homeland Security didn't violate an earlier court order when it reimposed a seven-day notice requirement for congressional oversight visits to Immigration and Customs Enforcement facilities.

Cobb stressed that she wasn't ruling on whether the new policy passes legal muster. Rather, she said, plaintiffs' attorneys representing several Democratic members of Congress used the wrong "procedural vehicle" to challenge it.

The judge also concluded that the Jan. 8 policy is a new agency

action that isn't subject to her prior order in the plaintiffs' favor.

Plaintiffs' lawyers asked Cobb to intervene after three Democratic members of Congress from Minnesota were blocked from visiting an ICE facility near Minneapolis earlier this month. The visit was intended to happen three days after an ICE officer shot and killed U.S. citizen Renee Good in Minneapolis.

Last month, Cobb temporarily blocked an administration oversight visit policy.

She ruled Dec. 17 that it is likely illegal for ICE to demand a week's notice from members of Congress seeking to visit and observe conditions in ICE facilities.

A day after Good's death, U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem secretly signed a new memorandum reinstating another seven-day notice requirement.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Strict gun law faces Supreme Court scrutiny

HI HONOLULU — State gun laws, long among the strictest in the nation, were the focus of arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court on Tuesday. The court is taking up the state's ban on firearms on private property that is open to the public, such as stores and hotels, unless the owner explicitly allows it.

Three Maui residents sued in 2023 to challenge new laws prohibiting the carrying of guns at places such as beaches, banks, bars and restaurants that serve alcohol.

Carrying guns in public is still fairly new to Hawaii. Before a 2022 Supreme Court decision expanded gun rights nationwide, the state's county police chiefs made it virtually impossible by rarely issuing permits for either open or concealed carry.

That ruling prompted Hawaii to retool its laws, and Democratic Gov. Josh Green signed legislation allowing more people to carry concealed firearms while limiting where they could be carried.

Lawsuits claim missteps made fire more deadly

CA ALTADENA — Southern California Edison has filed lawsuits accusing Los Angeles County, local water agencies and the Southern California Gas Co. of a series of missteps that the utility says made last year's Eaton Fire more deadly.

The utility filed cross-complaints in Los Angeles Superior Court on Friday against Los Angeles County, Pasadena Water and Power and five other water agencies, KABC-TV reported.

The cause remains under investigation, but evidence suggests one of the utility's idled power lines might have sparked the fire.

SoCal Edison claims in the lawsuits that Los Angeles Coun-

ty agencies failed to send timely evacuation warnings to residents in east and west Altadena.

The utility also claims water agencies, including Pasadena Water and Power, did not provide enough water as the fire spread, leaving firefighters with limited resources.

SoCal Edison is facing 998 lawsuits from fire victims, insurers and government entities.

Drunken driver gets 24 years to life in prison

NY NEW YORK — Daniel Hyden was drunk at the wheel on July 4, 2024, as the Ford F-150 jumped a curb, bulldozed a chain-link fence and plowed into a group of friends and relatives who were holding a holiday barbecue at Corlears Hook Park in Manhattan. The truck stopped just feet from Halena Herrera, its momentum halted by bodies trapped underneath.

Judge April A. Newbauer sentenced Hyden on Friday to 24 years to life in prison in the deaths of Ana Morel, 43; Lucille Pinkney, 59; her son, Herman Pinkney, 38; and Herrera's best friend, Emily Ruiz, 30.

Seven people were hurt, including Herrera, who was hit in the face by debris.

Judge expands media access to executions

TN NASHVILLE — A judge ruled Friday that Tennessee prison officials must grant expanded access to media members to view state-run executions, after a coalition of news organizations sued on claims that state execution protocols unconstitutionally limit thorough and accurate reporting.

Before Chancellor I'Ashea L. Myles' order, reporters witnessing lethal injections were limited to a short time period during which they could view the execution process.

The coalition's lawsuit argued the protocols violate the

public and press' constitutional rights to witness the entirety of executions conducted by the Tennessee Department of Correction, "from the time the condemned enters the execution chamber until after the condemned is declared dead."

The lawsuit sought a judgment that the protocols are unconstitutional and an injunction to allow the press to see the full execution process.

Myles' order granted a temporary injunction allowing media members and other witnesses to see most of the execution process, with security procedures in place for those carrying out the procedures.

Mother of a Musk child sues his AI company

NY NEW YORK — The mother of one of Elon Musk's children is suing his AI company, saying its Grok chatbot allowed users to generate sexually exploitative deepfake images of her that have caused her humiliation and emotional distress.

Ashley St. Clair, 27, who describes herself as a writer and political strategist, alleges in a lawsuit filed Thursday in New York City against xAI that the images have included a photo of her fully dressed at age 14 that was altered to show her in a bikini, and others showing her as an adult in sexualized positions and wearing a bikini with swastikas.

St. Clair is Jewish.

Grok is housed on Musk's social media platform X.

Elephant seals return to Año Nuevo State Park

CA PESCADERO — Every winter about 10,000 elephant seals make their way to California's Año Nuevo State Park to fight, mate and give birth. The spectacle runs from mid-December through March, drawing wildlife watchers eager for a glimpse of the largest seals on the planet.

Elephant seals were hunted nearly to extinction in the 1800s, sought out for their blubber, which was used to make oil. In 1892, fewer than 100 of the animals remained on a small island off the coast of Baja California.

Recognizing the crisis, the Mexican government extended legal protection to the species in 1922, followed shortly by protection in the United States. Today the population has grown to an estimated 250,000 seals living in the Pacific.

Año Nuevo State Park, about 90 minutes south of San Francisco, is one of the largest mainland breeding rookeries on the West Coast. During pupping season, visitors come in droves to book docent-led guided walks so they can watch the long-nosed bull seals clash on the shore, hear the barks and bellows filling the seaside air and see the mothers nurse sleek, 75-pound pups on the sand dunes.

Bishop warns clergy to prepare for 'martyrdom'

NH CONCORD — A New Hampshire Episcopal bishop is attracting national attention after warning his clergy to finalize their wills and get their affairs in order to prepare for a "new era of martyrdom."

Bishop Rob Hirschfeld of the Episcopal Church of New Hampshire made his comments earlier this month at a vigil honoring Renee Good, who was fatally shot on Jan. 7 in Minneapolis while behind the wheel of her vehicle by a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer.

Hirschfeld's speech cited several historical clergy members who had risked their lives to protect others, including mentioning New Hampshire seminary student Jonathan Daniels, who was shot and killed by a sheriff's deputy in Alabama while shielding a young Black civil rights activist in 1965.

— From wire reports

Stripes hasn't wavered from its true mission

BY JACQUELINE SMITH

Stars and Stripes Ombudsman

Stars and Stripes, the legendary newspaper for the U.S. military community, is in peril of losing its editorial independence and becoming nothing more than a public relations arm of the Pentagon.

Your help is urgently needed to keep Stars and Stripes operating as an independent news source that adheres to journalistic principles and ethics. Your help is needed for Stripes to continue providing fair, accurate and unbiased news for those who are serving our country and our veterans. They deserve nothing less than the unfiltered truth.

Here is what is happening, why and what you can do about it.

My alarm is not exaggerated. On Jan. 15, Sean Parnell, who is the chief Pentagon spokesman for Department of Defense/War Secretary Pete Hegseth, posted on the social media site X four paragraphs announcing a refocus for Stripes. That was the first anyone at Stripes had heard of the Pentagon leadership's intent.

"The Department of War is returning Stars & Stripes to its original mission: reporting for our warfighters," Parnell wrote.

Actually, Stripes never deviated from that mission, though you don't usually see the word "warfighters" used in place of soldiers, Marines, airmen and sailors in news stories.

Parnell wrote that the department would "refocus its content away from woke distractions that siphon morale." As the ombudsman, I read the newspaper carefully, cover to cover, the website and newsletters and I cannot tell you what any "woke

distractions" might be nor "repurposed DC gossip columns."

Morale is important, Parnell is right about that. In fact, funding for Stripes is under the "morale, welfare and recreation" portion of the defense budget. Only a portion of Stripes' operational budget is from defense funds, a moving target, of lately anywhere from 35% to 45%. The rest is generated by Stripes such as from advertising.

"Stars & Stripes will be custom tailored to our warfighters. It will focus on warfighting, weapons systems, fitness, lethality, survivability, and ALL THINGS MILITARY," Parnell wrote. Stripes readers already see stories about weapons systems and drills and fitness—and much more—stories affecting military families, about Defense Department schools overseas and health care. "Warfighters" do not live in isolation.

Those in the military also require unbiased information so that they can participate in the U.S. democracy as informed citizens. Stripes provides that.

The stories in Stripes do not lean right or left or support any particular ideology. From bases around the world, Stripes journalists provide news that is "objective, credible, and editorially independent of the military chain of command and military public affairs activities," as required by the Code of Federal Regulations provision governing Stars and Stripes.

On the same day that Parnell posted on X, the department summarily and illegally shut down the complex review process for the regulation and removed the current regulation on the basis it was "unnecessary." That leaves Stripes operating under guidelines in a 1994 De-

OPINION

partment of Defense directive, well

before the digital age revolutionized news publishing. This might not sound troubling on the face of it, but directives written by the Defense Department can be changed on a whim. The action also ignores Congress' intent for Stripes to remain editorially independent; three decades ago it created the position of ombudsman for the purpose of ensuring the independence.

Parnell's statement was brief. The ramifications were spelled out, however, in a story on the Daily Wire in which unnamed "War Department officials" said stories will be written by active-duty service members and "Fifty percent of the website's content will be composed of War Department-generated materials."

If half the content is composed by the Pentagon, how could anyone trust the other half to be impartial? Credibility will turn to dust.

I believe that service members are smart. They do not need to be spoon-fed good news from the Department of Defense/War. Give them the full and fair picture and let them think for themselves. This is respecting those who serve.

What is happening with Stars and Stripes should be seen within the wider context of Pentagon restrictions of mainstream media. You might remember in recent months journalists who cover the Pentagon were told they must sign a form agreeing to report only approved information or else lose their credentials. What reputable journalist would agree to censorship? Scores walked out. They continue to cover the department through other means.

More recently, Stripes leadership found out that job applicants applying through the USA-JOBS site, a funnel for all government positions, are asked whether they are loyal to the Trump administration and its policies. This is clearly antithetical to journalistic objectivity. Answering the questions is optional, the site states, but not in an obvious manner.

Given the overall press restrictions and the moves to take over editorial control of Stars and Stripes, the future of the reputable newspaper that dates to the Civil War is in danger.

This is where your help is needed. Immediately. Write to your U.S. senators and representative and tell them of the value of maintaining an unfettered news source for the military. Ask them to take action.

Not long ago, Stars and Stripes faced a real threat of being shut down. In 2020 then-Defense Secretary Mark Esper put zero funding in the defense budget. The outcry from those who value the newspaper was loud and strong. President Donald Trump, then in his first term, ordered the funds restored.

The president can do what's right once again and defend continued editorial independence of Stars and Stripes for the good of the military men and women serving our country. No other news organization in the country has that focus and responsibility.

The Stars and Stripes ombudsman, in a role created in 1991 by the House Armed Services Committee, is tasked with reporting to Congress on any threats to the organization's mission of providing independent news to U.S. service members and the military community.

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Indiana wins CFP title to finish perfect

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Fernando Mendoza lowered his pads into a defender, spun in a full circle, used his hand to keep his balance, then launched himself horizontally and reached the ball over the goal line — an Indiana touchdown and a ready-made poster pic for a title run straight from the movies.

Maybe they'll call it "Hoosiers 2."

The Heisman Trophy winner's touchdown Monday night put an exclamation point on a 27-21 win over Miami that closed out an undefeated season and brought an improbable — maybe impossible? — national championship to a program that had known nothing but losing and indifference for almost 140 years.

"Let me tell you: We won the national championship at Indiana University. It can be done," said coach Curt Cignetti, who took over a program with a nation-leading 713 losses and turned it into the game's biggest winner in the span of two years.

Cignetti, the 64-year-old coaching lifer, started it. Mendoza helped get the Hoosiers over the line. He finished with 186 yards passing, but it was that tackle-breaking, sprawled-out 12-yard touchdown run on fourth-and-4 with 9:18 left that

defined this game — and Indiana's season.

The Hoosiers would not be denied.

"I had to go airborne," said Mendoza, who had his lip split and his arm bloodied by a ferocious Miami defense that sacked him three times and hit him many more. "I would die for my team."

Mendoza's TD gave Indiana a 24-14 lead — barely enough breathing room to hold off a frenzied charge by the hard-hitting Hurricanes — a team that barely made the College Football Playoff and barely showed up in the first half of the final before coming to life behind 112 yards and two scores from Mark Fletcher.

"They're the best thing that happened to the University of Miami in 25 years," said coach Mario Cristobal, who was part of the title run that put this colorful program on the map in the 1980s and '90s.

The CFP trophy now heads to the most unlikely of places: Bloomington, Ind. — home of the college that famously boasts the most living alumni (805,000), including billionaire Mark Cuban and several thousand of his closest friends who packed the Hurricanes' home stadium and turned a title-game ticket into a

\$4,000-or-more splurge.

"It's way up there, that's for damn sure," Cuban said when asked where this ranked among the out-of-nowhere success stories he helped bankroll on his reality show "Shark Tank."

Indiana finished 16-0 — using the extra games afforded by the expanded 12-team playoff to match a perfect-season win total last compiled by Yale in 1894. President Donald Trump was in the stands for what he said "turned out to be a great game" after a slow start — the Hoosiers led 10-0 at half.

In a fitting bit of symmetry, this undefeated title comes 50 years after Bob Knight's men's basketball team went 32-0 to win it all in that state's favorite sport.

That hasn't happened since, and there's already some thought that college football — in its evolving, money-soaked, name-image-likeness era — might not see a team like this again, either.

Players like Mendoza — a transfer from Cal who grew up just a few miles away from Miami's campus, "The U" — certainly don't come around often.

Two fourth-down gambles by Cignetti in the fourth quarter, after Fletcher's second touchdown carved the Hurricanes' deficit to 17-14, put the QB in position to shine.

The first was a 19-yard-completion to Charlie Becker on a back-shoulder fade. Four plays later came the kind of decision and execution that wins championships.

Cignetti sent his kicker out on fourth-and-4 from the 12, but quickly called his second timeout. The team huddled on the field and the coach drew up a quarterback draw, hoping Miami would be in a defense it had shown before.

"We rolled the dice and said, 'They're going to be in it again,' and they were," Cignetti said. "We blocked it well, he broke a tackle or two and got in the end zone."

Mendoza's play could very well join John Elway's "helicopter" run in Super Bowl 32 as one of the greatest examples of a quarterback willing to put everything on the line to win it all.

Mendoza might soon have something else in common with Elway: This game did little to diminish his projection as the first pick in the upcoming NFL draft.

"Everyone on the team, including my coach, makes fun of my running style," Mendoza said. "But it's fourth down, so you've got to put it all on the line. Every player, if they had that opportunity, they'd put their body on the line, too."

Sinner starts Australian Open with anticlimactic win

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Two sets and just over an hour of tennis wasn't what Janik Sinner wanted at Rod Laver Arena for the start of his bid for an Australian Open three-peat.

In his first competitive match since beating Carlos Alcaraz at the ATP Finals in November, Sinner was leading 6-2, 6-1 when No. 93-ranked Hugo Gaston suddenly retired from their match Tuesday night with an undisclosed injury.

"I saw that he was not serving with a very high pace," Sinner said, but "it's not the way you want to win the match."

After signaling he had to quit, Gaston went

to a courtside chair and bowed his head into his hands. Sinner went to console him, putting a hand on the Frenchman's shoulder and wishing him a speedy recovery.

For Sinner, it was an anticlimactic return to Melbourne Park's main arena 12 months after clinching back-to-back Australian titles with a win over Alexander Zverev in the final.

He played Alcaraz in the finals of the other three majors, winning at Wimbledon and finishing runner-up at Roland Garros and the U.S. Open, as the so-called Sincaraz rivals extended their dominance of Grand Slam tournaments to a second full year.

Sinner isn't content with evenly splitting

the titles with Alcaraz, though. He used his time off to concentrate on adjusting his service motion and tweaking other parts of his game in the search for incremental improvements.

"I've put in many, many long days in the offseason trying to become a better tennis player," No. 2-ranked Sinner said. "But at the end of the day the most important part is to go on court and to enjoy, no? It's very special to start the season in a night session match here in a Grand Slam, the packed stadium, just trying to do your best."

Sinner is aiming to become the fourth player to win three consecutive men's titles at the Australian Open.

Source: Titans hiring Saleh as new coach

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Tennessee Titans agreed to hire Robert Saleh as their coach Monday night, hoping he can speed up their rebuild and end the franchise's skid of four straight losing seasons, a person familiar with the decision told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the agreement had not been announced.

Saleh spent this season as the San Francisco 49ers' defensive coordinator, his second stint in that job after spending three-plus seasons as coach of the Jets. He did not have a winning season in New York and was

fired after a 2-3 start in 2024, going 20-36 overall.

But the 46-year-old Saleh still had a strong reputation around the league and was a sought-after candidate in this busy coaching cycle.

"Playing for him was such a blessing. He's a defensive mastermind," 49ers cornerback Deommodore Lenoir said earlier Monday. "I think he's one of the best to do it."

The Titans went 19-49 over the past four seasons under Mike Vrabel — who was fired after the 2024 season — and Brian Callahan, who lasted just 23 games before being fired Oct. 13 after a 1-5 start. That made Tennessee the first team

with a coaching vacancy, only to wind up as one of 10 NFL teams looking for a coach and the fourth to hire one.

The Titans interviewed 15 candidates for the job before paring down their finalists to Saleh, Chiefs offensive coordinator Matt Nagy and Packers defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley — who was hired earlier Monday as the Dolphins' coach.

Of that trio, only Saleh had yet to interview with Tennessee until an in-person session Monday.

This was the first coaching search run by general manager Mike Borgonzi, who was hired Jan. 17, 2024. Borgonzi knew he was walking into a franchise needing a major rebuild, and he

made clear he had no timetable for making his biggest move yet.

Borgonzi started the renovation by taking quarterback Cam Ward at No. 1 overall.

All Pro defensive tackle Jeffrey Simmons shared a googly-eyes emoji on social media as news broke of the Titans finding their coach. Ward, who had said he wanted to be involved in the team's search, was in Florida watching his alma mater, Miami, lose the College Football Playoff national championship game to Indiana.

Saleh is the seventh coach the franchise has had since moving to Tennessee in 1997 and the fifth since 2014.

Pistons hold on to assert East control against Celtics

Associated Press

DETROIT — Tobias Harris scored 25 points and Jaylen Brown missed a jumper just before the buzzer, allowing the Detroit Pistons to hold on for a 104-103 win over the Boston Celtics on Monday night in a matchup of teams with the best records in the Eastern Conference.

Jalen Duren scored 18 points and grabbed nine rebounds, Cade Cunningham had 16 points and 14 assists and Duncan Robinson added 15 points for the Central Division-leading Pistons (31-10).

Brown had 32 points on 11-for-28 shooting for the Atlantic Division-leading Celtics (26-16).

Clippers 110, Wizards 106: James Harden scored 36 points, and when he finally missed a couple big free throws in the final seconds, the ball came right back to him as visiting Los Angeles edged Washington for its sixth straight victory.

Harden made two free throws with 36.9 seconds left to give the Clippers a 108-106 lead, and after the teams traded scoreless possessions, Kyshawn George missed a 3-pointer for the Wizards. Harden was fouled with 5.9

seconds left. At that point, he was 16-for-16 from the line, but he missed both free throws.

Bucks 112, Hawks 110: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 21 points and 17 rebounds as visiting Milwaukee snapped a three-game losing streak, holding off Atlanta after squandering a 23-point lead in the second half.

The Hawks led 105-104 on Jalen Johnson's 3-pointer with 1:11 remaining before dropping their fourth in a row in the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day game played in the hometown of the civil rights icon.

Thunder 136, Cavaliers 104: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 30 points, Chet Holmgren added 28 and visiting Oklahoma City rolled to a victory over Cleveland.

It is the 30th time in 42 games Gilgeous-Alexander has scored at least 30. The reigning NBA MVP is second in the league in scoring, averaging 31.8 points.

The Thunder — who improved to a league-best 36-8 — tied a season high with 23 3-pointers and made 48.9% from beyond the arc.

Mavericks 114, Knicks 97: Max Christie scored a season-high 26 points, Cooper Flagg had

18 in his first pro game at Madison Square Garden and Dallas rolled to a victory over New York, which was booed frequently in the first half while falling behind by 30.

The Knicks lost their fourth straight and ninth in 11 games.

The Mavericks, meanwhile, are missing numerous injured players, but the ones who did suit up ran the Knicks off the floor in the first half to win their third straight game. Flagg had missed the previous two, both victories over Utah, with a sprained left ankle. The No. 1 pick also had seven rebounds.

Spurs 123, Jazz 110: Victor Wembanyama had a season-high seven 3-pointers and finished with 33 points and 10 rebounds hours after being named an All-Star starter for the first time as host San Antonio beat Utah.

Wembanyama, named to his second All-Star team and the eighth Spurs player to start, shot 7-for-12 from 3-point distance and finished one shy of his career best, set Nov. 13, 2024, against Washington.

76ers 113, Pacers 104: Tyrese Maxey had 29 points and eight steals hours after being

named an All-Star starter for the first time, and Joel Embiid had 30 points and nine rebounds to lead host Philadelphia over Indiana.

Kelly Oubre Jr. scored 18 points, and all five starters hit double figures.

Suns 126, Nets 117: Dillon Brooks scored 27 points, Devin Booker had 23 and visiting Phoenix beat Brooklyn.

Collin Gillespie finished with 22 points and Grayson Allen added 14 off the bench for the Suns, who have won five of their last seven games.

Warriors 135, Heat 112: Golden State star Jimmy Butler injured his right knee midway through the third quarter of a win Monday night against his former Miami team after he scored 17 points, a big blow for the host Warriors.

Andrew Wiggins had 18 points and five rebounds for the Heat in his return to Chase Center, where he helped Golden State win the 2022 NBA championship. Norman Powell had 21 points as Miami kicked off a five-game West Coast trip and lost its fourth in a row away from home to drop to 7-14 overall outside South Florida.

Dolphins bring in Packers DC Hafley as coach

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — The Miami Dolphins hired former Green Bay Packers defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley as their coach Monday, ending a swift search and tasking him with turning around a franchise that hasn't won a playoff game in 25 years.

Hafley replaces Mike McDaniel, who was fired earlier this month after going 35-33 in four seasons.

Hafley, who spent two seasons in Green Bay, met with Miami for a second interview earlier Monday before he was offered the job. He will rejoin new GM Jon-Eric Sullivan

with the Dolphins.

The 46-year-old Hafley left his job as head coach at Boston College in 2024 to become defensive coordinator for the Packers, working with Sullivan for the past two seasons. Hafley also coached San Francisco's defensive backs from 2016-18 after spending two years as Cleveland's secondary coach.

Sullivan, formerly Green Bay's vice president of player personnel, spent 22 seasons with the Packers before becoming Miami's GM.

"Jeff is a man of integrity, intellect and great passion who players will buy into and

play for," Sullivan said. "He has a vision for the kind of team we will be and the ability to motivate them to move in one direction on the path towards that goal. I'm thrilled to go on this journey with him and together we will build a winner that this organization deserves."

Green Bay players, who spoke highly of Hafley, had been preparing for the possibility he would become a head coach.

"That (expletive) would suck," safety Javon Bullard said this season. "But, you know, that's the beauty of this profession. That's the sad part

about this profession but it's also a beautiful thing too. You want everybody to succeed and level up, because that's the same thing with somebody here going to get a new contract somewhere else."

The hiring of Hafley continues Dolphins owner Stephen Ross' trend of gambling on candidates without prior NFL head coaching experience.

Ross has not hired a proven NFL coach since becoming Miami's majority owner in 2009. He previously took chances on Joe Philbin (2012-2015), Adam Gase (2016-18), Brian Flores (2019-21) and McDaniel (2022-25).

Bussi makes 17 saves to lift Hurricanes past Sabres

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Brandon Bussi made 17 saves for his 18th win of the season, Seth Jarvis scored the go-ahead goal on a power play early in the third period and the Carolina Hurricanes beat the Buffalo Sabres 2-1 on Monday.

Andrei Svechnikov had a goal and an assist for Carolina, which has won three straight and secured at least one point for the eighth time in its past nine games. Sebastian Aho assisted on both of the Hurricanes' goals, giving him nine in five games.

Bussi improved to 18-3-1 and now has the most victories for a goaltender in his first 22 NHL starts. Six of his saves came on U.S. Olympian Tage Thompson, including a highlight-reel glove stop and another with two seconds remaining.

Rasmus Dahlin scored for Buffalo, which has lost back-to-back games for the first time since Dec. 5 and 8. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen stopped 26 of 28 shots as the Sabres began a five-game road trip.

Carolina has a 13-game home winning streak against Buffalo, the league's longest active streak

of its kind.

Flyers 2, Golden Knights 1: Travis Konecny scored twice for his first multigoal game this season and visiting Philadelphia defeated Vegas.

The Flyers stopped a six-game slide and ended the Golden Knights' seven-game winning streak.

Philadelphia improved to 6-8-2 since opening the season 17-9-6. The Flyers had lost six of their previous seven meetings with Vegas.

Penguins 6, Kraken 3: Brett Kulak broke a second-period tie with his first goal of the season, and visiting Pittsburgh beat Seattle.

Kulak, acquired from Edmonton in December as part of the trade for goalie Tristan Jarry, scored for the first time since last year's Western Conference final. The defenseman ripped a one-timer to give the Penguins a 3-2 lead with 5:15 left in the second.

Islanders 4, Canucks 3: Anthony Duclair scored twice and visiting New York beat Vancouver, handing the Canucks their 11th consecutive defeat.

Max Sasson, Evander Kane and Drew O'Connor scored for

NHL-worst Vancouver (16-28-5), which has lost eight straight games in regulation. The Canucks are 0-9-2 during the losing streak and still winless in 2026.

Avalanche 5, Capitals 2: Nathan MacKinnon had two goals and an assist to reach 1,100 career points and host Colorado beat Washington.

MacKinnon joined Hall of Famer Joe Sakic as the only players in franchise history to reach 1,100 points.

Sharks 4, Panthers 1, (OT): Will Smith scored in his second consecutive game after missing a month because of injury, and visiting San Jose spoiled Matthew Tkachuk's season debut by beating two-time defending champion Florida in a game highlighted by a rare goalie fight.

Eetu Luostarinen scored the Panthers' goal. Bobrovsky allowed three on 27 shots, giving up several juicy rebounds the Sharks capitalized on.

Wild 6, Maple Leafs 3: Marcus Foligno had his first NHL hat trick to double his season goals total, Vladimir Tarasenko scored twice and visiting Minnesota beat Toronto.

Auston Matthews scored his

25th goal of the season and had an assist for Toronto.

Blackhawks 2, Jets 0: Spencer Knight made 32 saves, Jason Dickinson scored and host Chicago beat Jonathan Toews and Winnipeg.

Toews was cheered all night long in his return to his first NHL home. The Blackhawks showed a video of Toews' highlights in the first period, and the crowd of 19,894 responded with a long standing ovation.

Devils 1, Flames 1, (OT): Simon Nemec scored at 1:18 of overtime to lift visiting New Jersey over Calgary.

Dawson Mercer opened the scoring for New Jersey at 7:51 of the second period, and Nazem Kadri tied it at 9:44 of the period. Rookie Matvei Gridin got his first NHL assist on Kadri's goal.

Ducks 5, Rangers 3: Alex Killorn broke a second-period tie, rugged newcomer Jeffrey Viel scored his first goal of the season and host Anaheim beat New York.

Matthew Robertson, Artemi Panarin and Vladislav Gavrikov scored for the Rangers, and Spencer Martin stopped 21 shots in his fourth NHL game of the season.