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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Massive winter storm hits much of US

Associated Press

A massive winter storm continued Sunday morning, dumping sleet, freezing rain and snow across the South and up through New England, bringing frigid temperatures, widespread power outages and treacherous road conditions.

The ice and snowfall were expected to continue through Monday in much of the United States, followed by very low temperatures, causing “dangerous travel and infrastructure impacts” to linger for several days, the National Weather Service said.

Heavy snow was forecast from the Ohio Valley to the Northeast, while “catastrophic ice accumulation” threatened from the Lower Mississippi Valley to the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast.

“It is a unique storm in the sense that it is so widespread,” weather service meteorologist Allison Santorelli said in a phone

interview. “It was affecting areas all the way from New Mexico, Texas, all the way into New England, so we’re talking like a 2,000 mile spread.”

As of Sunday morning, about 213 million people were under some sort of winter weather warning, she said. The number of customers without power topped 880,000, according to poweroutage.us, and the number was rising.

Tennessee was hardest hit with nearly 325,000 customers out, and Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi all had more than 100,000 customers in the dark.

Some 11,000 flights had already been canceled Sunday and more than 13,000 have been delayed, according to the flight tracker flightaware.com. The biggest hubs hit so far were in Philadelphia, Washington, Raleigh-Durham in North Carolina, New York and New Jersey.

At Philadelphia International

Airport, inside displays registered scores of canceled flights and few vehicles could be seen arriving Sunday morning.

Even once the ice and snow stop falling, the danger will continue, Santorelli warned.

“Behind the storm it’s just going to get bitterly cold across basically the entirety of the eastern two-thirds of the nation, east of the Rockies,” she said.

That means the ice and snow won’t melt as fast, which could hinder some efforts to restore power and other infrastructure.

Along the Gulf Coast, temperatures were balmy Sunday, hitting the high 60s and low 70s, but temperatures were expected to drop into the high 20s and low 30s by Monday morning.

The National Weather Service warned of damaging winds and a slight risk of severe storms and even a brief tornado.

President Donald Trump had approved emergency declara-

tions for at least a dozen states by Saturday, with more expected to come.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency pre-positioned commodities, staff and search and rescue teams in numerous states, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said.

In New York City, Mayor Zohran Mamdani said at least five people died as temperatures plunged Saturday before the snows arrived in earnest.

Nashville and the surrounding area was seeing ice accumulations of half an inch or more, with icicles hanging from power lines and overburdened tree limbs crashing to the ground.

In Oxford, Miss., police on Sunday morning used social media to tell residents to stay home as the danger of being outside was too great. Local utility crews were also pulled from their jobs during the overnight hours.

US destroyer begins patrolling in European waters

BY ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The destroyer USS Delbert D. Black began patrolling European waters last week, an addition to the Navy’s presence as the U.S. builds up forces in the Middle East amid tensions with Iran.

The ship officially arrived on station in the U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet area of command following its departure on Monday from Las Palmas, Spain, NAVFUR-AF/U.S. 6th Fleet said in a Facebook post Thursday.

The Arleigh-Burke-class destroyer recently completed a flight operations exercise with an MH-60R Seahawk helicopter

that left the ship’s crew “razor-sharp and ready,” the post said.

Based at Naval Station Mayport in Florida, the vessel carries standard, Tomahawk and Evolved Sea Sparrow missiles, among other armaments. It joins five other destroyers in the region homeported at Naval Station Rota in Spain.

One, USS Roosevelt, left the Red Sea earlier this month and is in the Mediterranean Sea, USNI News reported on Tuesday.

That departure left two destroyers, USS McFaul and USS Mitscher, both homeported at Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia, in the Persian Gulf, according to USNI.

Meanwhile, the Abraham

Lincoln Carrier Strike Group, which includes three destroyers, is in the Indian Ocean and expected to arrive in the Middle East in the coming days, Reuters reported Thursday, citing unidentified U.S. officials.

That news came the same day President Donald Trump warned Tehran that the U.S. has an “armada” heading toward the country, adding that he hoped he would not have to use it, Reuters reported.

Trump has been mulling options for responding to Iran’s brutal crackdown on protests against the regime.

Navy ships and aircraft are not the only U.S. forces apparently being routed to the Middle

East.

On Tuesday, U.S. Central Command shared a photograph on X of an Air Force F-15E Strike Eagle fighter jet assigned to the 494th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron landing at an unidentified base in the Middle East. The squadron is based at RAF Lakenheath in the U.K.

A dozen F-15s departed Lakenheath last Sunday supported by KC-135 Stratotanker aerial refueling aircraft, Air & Space Forces Magazine reported on Tuesday, citing flight-tracking data.

C-17 Globemaster III cargo planes also have flown from the U.K. to the Middle East, the magazine said.

New DOD strategy focuses on homeland

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

A new U.S. national defense strategy released Friday puts protection of the homeland and access to strategic terrain in the Western Hemisphere atop the military's agenda, marking a shift from the Pentagon's previous position that countering China was the Defense Department's number one pacing threat.

The Pentagon's long-awaited new plan lines up with the White House's National Security Strategy, released last month, and prioritizes border security, targeting drug traffickers and "fearlessly" defending "America's interests across the hemisphere."

"We will guarantee U.S. military and commercial access to key terrain, especially the Panama Canal, Gulf of America, and Greenland," the document states.

"We will provide President [Donald] Trump with credible military options to use against narco-terrorists wherever they may be."

The Pentagon said it will work with nearby allies and partners, such as neighbor and NATO ally Canada, and added "we will ensure that they respect and do their part to defend our shared interests."

"And where they do not, we will stand ready to take focused, decisive action that concretely advances U.S. interests," the Pentagon strategy states.

The heavy emphasis on military operations in the Western Hemisphere is a shift from previous defense strategies, which since 2018 have made China the number one issue. Now, deterring China is second on the agenda. The approach calls for more

diplomacy aimed at avoiding confrontation with Beijing while building up defenses in the Pacific to discourage Chinese aggression.

Efforts will be made to support "strategic stability," "deconfliction" and "de-escalation," the strategy states.

"But we will also be clear-eyed and realistic about the speed, scale, and quality of China's historic military buildup," the strategy states. "Our goal in doing so is not to dominate China; nor is it to strangle or humiliate them."

The aim is to achieve a balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and prevent China from dominating the region, according to the strategy. The "peace through strength" approach will be backed by "erecting a strong denial defense" along the Pacific's first island chain and through

more military burden-sharing among allies in the region, the strategy says.

In Europe, meanwhile, Russia is still viewed as a threat, especially to allies on NATO's eastern flank.

The strategy says Russia is in no position to pose a threat to Europe as a whole, given that NATO dwarfs Russia "in economic scale, population, and, thus, latent military power."

Still, the Pentagon says it will remain involved in Europe going forward, although on a more limited basis as allies step up their defense spending and bolster their own capabilities.

"Our NATO allies are therefore strongly positioned to take primary responsibility for Europe's conventional defense, with critical but more limited U.S. support," the strategy states.

US carries out its 1st known boat strike since Maduro op

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military said Friday that it has carried out a deadly strike on a vessel accused of trafficking drugs in the eastern Pacific Ocean, the first known attack since the raid that captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro earlier this month.

U.S. Southern Command said on social media that the boat was "engaged in narco-trafficking operations" and that the strike killed two people and left one survivor. It said it notified the Coast Guard to launch search and rescue operations for that person.

A video accompanying the post announcing the latest strike shows a boat moving through the water before exploding in flames. The U.S. military has focused lately on seizing sanctioned oil tankers with connec-

tions to Venezuela since the Trump administration launched an audacious raid on Jan. 3 to capture Maduro and bring him to New York to face drug trafficking charges.

With the latest military action, there have been 36 known strikes against alleged drug smuggling boats in South American waters since early September that killed at least 117 people, according to announcements from the U.S. military and Trump. The majority of those strikes have occurred in the Caribbean Sea.

The last reported boat strikes occurred in late December, when the military said it struck five alleged drug-smuggling boats over two days, killing a total of eight people while others jumped overboard. Days later, the Coast Guard suspended its search.

Trump praises UK troops after war comments furor

Associated Press

LONDON — President Donald Trump heaped praise Saturday on British soldiers who fought in Afghanistan, in a post on social media that represented a partial reversal of comments he made last week that drew a cascade of criticism in the U.K., particularly from families of those killed and seriously injured in the conflict.

In the wake of a conversation earlier with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Trump said on Truth Social that the "great and very brave soldiers of the United Kingdom will always be with the United States of America."

He described the 457 British servicemen and women who died in Afghanistan and those that were badly injured, as "among the greatest of all war-

riors."

Trump added that the bond between the two countries' militaries is "too strong to ever be broken" and that the U.K. "with tremendous heart and soul, is second to none (except for the USA)."

Trump's comments follow an interview with Fox Business Network on Thursday in Davos, Switzerland, when he said he wasn't sure the other 31 nations in NATO would be there to support the United States if and when requested and that troops from those countries stayed "a little off the front lines."

Trump did not apologize directly for those comments, nor retract them, as Starmer suggested in his initial response on Friday when he described the words of the president as "insulting and frankly appalling."

Canada counters Trump on China trade claim

Associated Press

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said Sunday his country has no intention of pursuing a free trade deal with China. He was responding to President Donald Trump's threat to impose a 100% tariff on goods imported from Canada if America's northern neighbor went ahead with a trade deal with Beijing.

Carney said his recent agreement with China merely cuts tariffs on a few sectors that were recently hit with tariffs.

Trump claims otherwise, posting that "China is successfully and completely taking over the once Great Country of Canada. So sad to see it happen.

I only hope they leave Ice Hockey alone! President DJT"

The prime minister said under the free trade agreement with the U.S. and Mexico there are commitments not to pursue free trade agreements with non-market economies without prior notification.

"We have no intention of doing that with China or any other nonmarket economy," Carney said. "What we have done with China is to rectify some issues that developed in the last couple of years."

In 2024, Canada mirrored the United States by putting a 100% tariff on electric vehicles from Beijing and a 25% tariff on steel and aluminum. China had re-

sponded by imposing 100% import taxes on Canadian canola oil and meal and 25% on pork and seafood.

Breaking with the United States this month during a visit to China, Carney cut its 100% tariff on Chinese electric cars in return for lower tariffs on those Canadian products.

Carney has said there would be an initial annual cap of 49,000 vehicles on Chinese EV exports coming into Canada at a tariff rate of 6.1%, growing to about 70,000 over five years. He noted there was no cap before 2024. He also has said the initial cap on Chinese EV imports was about 3% of the 1.8 million vehicles sold in Canada annually

and that, in exchange, China is expected to begin investing in the Canadian auto industry within three years.

"A MUST WATCH. Canada is systematically destroying itself. The China deal is a disaster for them. Will go down as one of the worst deals, of any kind, in history. All their businesses are moving to the USA. I want to see Canada SURVIVE AND THRIVE! President DJT," Trump posted on social media on Sunday.

Trump's earlier post said that if Carney "thinks he is going to make Canada a 'Drop Off Port' for China to send goods and products into the United States, he is sorely mistaken."

Killing of protester in Minn. intensifies anti-ICE effort

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Local leaders and Democrats across the country demanded that federal immigration officers leave Minnesota after a U.S. Border Patrol agent fatally shot a man in Minneapolis, drawing hundreds of protesters onto the frigid streets and increasing tensions in a city already shaken by another shooting death weeks earlier.

Family members identified the man who was killed as Alex Petti, a 37-year-old intensive care unit nurse who protested President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown in his city. After the shooting, an angry crowd gathered and protesters clashed with federal officers, who wielded batons and deployed flash bangs.

A federal judge has already issued an order blocking the Trump administration from "destroying or altering evidence" related to the shooting, after state and county officials sued.

Minnesota Attorney General

Keith Ellison said the suit filed Saturday is meant to preserve evidence collected by federal officials that state authorities have not yet been able to inspect. A court hearing is scheduled for Monday in federal court in St. Paul.

Spokespersons for the Justice Department and the Department of Homeland Security, which are named in the lawsuit, didn't respond to an email seeking comment Sunday.

Another federal judge previously ruled that officers participating in the federal immigration enforcement surge in Minnesota can't detain or tear gas peaceful protesters who aren't obstructing authorities, including when these people are observing the agents.

The Minnesota National Guard was assisting local police at the direction of Gov. Tim Walz, officials said. Guard troops were sent to both the shooting site and a federal building where officers have squared off with demonstrators daily.

Court appears to carve out exception for Federal Reserve

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court for the past year has repeatedly allowed President Donald Trump to fire heads of independent agencies, but it appears to be drawing a line with the Federal Reserve.

The court has signaled for months that it sees the Fed in a different light.

It has said that the president can fire directors of other agencies for any reason but can remove Fed governors only "for cause," which is interpreted to mean neglect of duty.

Last year, the court allowed President Donald Trump to fire — at least temporarily — Gwynne Wilcox, a member of the National Labor Relations Board, and Cathy Harris, a member of the Merit Systems Protection Board, but it carved out a distinction for the Fed. The two officials had argued that if Trump could fire them, he could also fire members of the Fed's board of governors.

"We disagree," the court said then. "The Federal Reserve is a uniquely structured, quasi-priva-

te entity that follows in the distinct historical tradition of the First and Second Banks of the United States."

That is now being put to the test in a case in front of the Supreme Court involving Trump's attempt to remove Fed governor Lisa Cook. On Wednesday, the court seemed inclined to keep Cook.

Allowing Cook's firing to go forward "would weaken, if not shatter, the independence of the Federal Reserve," said Justice Brett Kavanaugh, one of three Trump appointees on the nation's highest court.

But the court largely skirted a key issue: What, exactly, is the legal principle that protects the Fed but not the other agencies?

Several legal experts say the justices are on shaky ground.

The Fed, they argue, is similar in many ways to the Federal Trade Commission or the National Labor Relations Board, agencies Congress intended to be independent but whose officials Trump has been able to fire without pushback from the high court.

Zelenskyy: US security deal is '100% ready'

Associated Press

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Sunday that a U.S. security guarantees document for Ukraine is "100% ready" after two days of talks involving representatives from Ukraine, the United States and Russia.

Speaking to journalists in Vilnius during a visit to Lithuania, Zelenskyy said Ukraine is waiting for its partners to set a signing date, after which the document would go to the U.S. Congress and Ukrainian parliament for ratification.

Zelenskyy also emphasized Ukraine's push for European Union membership by 2027,

calling it an "economic security guarantee."

The Ukrainian leader described the talks in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, as likely the first trilateral format in "quite a long while" that included not only diplomats but military representatives from all three sides. The talks, which began Friday and continued Saturday, were the latest aiming to end Russia's nearly four-year full-scale invasion.

Zelenskyy acknowledged fundamental differences between Ukrainian and Russian positions, reaffirming territorial

issues as a major sticking point.

"Our position regarding our territory—Ukraine's territorial integrity—must be respected," he said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed a Ukraine settlement with President Donald Trump's envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner during marathon talks late Thursday. The Kremlin insisted that to reach a peace deal, Kyiv must withdraw its troops from the areas in the east that Russia illegally annexed but has not fully captured.

Zelenskyy said the U.S. is try-

ing to find a compromise, but that "all sides must be ready for compromise."

Negotiators will return to the UAE on Feb. 1 for the next round of talks, according to a U.S. official. The recent talks covered a broad range of military and economic matters and included the possibility of a ceasefire before a deal, the official said.

There was not yet an agreement on a final framework for oversight and operation of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, which is occupied by Russia and is the largest in Europe.

Iran unveils mural warning of retaliation if US strikes

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A new mural unveiled in a central Tehran square Sunday contains a direct warning by Iran to the United States to not attempt a military strike on the country.

The painted image of several damaged planes on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier bears the slogan: "If you sow the wind, you will reap the whirlwind."

The unveiling of the mural in Enghelab Square comes as the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier and accompanying warships move toward the region. U.S. President Donald Trump has said the ships are being moved "just in case."

"We have a massive fleet heading in that direction and maybe we won't have to use it," Trump said Thursday.

Enghelab Square is used for gatherings called by the state, and authorities change its mural based on national occasions. On Saturday, the commander of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard warned his force is "more ready than ever."

Tension between the U.S. and

Iran has spiked in the wake of a brutal crackdown on nationwide protests that saw thousands of people killed and tens of thousands arrested. Trump had threatened military action if Iran continued to kill peaceful protesters or carried out mass executions of those detained.

There have been no further protests for days, and Trump claimed recently that Tehran had halted the executions of about 800 arrested protesters—a claim Iran's top prosecutor called "completely false."

But Trump has indicated he is keeping his options open, saying Thursday that any military action would make last June's U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear sites "look like peanuts."

U.S. Central Command said on social media that its Air Force F-15E Strike Eagle now has a presence in the Middle East, noting the jet "enhances combat readiness and promotes regional security and stability."

Similarly, the U.K. Ministry of Defense said Thursday that it deployed its Typhoon fighter jets to Qatar "in a defensive capacity."

Rock climber reaches top of skyscraper without ropes

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — American rock climber Alex Honnold ascended the Taipei 101 skyscraper Sunday without any ropes or protective equipment.

Cheers erupted from a street-level crowd as he reached the top of the spire of the 1,667-foot tower about 90 minutes after he started. Wearing a red short-sleeve shirt, Honnold waved his arms over his head.

"It was like what a view, it's incredible, what a beautiful day," he said afterward. "It was very windy, so I was like, don't fall off the spire. I was trying to balance nicely. But it was, what an incredible position, what a beautiful way to see Taipei."

Honnold, known for his ropeless ascent up Yosemite National Park's El Capitan, climbed up one corner of Taipei 101 using small L-shaped outcroppings as footholds. Periodically, he had to maneuver around and clamber up the sides of large ornamental structures that jut out from the tower, pulling himself up with his bare hands.

The building has 101 floors, with the hardest part being the

64 floors of the middle section—the "bamboo boxes" that give the building its signature look. Divided into eight, each segment has eight floors of steep, overhanging climbing followed by balconies, where he took rests as he made his way up.

Honnold's free solo climb of the iconic building in Taiwan's capital city was broadcast live on Netflix with a 10-second delay. The ascent, originally scheduled for Saturday, was delayed for 24 hours due to rain.

Having a cheering crowd was unusual and a bit unnerving at first for Honnold, whose climbs are usually in remote areas.

"When I was leaving the ground, you're like, 'Oh it's kind of intense, there's so many people watching,'" he said. "But then honestly, they're all wishing me well. I mean basically it just makes the whole experience feel almost more festive, all these nice people are out supporting me and having a good time."

The climb drew both excitement and concern over the implications of attempting such an endeavor on live broadcast.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

This spud's not for you after Hasbro moves HQ

RI PROVIDENCE — It's been no small potatoes that Rhode Islanders have been able to choose the image of Mr. Potato Head as a specialty license plate for decades.

Yet with Hasbro's decision to move its headquarters from the smallest state in the U.S. to Boston, two lawmakers said it's time to hash out whether Rhode Island should continue promoting one of the company's most iconic characters.

Under the proposal introduced earlier this month, Rhode Island's Division of Motor Vehicles would stop providing Mr. Potato Head as an option for a specialty license plate. The plate currently costs around \$40, with half of that amount going to help support the Rhode Island Community Food Bank.

Rep. Brian Newberry, a Republican from North Smithfield, said in an email that he filed the legislation because Hasbro leaving the state will cause "untold economic harm and loss of tax revenue."

Ponzi scheme bilked investors of \$380M

GA ATLANTA — A financial adviser in Georgia pleaded guilty to wire fraud in a Ponzi scheme that bilked more than 2,000 people out of \$380 million, federal authorities announced.

Prosecutors accused Todd Burkhalter, the founder and CEO of Drive Planning LLC, of marketing several fraudulent investment schemes and using the money in part to buy a \$2 million yacht, a \$2.1 million condo in

Mexico and a motorcoach.

Prosecutors said one of Burkhalter's investment schemes purported to provide short-term loans to real estate developers and promised returns of 10% every three months. According to prosecutors, Burkhalter falsely said those investments were backed by real estate holdings.

Burkhalter, 54, of St. Petersburg, Fla., encouraged investors to dip into retirement accounts and savings and take out lines of credit.

Lawmaker reprimanded for sexually vulgar texts

MO JEFFERSON CITY — Missouri lawmakers on Thursday formally reprimanded a House member who sent a sexually vulgar text message to a colleague while protesting a congressional redistricting plan backed by President Donald Trump.

Democratic state Rep. Jeremy Dean was barred from serving on House committees, ordered to stay at least 50 feet away from the lawmaker he targeted and undergo additional sexual harassment training. His House seating and parking assignments could also get changed.

The lawmaker subjected to his text message, Republican state Rep. Cecelia William, said Dean should have been expelled from office.

Lone Star State leads in losing citizens to others

TX AUSTIN — Texas supplied the most new residents of any U.S. state for nine other states, despite having the biggest population growth this decade, according to

figures released last week by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Texas was the top source of new residents for Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico and Oklahoma, according to the 2024 state-to-state migration flows, which track where someone lived in the previous year and where they currently live.

With 31 million residents, Texas ranks second in population among U.S. states. Between 2020 and 2024, Texas gained 2.1 million people.

"The obvious and primary answer is size," said Dudley Poston, professor emeritus of sociology at Texas A&M University. "There's got to be more people leaving Texas than leaving other states because of the population size of Texas."

Woman shot, injured by Border Patrol sentenced

OR PORTLAND — A woman who was shot and wounded by a Border Patrol agent during a recent immigration stop in Portland pleaded guilty Thursday to illegally entering the United States and was sentenced to one year of probation.

Yorlenys Zambrano-Contreras appeared by video from an immigration detention facility in Tacoma, Wash., for the federal court hearing in Portland, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported. She won't face time in prison but will have location monitoring and certain nighttime curfew requirements during probation. She will be able to remain out of custody in Oregon under the negotiated resolution of the case.

The case was initially filed in Texas, where she was accused of illegally entering the U.S., but she waived her right to appear there for prosecution, the outlet reported. The shooting Jan. 8 prompted protests over agents' aggressive tactics during immigration enforcement operations.

Ex-schools chief pleads guilty in immigration case

IA DES MOINES — The former superintendent of Iowa's largest school district pleaded guilty Thursday, and admitted to falsely claiming to be a U.S. citizen on a federal form and illegally possessing firearms.

Ian Roberts, a native of Guyana in South America, had initially pleaded not guilty to both counts, which together carry a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, and a trial was scheduled to begin in early March. Roberts affirmed Thursday that he's aware his guilty pleas could have an impact on his immigration case, and that he could face immediate deportation after he serves his sentence.

Roberts ascended as an exuberant and inspiring leader over a two-decade career in urban education. For two years, he was superintendent of the Des Moines public school district, which serves 30,000 students.

Just weeks into a new school year, Roberts was detained by federal immigration officers. The Sept. 26 arrest stunned community members and drew national attention to his history of criminal charges and falsified credentials.

— From wire reports

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Sabalenka holds off Mboko in Australian Open

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — TikTok influencer and top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka is having to work her way through some rising teenage stars in her bid for a third Australian Open title in four years.

Sabalenka, who has drawn praise from fans and other players for her posts on the social media platform about matters on and off the court, held off 19-year-old Vicky Mboko 6-1, 7-6 (1) at Rod Laver Arena on Sunday. She'll play 18-year-old Iva Jovic in the quarterfinals.

The 29-seeded Jovic overwhelmed Yulia Putintseva 6-0, 6-1 in 53 minutes at John Cain Arena — with six service breaks and winning the first 10 games — to secure a spot in the last eight of a Grand Slam for the first time.

"Obviously, she's No. 1 for a reason and had so much success at this tournament," Jovic said of Sabalenka. "But that's what I

want — I said it last year, I hope to be able to play her this year, because you definitely want to play the best and see how it goes."

Coco Gauff, who was still a teenager when she won her first major title in 2023, is back into the quarterfinals in Australia for the third consecutive year after a 6-1, 3-6, 6-3 win over No. 19 Karolina Muchova. She'll next face No. 12 Elina Svitolina, who closed play on Day 8 with a 6-2, 6-4 win over 18-year-old, eighth-seeded Mirra Andreeva.

No. 1-ranked Carlos Alcaraz is also in the last 8 for the third straight year, continuing his bid for a career Grand Slam at age 22 with a 7-6 (6), 6-4, 7-5 win over No. 19-seeded Tommy Paul.

He's never gone past the last eight at Melbourne Park, the only one of the four Grand Slam venues where he hasn't won the title. That's a statistic he's determined to rectify, to the point

where he's reworking his serve to a look a little bit more in style with 10-time Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic.

He's unlikely to have the crowd behind him in the quarterfinals, where he'll meet local hope and sixth-seeded Alex de Minaur, a 6-4, 6-1, 6-1 winner over No. 10 Alexander Bublik.

No. 3 Alexander Zverev, the runner-up in Melbourne last year, beat Francisco Cerundolo 6-2, 6-4, 6-4 and will next meet 20-year-old Learner Tien, the youngest men's quarterfinalist in Australia since Nick Kyrgios in 2015. Tien, who needed treatment for a bloody nose after the third game, beat three-time Australian Open runner-up Daniil Medvedev 6-4, 6-0, 6-3.

Djokovic's influence

The 38-year-old Djokovic got a walkover into the quarterfinals after Jakub Mensik withdrew 24 hours ahead of their scheduled fourth-round match

with an abdominal injury.

Jovic has been getting some good advice from Djokovic, a 24-time major winner, during the tournament. He said he's been happy to help an up-and-coming star with Serbian heritage.

Sabalenka, who has joked about waiting for a formal invitation to partner Djokovic in mixed doubles at a major, breezed through the first set in 31 minutes against Mboko but had some difficulty in the second.

Mboko saved match points and played well enough to beat many players, but not the two-time Australian Open champion.

Sabalenka led the second set 4-1, and then failed to convert three match points while leading 5-4. Mboko slowly took momentum and forced a tiebreaker only for Sabalenka to dominate.

It was the 20th straight tiebreaker victory — a record — for Sabalenka.

Geekie scores 100th goal, lifts Bruins past Canadiens

Associated Press

BOSTON — Morgan Geekie scored his 100th career goal with 5:53 remaining to break a tie and give the Boston Bruins a 4-3 win over the Montreal Canadiens on Saturday night.

Geekie's winner, his second goal of the night, came on the power play just 12 seconds after Fraser Minten fired a backhander that beat Montreal goalie Samuel Montembeault to tie the game at 3-3.

Cole Caufield had his second career hat trick for Montreal while Montembeault made 17 saves. Caufield now has 29 goals this season and became the first Canadiens skater to have a hat trick in Boston since 1997.

Mammoth 5, Predators 2: Kailer Yamamoto had a goal and an assist and visiting Utah extended its winning streak to five

games with a victory over Nashville.

Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault scored and Juuse Saros made 26 saves for the Predators, who have lost three of four.

Sabres 5, Islanders 0: Jason Tucker scored twice and Alex Lyon stopped 26 shots and tied a Buffalo record with his ninth straight victory as the visiting Sabres beat New York.

Buffalo improved to 18-3-1 in its last 22 games.

Blue Jackets 8, Lightning 5: Mason Marchment recorded his third career hat trick, and host Columbus beat Tampa Bay, ending its streak of 15 straight games without a regulation loss.

Charlie Coyle scored his 200th career goal and added two assists.

Hurricanes 4, Senators 1: William Carrier, Seth Jarvis and Taylor Hall scored in the first

period and visiting Carolina beat Ottawa to take the Eastern Conference lead.

Jalen Chatfield's cross-ice pass sprung Mark Jankowski on an odd-man rush, where he fed Carrier cross-slot for an easy backhand tap-in to open the scoring just four minutes into the game. Only two minutes later, Jarvis beat James Reimer cleanly with a top-corner snipe from the faceoff circle.

Red Wings 5, Jets 1: J.T. Compher scored twice as visiting Detroit defeated Winnipeg in front of a sold-out crowd of 15,225.

Lucas Raymond and Marco Kasper added a goal and assist, and Alex DeBrincat also scored for the Red Wings, who scored four times in the third period.

Kings 5, Blues 4 (SO): Trevor Moore scored the deciding goal in the shootout and had a goal in

regulation in his first game since being activated off injured reserve to help visiting Los Angeles beat St. Louis.

Moore, who missed 11 games with an upper-body injury, scored in the fourth round of the shootout.

Panthers 4, Wild 3 (OT): Brad Marchand scored twice, with his second coming 3 minutes into overtime, and Florida won its third straight road game with a victory over Minnesota.

The Panthers improved to 5-2 in their past seven.

Oilers 6, Capitals 5 (OT): Connor McDavid scored 46 seconds into overtime, Evan Bouchard had his first NHL hat trick and three assists, and host Edmonton held on over Washington.

The Capitals got off to a slow start and didn't register a shot on goal until the final minute of the first period.

Gaethje upsets Pimblett for UFC title

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS—One of the storylines entering UFC 324 was whether Justin Gaethje would retire after facing Paddy Pimblett on Saturday night.

It looks like Gaethje has plenty left if he wants to continue his career.

Gaethje went after Pimblett from the beginning, his aggressiveness leading to a unanimous decision and upset victory for the interim lightweight title.

"My coach was definitely upset with me after the first round," Gaethje said. "I love this (stuff) so much, it's really hard to control myself sometimes. I knew that I had to put him on his back foot. He is very dangerous, got great timing. I had to steal momentum and his confidence. I had to work really hard in the first round. Champions move forward."

In the first UFC fight card on

Paramount+, the judges awarded Gaethje (27-5) the victory by scores of 48-47, 49-46 and 49-46. The Associated Press scored it 48-47 for Gaethje.

Pimblett (23-4) was a -250 favorite at BetMGM Sportsbook.

In the co-main event, third-ranked bantamweight challenger Sean O'Malley (19-3) of Phoenix defeated No. 5 Song Yadong (22-9-1) of China by unanimous decision. All three judges scored the bout 29-28. O'Malley appeared in real trouble before putting together his strongest round in the third.

UFC CEO and President Dana White said the Paramount viewership numbers will come out Tuesday or Wednesday, but the early results were more than promising.

"This exceeded expectations beyond belief for Paramount," White said. "We know it killed it. They're saying it exceeded ex-

pectations by double. We've got a real good feeling we're going to have a great relationship for seven years."

Gaethje and Pimblett waged a physical and bloody fight. White said Pimblett was sent to a hospital but that Gaethje refused to go.

"I wanted that belt, but there's no other man I would rather lose to," Pimblett said. "For me, it's the idea of someone I've loved watching growing up watching the UFC. It shows why he's a legend right there."

The combatants weren't the only ones injured. Referee Mark Smith was carried out of the octagon after tearing an ACL while officiating the Ateba Gautier-Andrey Pulyaev bout.

Gaethje, a 37-year-old who fights out of Denver, landed a series of punches about a minute and a half into the fight and took Pimblett to the mat. The

pounding continued in the second round when Gaethje took the 31-year-old Englishman down three times. On the third time, with about 30 seconds left, Gaethje was relentless in landings blows on Pimblett's face.

But Pimblett began to find his game in the third round despite bleeding by his right eye. He connected with enough punches while remaining standing to get back into the bout.

At least temporarily.

A strong combination by Gaethje midway through the fourth turned the fight back into his favor. Even though he was taken to the floor late in the round, it was Gaethje who pounded Pimblett's face. Each approached the fifth as if he didn't want to leave it in the judge's hands, and Pimblett put together a combination with about a minute left.

Brunson helps Knicks top 76ers for 2nd straight win

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Jalen Brunson scored 31 points, OG Anunoby added 23 and the New York Knicks followed their most lopsided win in franchise history with a 112-109 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers on Saturday.

New York crushed the Brooklyn Nets 120-66 on Wednesday and then exploded with a 30-point third quarter in a stiffer road test that sent it to its first win in three tries this season over Philadelphia.

Joel Embiid had 38 points and 11 rebounds, but turned the ball over on the final play of the game after the Knicks seemingly tried to intentionally foul him. Tyrese Maxey scored 22 points for the 76ers but shot an airball on a late tying 3-point attempt from near halfcourt as he anticipated an intentional foul that didn't come.

Philadelphia had pulled with in two late until Anunoby and Landry Shamet followed with consecutive 3s that helped New York stave off the late-game collapse.

Led by Brunson, the Knicks opened the quarter on a 21-7 run and made Xfinity Mobile Arena sound a bit like the inside of Madison Square Garden. The "Let's go Knicks!" chants that had largely been tamped down by boos in a competitive first half, instead filled the arena with each big New York bucket.

Brunson gave a little wave after he buried a 3 for an 84-72 lead. Embiid tried to rally the Sixers and his three-point play in the fourth — aided by a sixth foul on Karl-Anthony Towns — cut it to 98-92. It wasn't enough and a Knicks team that had lost nine of its previous 11 games heading into the Brooklyn game has now won two straight.

Hornets 119, Wizards 115: Brandon Miller scored 21 points as host Charlotte beat Washington, sending the Wizards to their ninth straight loss.

Miles Bridges and LaMelo Ball each scored 20 points, Kon Knueppel added 16 and Moussa Diabate 11 as the Hornets won consecutive games for the first time since January 3-5.

Cavaliers 119, Magic 105: Donovan Mitchell scored 27 of his 36 points in the second half and visiting Cleveland pulled away over Orlando.

Jaylon Tyson added 17 points for the Cavaliers, and Evan Mobley had 13 points and seven rebounds.

Bulls 114, Celtics 111: Kevin Huerter made a 3-pointer just before the buzzer, lifting host Chicago past Boston before retiring Derrick Rose's jersey number.

Coby White scored 22 points

and hit five of the Bulls' 21 3s, helping them win their fourth straight.

Lakers 116, Mavericks 110:

Luka Doncic had 33 points and 11 assists, and visiting Los Angeles erased a 15-point deficit in the final seven minutes of a win in the star guard's second visit to Dallas since his shocking trade almost a year ago.

LeBron James scored 11 of his 17 points in the fourth quarter, when Rui Hachimura had a four-point play before another 3-pointer on the next possession to put the Lakers in front for good.

Heat 147, Jazz 116: Bam Adebayo had 26 points and 15 rebounds to lead visiting Miami over Utah.

Nikola Jovic added 23 points and Pelle Larsson had 20 as the Heat matched their most points in a game this season. Miami beat Denver 147-123 last month.

Wagler leads No. 11 Illinois past No. 4 Purdue

Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Keaton Wagler scored a career-high 46 points, making nine 3-pointers, as No. 11 Illinois beat No. 4 Purdue 88-82 on Saturday.

Wagler, a freshman guard, shot 13-for-17 overall, 9-for-11 from 3-point range and 11-for-13 on free throws. David Mirkovic added 12 points and eight rebounds for the Fighting Illini (17-3, 8-1 Big Ten).

Braden Smith led the Boilermakers (17-3, 7-2) with 27 points and 12 assists. Trey Kaufman-Renn added 12 points for Purdue, which lost its second consecutive game.

Illinois hit 18 of 38 3-pointers while the Boilermakers made just 7 of 19.

Wagler had 24 of the Illini's 39 first-half points, including the first 14.

No. 2 UConn 75, Villanova 67 (OT): Solo Ball had 24 points, including a key 3-pointer in overtime, and Alex Karaban had all of his 17 after halftime as the host Huskies beat the Wildcats.

Silas Demary Jr. and Tarris Reed Jr. each finished with 10 for UConn (19-1, 9-0 Big East), which won its 15th game in a row.

No. 5 Duke 90, Wake Forest 68: Cameron Boozer scored 32 points to lead the Blue Devils' dominating interior play that helped host Duke beat the Demon Deacons.

The star freshman big man made 11 of 20 shots to go with nine rebounds and four assists, controlling large stretches with his scoring and his playmaking ability to passing out of oncoming double teams.

No. 12 Texas Tech 90, No. 6 Houston 86: JT Toppin had 31 points and 12 rebounds for his 44th career double-double and Donovan Atwell hit consecutive 3-pointers late to put the host Red Raiders ahead to stay in a win over the Cougars, ending Houston's 11-game winning streak.

True freshman Kingston

Flemings had a season-high 42 points with six assists for the Cougars (17-2, 5-1 Big 12), who had won their past 16 true road games — all conference games — since a loss at No. 8 Kansas two years ago. That was a school record and the nation's longest active streak.

No. 7 Nebraska 76, Minnesota 57: Pryce Sandfort scored 20 of his 22 points in the second half and grabbed 10 rebounds for the visiting Cornhuskers, helping Nebraska remain unbeaten by surging past the Golden Gophers.

Sam Hoiberg had 14 points and seven assists and Jamarques Lawrence added 14 points for the Huskers (20-0, 9-0 Big Ten), who maintained sole possession of first place in the conference and matched the program's best start in conference play since the 1965-66 team began 9-0 in the Big Eight. That season was also the last time Nebraska won five straight conference road games.

No. 8 Gonzaga 68, San Francisco 66: Jalen Warley scored 19 points and Davis Fogle added 15 points and a last-second rebound as the host Bulldogs edged the Dons for their 14th consecutive victory of the season and 34th win in a row over San Francisco.

Tyson Grant-Foster added 15 points for Gonzaga (21-1, 9-0 West Coast Conference), which was without its two leading scorers for the third straight game. Forward Braden Huff (17.8 points per game) is out for several weeks with a knee injury. Forward Graham Ike (18 ppg) is expected back soon from an ankle injury.

No. 9 Iowa State 84, Oklahoma State 71: Milan Momcilovic scored 29 points, and the visiting Cyclones defeated the Cowboys.

Momcilovic made 8 of 12 field goals, including 5 of 9 3-pointers, and all eight of his free throw attempts. The 6-foot-8 junior guard has averaged 27.7 points in his past three games.

No. 10 Michigan St. 91, Maryland 48: Jeremy Fears had

17 points and a career-high 17 assists and Coen Carr scored 14 points while adding to his highlight reel of dunks, leading the host Spartans' rout over the Terps.

Michigan State (18-2, 8-1 Big Ten) jumped out to a 24-4 lead and didn't let up in the second half, scoring 15 straight points to lead 71-34 with 11:11 to play.

No. 13 BYU 91, Utah 78: AJ Dybantsa scored 43 points to break the Cougars' freshman scoring record, leading host BYU over the Utes.

Dybantsa went 15-for-24 from the floor and 9-for-10 from the free throw line for his first 40-point game. He surpassed Danny Ainge's record for points in a game by a Cougars freshman and added six rebounds, three assists and blocked a shot.

No. 22 North Carolina 85, No. 14 Virginia 80:

Caleb Wilson scored 20 points, Jarin Stevenson added all of his 17 in the second half and the Tar Heels rallied past the Cavaliers for a big ACC road victory.

Trailing by two points with 3:50 to play, North Carolina got three-point plays from Stevenson and Seth Trimble to build a 78-74 lead, then hung on. The Tar Heels outscored Virginia 18-9 over the final 5:25.

No. 15 Vanderbilt 88, Mississippi St. 56: Tyler Tanner scored 24 points and Duke Miles added 17 as the visiting Commodores snapped a three-game losing skid with a win over the Bulldogs.

Tyler Nickel scored 13 points and Devin McGlockton added 10 for Vanderbilt (17-3, 4-3 SEC).

Auburn 76, No. 16 Florida

67: Keyshawn Hall scored 24 points, including 22 in the Tigers' dominant and stunning first half, and visiting Auburn upset the Gators for the program's first win in Gainesville since 1996.

The Tigers used 7-0, 8-0 and 12-0 runs en route to a 15-point

halftime lead in a matchup of 2025 Final Four teams, building enough of a cushion to withstand Florida's frantic rally after the break. The defending national champion Gators (14-6, 5-2 Southeastern Conference), an 11½-point favorite, tied the game twice in the second half, but Auburn's Tahaad Pettiford hit a driving layup with 4:24 remaining to push the lead to 62-56.

Tennessee 79, No. 17 Alabama 73: Volunteers freshman Nate Ament scored a career-high 29 points, Ja'K Gillespie added 23 and visiting Tennessee upset the Crimson Tide.

The loss spoiled the debut of Alabama's Charles Bediako, who was playing his first college game in nearly three years after securing a temporary restraining order in an ongoing eligibility lawsuit against the NCAA.

No. 18 Clemson 77, Georgia Tech 63:

Jake Wahlin and Nick Davidson scored 13 points apiece and the visiting Tigers got hot from long range, bouncing back from their first Atlantic Coast Conference loss to beat the Yellow Jackets.

No. 19 Kansas 86, Kansas State 62: Flory Bidunga had 21 points and 10 rebounds, Elmariko Jackson added 19 points, and the visiting Jayhawks overcame the absence of standout guard Darryn Peterson with a big finishing kick for a win over the Wildcats.

No. 20 Arkansas 85, LSU 81: Darius Acuff Jr. scored 24 of his career-high 31 points in the second half to lead the host Razorbacks over the Tigers.

Texas 87, No. 21 Georgia 67: Dailyn Swain scored 26 points, Tramon Mark added a season-best 23 and the host Longhorns overwhelmed the Bulldogs with a strong second half.

No. 23 Louisville 85, Virginia Tech 71:

Mikel Brown Jr. returned from an eight-game absence and scored 20 points to lead the host Cardinals over the Hokies.