

## Indo-Pacific leader cites Chinese threat

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The United States needs to invest more in troops, missile detection systems and weapons in the Indo-Pacific region in order to protect the country from an aggressive Chinese threat, Adm. Phil Davidson, the commander of Indo-Pacific Command, said Tuesday.

“I see [China] developing systems, capabilities and a posture that would indicate that they’re interested in aggression,” Davidson said about China’s growing military during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has named China as the Pentagon’s “pacing threat.” But the focus on China is not new to the department, which has already named the country as an ad-

versary in the 2018 National Defense Strategy. More so, defense officials are reviewing the U.S. strategy for China through a 15-member task force.

For fiscal year 2021, which ends Sept. 30, Congress funded \$2.2 billion in the Pacific Deterrence Initiative to counter Chinese influence in the region and increase cooperation with Pacific allies and partners. Davidson said he supports additional funding for the initiative in fiscal year 2022, which is slated to reach \$4.6 billion.

One of Davidson’s top priorities that is still unfunded is building an Aegis Ashore system on Guam to protect the territory from China. The system would allow a 360-degree air and missile defense against Chinese missiles. The current Terminal High Alti-

tude Area Defense, or THAAD, radar system on Guam is not capable of meeting the future missile threat, according to Davidson.

Guam is home to 170,000 Americans and 21,000 service members, he said. It is also important strategically due to its deep water port, fuel storage and Andersen Air Force Base, which allows U.S. aircraft to fly farther into the Pacific region. That base was also shown as a target in a simulated bombing attack in a Chinese propaganda video, Davidson said.

“Guam is a target today. It needs to be defended and it needs to be prepared for the threats that will come in the future,” he said.

Davidson called the status of American forces positioned in the region as “static” and their conventional deterrence

is “eroding” as China builds and positions more ships in the region than the U.S. has there now. Having a posture that promotes deterrence is critical for America to respond to threats there, he said. It takes almost three weeks for forces to arrive to the region from the West Coast and 17 days from Alaska.

Davidson said he believes the U.S. must have a “robust” amount of forces spread out in permanently based locations in the region, as well as the ability to accommodate rotational forces to allow for a better response to threats. These forces include maritime as well as surveillance forces.

Increasing the stockpile of missiles to counter China’s growing stockpile is also key to deterring an attack, Davidson said.

## Guardsmen to stay at US Capitol through May 23

By WYATT OLSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on Tuesday approved a request by the U.S. Capitol Police for continued National Guard support through May 23, the Pentagon said in a statement.

Almost 2,300 National Guard personnel will continue with the work, which is roughly half the number currently on the mission, the Pentagon said.

Defense Department officials will work with the Capitol Police to continue reducing the Guard’s footprint as conditions allow, the Pentagon said.

Officials have been scrambling in recent days to determine if and how to fill the request for more than 2,000 Guard forces. The original deadline called for the troops to leave Washington on Friday.

The decision underscores concern about the ongoing threat of violence at

the Capitol, two months after rioters breached the building in violence that left five people dead. Law enforcement have remained in a heightened security posture in response to intelligence suggesting possible threats to the Capitol by militia groups.

The request to extend the deployment met resistance last week, as some governors expressed reluctance or flatly refused to commit their troops to more time in the city. There now appears to be enough states willing to provide Guard troops for the mission, said the defense officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

The Guard’s deployment to the Capitol has been troubled. Early on, Guard members were briefly forced to take rest breaks and meals in a nearby cold garage, sparking outrage within the Biden administration. Officials quickly found

new spaces within congressional buildings for the on-duty breaks.

In addition, Guard members complained of bad food, including some who said they became sick.

On Monday, chief Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said that about 50 Guard troops had been treated for gastrointestinal issues out of the 26,000 that deployed to Washington.

Acting Capitol Police Chief Yogananda Pittman made the request to have the Guard members stay on, setting off a series of discussions with the Pentagon and National Guard leaders.

U.S. military officials have said the cost of deploying about 26,000 Guard troops to the U.S. Capitol from shortly after the Jan. 6 riot to this Friday is close to \$500 million. The costs include housing, transportation, salaries, benefits and other essentials.

# Marines shed helicopters in Hawaii refocus

By WYATT OLSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Two Super Stallion helicopters were permanently transferred from Marine Corps Base Hawaii to Okinawa last week as part of Force Design 2030, in which the Corps is refocusing on expeditionary warfare in the Pacific.

The U.S. Air Force 517th Air-lift Squadron transported the

CH-53E helicopters on Thursday, the Marine Corps said in a statement Tuesday to Stars and Stripes.

The Stallions were part of the Hawaii-based Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463. The transfer leaves the squadron with eight Stallions, but they won't be in Hawaii for very long.

Squadron 463 will continue to divest itself of aircraft and be decommissioned sometime in

fiscal year 2022, which begins Oct. 1, the Marine Corps said.

Hawaii's Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 367 will also be decommissioned as part of the force redesign, the Marine Corps said.

Marine Aircraft Group 24 at Marine Corps Base Hawaii will gain a KC-130 cargo plane squadron in the years following the other deactivations, the Marine Corps said.

The new force design calls for formation of the 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment from the existing 3rd Marine Regiment in Hawaii.

The littoral regiment will consist of a combat team, an anti-air battalion and logistics unit capable of quick maneuvering to and among the myriad islands and atolls in the Pacific, the Marine Corps Times has reported.

## 500 National Guard troops will be deployed to US border at Texas

By ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

AUSTIN, Texas — The Texas National Guard will deploy 500 troops to the state's border with Mexico this week as part of a surge of resources that Gov. Greg Abbott said are necessary to stop the increase in illegal activity there following federal policy changes.

"We will work to step up and try to fill the gap that the federal government is leaving open by making sure we deploy every resource, whether it be Department of Public Safety or Texas National Guard, whatever we need to do. Texas is going to fight for the safety and security of our state," Abbott said Tuesday during a news conference along the border in Mission, Texas.

The 500 troops will arrive by the end of the week and have already begun training to work in observation posts in support of the Department of Public Safety, which is adding about 1,200 state police officers to the region. The Guard has already embedded planners within the department and begun to train soldiers who will deploy to the border, said Maj. Gen. Tracy Norris, Texas adjutant general and commander of the Texas Military Department.

"We have been supporting the border for our governor and our federal and state partners for over 15 years," Norris said.

About 100 of the soldiers set to deploy served on similar border missions last year, she said.

Funding for the mission, dubbed Oper-

ation Lone Star, will come from the \$800 million that the Texas Legislature designates each session for border security, Abbott said.

This mission is separate from the federal National Guard mission to support U.S. Customs and Border Protection across the entire southern U.S. border that began under former President Donald Trump in April 2018 and continues under President Joe Biden. About 3,600 active-duty service members and Guard troops from several states are deployed through that mission, according to the Defense Department.

A Government Accountability Office report recently revealed that the Department of Homeland Security expects to need continued military support at the border for at least the next three years.

Texas troops have supported the federal mission and, in 2019, Abbott sent about 1,000 Guard troops under state orders to temporarily assist that mission.

Abbott said Tuesday that this new influx of resources is necessary because apprehensions for illegal entry into the country are already up in the Rio Grande Valley sector of Texas, which covers southeast Texas from Orange County west into Starr County.

Last year, Border Patrol apprehended about 90,000 people in the Rio Grande Valley. This year, there have been 108,000 apprehensions so far, Abbott said.

Speaking at the White House last week, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said he does not believe there is a crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border.

## Blackout shades set up at base to help curb suicides

By WYATT OLSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

A \$1.24 million project to install blackout shades on all soldiers' barracks at Fort Wainwright in Alaska is mostly complete, the Army said Tuesday.

The project is among efforts to reduce the risk of soldier suicide by improving overall quality of life.

"We did beat our timeline goal of getting shades installed in all of the facilities that are occupied by soldiers," Col. Adam Lange, U.S. Army Alaska's deputy commander for sustainment, said in a video posted Tuesday on Facebook.

Soldiers stationed at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson — the Army-Air Force installation in Anchorage — will also be getting the shades, Lange said.

"Working with our Air Force counterparts, they've agreed and plan to install 400 sets of blackout shades in those facilities that don't already have them down at the Fort Richardson side of Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson," he said.

Fort Wainwright is less than 140 miles south of the Arctic Circle, a location that experiences long, dark days in the winter and seemingly endless daylight in the summer.

Fairbanks gets about 22 hours of sunlight a day during the height of summer. For some individuals, the incessant sunlight interrupts the body's circadian rhythm that regulates sleep and wakefulness, which can affect mental health.

# Virus aid nears final OK in win for Dems

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Congress sped toward final approval Wednesday of a landmark \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill, as President Joe Biden and Democrats neared a major triumph for the party's priorities and showcased the unity they'll need to forge future victories.

The House was on track to use a virtual party-line vote to approve the 628-page measure, which represents Democrats' effort to bridle the catastrophic pandemic and revive the enfeebled economy. Four days after the Senate passed the measure over unanimous Republican opposition, GOP House counterparts were poised to do the same for a bill they've characterized as bloated, crammed with liberal policies and heedless of signs the dual crises are easing.

Democrats rejected those complaints.

"I call upon my Republican

colleagues to stop their March madness and show some compassion for their constituents who are less than wealthy," said No. 3 House Democratic leader James Clyburn, of South Carolina, as the House debated the legislation.

For Biden and Democrats, the bill is essentially a canvas on which they've painted their core beliefs — that government programs can be a benefit, not a bane, to millions of people and that spending huge sums on such efforts can be a cure, not a curse. The measure so closely tracks Democrats' priorities that several rank it with the top achievements of their careers, and despite their slender congressional majorities there was never real suspense over its fate.

They were also empowered by three dynamics: their unfettered control of the White House and Congress, polls showing robust support for Biden's approach and

a moment when most voters care little that the national debt is soaring toward a stratospheric \$22 trillion. Neither party seems much troubled by surging red ink, either, except when the other is using it to finance its priorities, be they Democratic spending or GOP tax cuts.

Republicans noted that they've overwhelmingly supported five previous relief bills Congress has approved since the pandemic struck a year ago — when divided government under then-President Donald Trump forced the parties to negotiate. They said this one, written solely by Democrats, was a bridge too far.

"This isn't a rescue bill, it isn't a relief bill. It's a laundry list of left-wing priorities that predate the pandemic," said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, of California.

A dominant feature of the bill is initiatives making it one of the biggest federal thrusts in years to

assist lower- and middle-income families. Included are expanded tax credits over the next year for children, child care and family leave plus spending for renters, feeding programs and people's utility bills.

The measure provides up to \$1,400 direct payments to most Americans, extended emergency unemployment benefits and hundreds of billions for COVID-19 vaccines and treatments, schools, state and local governments and ailing industries from airlines to concert halls.

The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll found last week that 70% of Americans back Biden's response to the virus, including a hefty 44% of Republicans.

Democrats control the Senate, split 50-50, only because Vice President Kamala Harris gives them the winning vote in tied roll calls. They have just a 10-vote advantage in the House.

## Lawyers use care as they pick Chauvin jury

*Associated Press*

MINNEAPOLIS — One was anxious, worried about high emotion surrounding the case. One worried his family might be targeted. And one was delighted to receive her jury summons — even after learning she might wind up on the panel considering whether to convict a former police officer in George Floyd's death.

Jury selection for Derek Chauvin opened Tuesday, a grinding process during which attorneys asked the prospective jurors one by one whether they could keep an open mind, what they think of the criminal justice system, how they resolve conflicts and much more.

"I definitely have strong opinions about the case," one woman said. "I think I can try to be impartial — I don't know that I can

promise impartiality."

She was dismissed. So was another woman, who said she didn't understand why Chauvin didn't get up when Floyd — in a widely seen bystander video that showed Chauvin with his knee pressed on Floyd's neck — kept saying he couldn't breathe.

Three in the pool were seated on the jury by day's end, in a process that began months ago, when potential jurors responded to an extensive questionnaire. The questionnaires have not been made public and the jurors' identities are being kept secret.

The three jurors who were selected — two men and one woman — all said they had heard some details about the case against Chauvin but would be able to put aside what they heard or opinions they had formed and make a decision based on evidence in court.

## House OKs pro-union bill despite dim Senate odds

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Democratic-led House approved legislation that would invigorate workers' unions, following decades of court defeats and legislative setbacks that have kneecapped the labor movement's once formidable ability to organize.

The measure, which union leaders and labor allies have presented as a cure for decades of working-class wage stagnation, was approved Tuesday on a mostly party-line 225-206 vote. But it faces an all-but-certain Republican blockade in a narrowly divided Senate and is unlikely to become law.

In an angry floor speech, Rep. Tim Ryan excoriated Republicans, most of whom opposed the measure, mocking them for re-

jecting a bill to "help the damn workers."

"Heaven forbid we tilt the balance that has been going in the wrong direction for 50 years," Ryan, D-Ohio, said, his voice rising. "We talk about pensions, you complain. We talk about the minimum wage increase, you complain. We talk about giving them the right to organize, you complain. But if we were passing a tax cut here, you'd be all getting in line to vote 'yes.'"

President Joe Biden backs the Democratic bill.

While Republicans have welcomed blue-collar workers drawn to the party by conservative cultural issues, many draw the line at measures that would expand the power of labor and could benefit their economic bottom line.



# Ark. enacts near-total ban on abortions

Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson on Tuesday signed into law legislation banning nearly all abortions in the state, a sweeping measure that supporters hope will force the U.S. Supreme Court to revisit its landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision but opponents vow to block before it takes effect later this year.

The Republican governor had expressed reservations about the bill, which only allows the procedure to save the life of the mother and does not provide exceptions for those impregnated in an act of rape or incest. Arkansas is one of at least 14 states where legislators have proposed outright abortion bans this year.

Hutchinson said he was signing the bill because of its “overwhelming legislative support and my sincere and long-held pro-life

convictions.”

The bans were pushed by Republicans who want to force the U.S. Supreme Court to revisit its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion nationwide. Conservatives believe the court is more open to striking down the decision following former President Donald Trump’s three appointments to the court.

“We must abolish abortion in this nation just as we abolished slavery in the 19th century — all lives matter,” Republican Sen. Jason Rapert, the bill’s sponsor said in a statement.

Hutchinson has signed several major abortion restrictions into law since taking office in 2015, but he had voiced concerns that this bill directly challenges *Roe* and about the lack of rape and incest exceptions. He repeated those concerns as he announced his decision.

“(The ban) is in contradiction of binding precedents of the U.S. Supreme Court, but it is the intent of the legislation to set the stage for the Supreme Court overturning current case law,” he said in a statement released by his office. “I would have preferred the legislation to include the exceptions for rape and incest, which has been my consistent view, and such exceptions would increase the chances for a review by the U.S. Supreme Court.”

The legislation won’t take effect until 90 days after the majority-Republican Legislature adjourns this year’s session. That means it can’t be enforced until this summer at the earliest. Abortion rights supporters said they plan to challenge the ban in court before then.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Arkansas called the ban “cruel and unconstitutional.”

## Embattled Calif. governor says ‘brighter days ahead’

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — California Gov. Gavin Newsom sought to rally his state worn down after a year of coronavirus lockdowns, record wildfires and unfathomable sickness and death. He urged California’s nearly 40 million residents to “dream of brighter days ahead” while acknowledging mistakes that have put his political future on the line.

“People are alive today because of the public health decisions we made — lives saved because of your sacrifice,” Newsom said Tuesday night in his third State of the State address. “Even so, I acknowledge that it’s made life hard, it’s made life unpredictable, and you’re exhausted by all of it.”

California governors normally make these annual speeches before a joint session of the Legislature in Sacramento and are interrupted frequently by cheers and applause from members of their party.

This year, with the coronavirus receding but

still dangerous, Newsom delivered the speech from an empty Dodger Stadium. He stood behind a solitary lectern rising from a carpeted black podium in deep center field. There were no cheers, only the sound of a helicopter thumping overhead.

Newsom made no new major policy announcements, instead focusing mostly on actions he believes have positioned the state for a robust recovery and that blunt calls for him to be recalled.

He issued a warning to Republicans working to give voters a chance to remove him later this year and vowed: “I remain determined.”

“To the California critics out there who are promoting partisan political power grabs with outdated prejudices, rejecting everything that makes California truly great, we say this: We will not be distracted from getting shots in arms and our economy booming again,” he said.

Newsom was the first governor to impose a statewide stay-at-home order last year, a move

praised by many public health experts. When cases in New York and elsewhere surged last spring, California fared better.

California by the end of the year was the epicenter for the virus, though cases and hospitalizations have plummeted in recent weeks.

Strict state rules limiting which businesses could open led to 1.6 million job losses last year. A crush of unemployment benefit claims overwhelmed Newsom’s administration, contributing to more than \$11 billion in fraud — including an estimated \$810 million paid in the names of prison inmates.

That scandal is referenced often by Newsom’s critics but his most damaging political pandemic blow came when he attended a private dinner with lobbyists at a fancy restaurant and was photographed without a mask. The gathering didn’t technically violate the state’s rules at the time but contrasted with his message for state residents to stay home and wear masks.

## Biden dog Major causes ‘minor injury’ to security agent

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden has Major trouble.

Family dogs Major and Champ have been banished from the White House for a doggie time out in Delaware after Major caused a “minor injury” to a Secret Service agent.

“On Monday, the first family’s younger dog Major was surprised by an unfamiliar person

and reacted in a way that resulted in a minor injury to the individual, which was handled by the White House medical unit, with no further treatment needed,” White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday.

She would not confirm that a Secret Service agent was injured in Monday’s incident, but an administration official later said an agent was Major’s victim. The agent was not

seriously injured, said the official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity.

Psaki said plans already had been made to send the German shepherds to Delaware while first lady Jill Biden left town on Monday. The dogs will return to the White House soon, Psaki said.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Student hurts self after igniting firework in class

**MI** NEWAYGO — A student lit a firework inside a western Michigan classroom, injuring himself through a “serious lack of judgment,” an official said.

No other injuries were reported at Newaygo High School. Details about the student’s injury were not immediately disclosed.

Students were sent home because of the odor and smoke, Superintendent Peg Mathis said.

### Confederate flag to fly from smaller pole

**VA** LOUISA — A 1,500-square-foot Confederate flag visible from a major Virginia highway will soon be flying from a diminished flagpole.

A building permit issued by Louisa County shows that the flag’s owners plan to reduce the current 120-foot flagpole down to 60 feet to bring it in compliance with county regulations.

It was built on private property about 15 miles east of Charlottesville in 2018, after the Charlottesville City Council voted to remove two Confederate statues.

Louisa officials said the flagpole exceeded the 60-foot maximum allowed by the county, and several years of legal battles ensued.

### Fire hall blaze totals building, damages trucks

**ND** GLENBURN — Authorities said a small-town North Dakota fire department lost its building and likely six trucks in a fire.

Fire crews from Lansford, Maxbass and the Minot Air Force Base also responded to the

blaze at the Glenburn Fire Department, the Minot Daily News reported.

The structure is considered a total loss, said Lance Johnson, fire district board vice president and firefighter. The fire damaged a pumper truck, a tanker, three grass fire units and a rescue truck.

The cause of the fire remains under investigation. Area departments have offered to loan equipment in the interim as the Glenburn department seeks to restore or replace equipment.

### Meteor spotted over New England, Canada

**VT** BURLINGTON — A meteor first spotted over Vermont’s Mount Mansfield State Forest was likely traveling more than 40,000 mph before it burned up, experts said.

NASA Meteor Watch said the bright fireball was seen just before 5:40 p.m. last Sunday.

It traveled 33 miles before burning up over Orleans County. More than 100 eyewitnesses from across the region reported seeing it.

It was seen over northern New England and Canada.

### Failed heater leads to loss of \$40K of plants

**KS** WICHITA — Last month’s Arctic cold snap has proved costly for a well-known botanical gardens venue in Wichita, officials there said.

A heater in Botanica’s largest greenhouse failed during the coldest day of the cold snap, when the temperature was well below zero, television station KAKE reported. Because gardeners didn’t discover the failure until the next day, most of

the plants in it succumbed to the freeze.

The estimated value of the plants lost is between \$30,000 and \$40,000. Botanica staff have started a crowd-funding effort to replace the plants.

### Police arrest man after rescue from ceiling

**MS** NATCHEZ — A teenager who called 911 to report that he was stuck in the ceiling of an elementary school was arrested after being rescued by police and firefighters, authorities said.

Willie Dobbins, 19, of Hattiesburg, telephoned dispatchers to tell them he was suspended from inside the cafeteria ceiling at Frazier Elementary School in Natchez, The Natchez Democrat reported.

Dobbins appeared to be trying to break in through the roof where money is kept and got stuck, said Police Chief Joseph Daughtry. Once in police custody, Dobbins was checked for injuries at a hospital, the chief said.

### Community cancels July fireworks show

**MI** SOUTH HAVEN — A Lake Michigan community in southwestern Michigan is canceling a popular fireworks show months before the July 4 holiday.

Organizers said the spread of COVID-19 would be too risky, despite the availability of vaccines. The South Haven show usually attracts 50,000 people to the area.

“Out of an abundance of caution, city leadership decided to cancel the show this year with hopes to resume in 2022,” City Manager Kate Hosier said.

### Department fined for operating cesspools

**HI** HONOLULU — The Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources was fined nearly \$222,000 for operating seven large-capacity cesspools on Kauai island.

The Environmental Protection Agency banned the type of cesspool targeted in 2005 because they can pollute water resources and violate the Safe Drinking Water Act, Hawaii News Now reported.

The cesspools were at Camp Hale Koa, the Waianae Cabins and at a commercial property, the television station reported.

The EPA has taken action before against the department, has collected over \$400,000 in fines and closed 74 cesspools.

### Woman booted from bar drives into crowd, hurts 1

**WI** MOUNT PLEASANT — Authorities said a woman who got kicked out of a Mount Pleasant bar drove her car into a crowd and seriously injured a pedestrian.

The crash happened after the 33-year-old Racine woman was allegedly involved in an altercation with a group inside the bar, Mount Pleasant police said. Witnesses told police the pedestrian was struck and became trapped under the car.

The driver tried to flee the scene but was apprehended by officers, WDJT-TV reported.

The victim was taken to a local hospital and then later transported by Flight for Life to Froedtert Hospital in Milwaukee with possible life-threatening injuries.

— From wire reports

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# NBA cranks up again after All-Star break

Associated Press

While LeBron James was largely resting through the All-Star Game, the Brooklyn Nets were adding another piece for a run at his title.

With James still near the top of his game and the Nets on top of the league in scoring, it's easy to envision a coast-to-coast NBA Finals when a champion is crowned in July.

But, when most teams resume play Thursday — the same date last season was suspended — the leaders in the Eastern Conference will be doing so without their two best players.

As proven again when Philadelphia's Joel Embiid and Ben Simmons had to sit out the All-Star Game, the coronavirus still has a say on this season, making uncertainty a sizable obstacle in the title chase. Both players will also miss the 76ers' game Thursday in Chicago.

"You're playing every other day. You don't know when you're going to have practice

time. You don't know as far as what the restrictions and with COVID and things of that nature if you're going to have all your guys," James said. "So it's very challenging for all teams, not just us."

The bigger problem for the Lakers has been the absence of All-Star Anthony Davis because of a right calf injury. The defending champions have struggled without him, dropping six of eight to end the first half and falling 3½ games behind surprising West leader Utah.

The Nets have also been without an All-Star, though they've hardly missed Kevin Durant because of the brilliance of James Harden and Kyrie Irving. Blake Griffin agreed to join them Sunday night after the six-time All-Star cleared waivers after securing his buyout from Detroit.

"We're fortunate to be able to add a player of Blake's caliber to our roster at this point in the season," Nets general manager Sean Marks said.

Brooklyn comes out of the

break a half-game behind Philadelphia. Embiid has been a force this season and become a leading MVP candidate, but he and Simmons were ruled out of the All-Star Game on Sunday morning because they got haircuts from a barber who tested positive for COVID-19.

They may not be cleared to return until the weekend, after the Sixers have played their first two games of the second half.

"We start on the road, back-to-back games, with one practice. That's a challenge in itself, right?," Sixers coach Doc Rivers said. "Then, obviously, not having those guys, that's a lot of points, our two best defenders. So, obviously, it would hurt."

Teams are used to it after a first half in which the unavailability of players and coaches because of health and safety protocols forced 31 games to be called off. For every team, the first big test of the second half is the coronavirus one that will determine who is good to go upon re-

turning from break.

Once that's finished, teams can look ahead to a busy and exciting stretch run. With many clubs bunched in the standings and another play-in tournament opening up additional paths to the postseason, even teams that weren't as sharp as they hoped in the first half have reason for hope.

That includes teams such as Miami and Boston — last season's Eastern Conference finalists — plus Dallas and Golden State, all at or barely above .500 but perhaps just one hot streak from a nice leap up the standings.

Or maybe Milwaukee, which was running away with the best record in the East last year when the season stopped but has been inconsistent this season, can discover its old form. The Bucks will be fearsome again if Giannis Antetokounmpo shoots anywhere near the way he did in the All-Star Game, when he went 16-for-16 en route to MVP honors.

## Nets want to prove they can win title with offense

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Defense wins championships is one of the oldest clichés in sports.

It's mostly been true, too.

Now, even coaches who preached defense before look around an NBA where the pace is quicker, the shots come from deeper, and can come to only one conclusion.

"It seems like offense wins," Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said.

That's what the Brooklyn Nets are looking to prove with an NBA title.

Perhaps no team has ever packed so much offensive punch. Kevin Durant is a four-time NBA scoring champion. James Harden has won three. They've both been league MVPs. Kyrie Irving is a peren-

nial All-Star who hit the winning shot to cap the biggest NBA Finals comeback ever.

"You look at Kyrie, Durant, Harden. (Spencer) Dinwiddie's out, he's a terrific player. He's an All-Star-caliber talent," Dallas coach Rick Carlisle said. "So, they're up there with the best of them."

Stopping one is possible. Stopping two is doable. Stopping all three the four times it would require to beat Brooklyn in a series is a mighty ask for any team, no matter how well it defends.

The Nets average 121.1 points, 30 more than the league average when Popovich's Spurs won their first title in 1999. Now, the Cleveland Cavaliers score 104.6 per game, last in the NBA with an average that would have led the league in 2011-12.

"The rules are tilted toward the offense obviously and that makes it a little bit easier for a talented player to have his way," said Popovich, whose early Spurs won with a methodical style that helped influence rules changes that opened up the game.

"Defense can keep you in games and if you don't play defense, it's going to be an ugly night. But to actually win the game, offense has become more important than it ever has in the past."

That's apparently what Nets general manager Sean Marks, who played and worked under Popovich, realized when he assembled his roster. The Nets favored skill and shooting over size and strength, and hired Steve Nash to coach them. Nash

hired Mike D'Antoni as one of his assistants, reuniting the point guard and coach of the Phoenix Suns squads of 15 years ago that were the predecessors of today's wide-open offenses.

Brooklyn started slowly and had to adjust in January after the blockbuster deal to acquire Harden, but the Nets' torrid stretch before the All-Star break even without the injured Durant showed they might just have the perfect team for the times.

"I think in our whole league right now, if you look at offensive numbers overall, there's just possessions where against every team when you're watching the film and you'll say, that's not because it's bad defense," Orlando coach Steve Clifford said.



# Islanders slip past Bruins in shootout

Associated Press

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — Anthony Beauvillier scored the deciding goal in the shootout and the New York Islanders beat the Boston Bruins 2-1 on Tuesday night for their sixth straight win.

Brock Nelson scored in regulation for the Islanders, and Semyon Varlamov stopped 32 shots as Barry Trotz became the third coach in NHL history to reach 1,700 games behind the bench. New York beat Boston for the fourth time in four meetings this season.

"In a shortened season you want to come away with points and we've found a way to do that last couple of weeks here," said Nelson. "Nice to get this one in a shootout and just a good feeling in the room."

The Islanders also improved to 11-0-2 at Nassau Coliseum, remaining the league's only team without a regulation loss at home.

David Pastrnak scored for the Bruins, who lost their second straight and fell to 3-5-2 in their last 10 games. Jaroslav Halak finished with 26 saves.

Beauvillier beat Halak top shelf with a backhand in the third round of the tiebreaker. Varlamov then denied Brad Marchand to preserve New York's first win in five games beyond regulation this season.

"You never know what he's going to do —

he's a skilled guy," Varlamov said of Marchand. "He has a lot of moves. He tried to beat me five-hole and I stopped that one."

Jordan Eberle scored for the Islanders, and Pastrnak converted for Boston in the first round.

**Penguins 4, Rangers 2:** Kasper Kaponen got his fourth goal in his last five games and surging Pittsburgh held off visiting New York.

Teddy Blueger and Jake Guentzel also scored for the Penguins, who went 4-1 on their homestand to gain ground in the hyper-competitive East Division. Sidney Crosby's empty-net goal with 32 seconds to go helped the team escape with a win.

Tristan Jarry finished with 33 saves — including a couple of scrambling stops on his belly in the final minutes to preserve a one-goal lead. He improved to 8-3 in his last 11 starts.

**Capitals 5, Devils 4 (OT):** Jakub Vrana scored his second goal of the game in overtime to help host Washington beat New Jersey after squandering a three-goal lead.

The Capitals have won six of seven, including two in a row since Tom Wilson was suspended for hitting Boston's Brandon Carlo in the head, but New Jersey earned a point with a dominant third period that featured a 16-5 shot disparity.

**Stars 6, Blackhawks 1:** Joel Kiviranta scored 100 seconds in and added an assist, rookie Jason Robertson had four assists for his first four-point game and host Dallas dominated Chicago.

Joe Pavelski got his team-best 13th goal for the Stars.

**Flyers 5, Sabres 4 (SO):** Shayne Gostisbehere tied it late in regulation, Sean Couturier and Nolan Patrick scored shootout goals, and host Philadelphia handed Buffalo its NHL-worst eighth straight loss.

**Lightning 4, Red Wings 3 (OT):** Blake Coleman scored 2:17 into overtime to lift Tampa Bay to a win at Detroit, extending the Stanley Cup champions' season-high point streak to nine games.

**Hurricanes 3, Predators 2 (OT):** Jordan Staal scored his second goal of the game with 34.9 seconds left in overtime to give host Carolina a win over Nashville for its sixth consecutive win.

**Panthers 4, Blue Jackets 2:** Patric Hornqvist and Owen Tippett scored power-play goals in the second period, Sergei Bobrovsky made 40 saves and Florida won at Columbus.

**Jets 4, Maple Leafs 3:** Connor Hellebuyck made 36 saves, leading Winnipeg to a win at North Division-leading Toronto in the opener of a three-game series.

# No. 1 Gonzaga rallies past BYU to earn WCC title

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Gonzaga was out of sorts for one of the few times this season, falling into its biggest halftime deficit in three years.

Corey Kispert got the Bulldogs back in it. Jalen Suggs finished it off.

The undefeated season is intact. The NCAA Tournament is next.

Suggs hit two late three-pointers and scored 23 points, helping top-ranked Gonzaga survive its biggest test of an undefeated season to beat Brigham Young 88-78 in the West Coast Conference Tournament title game on Tuesday night.

"We needed a game like that," Bulldogs coach Mark Few said. "We had some adversity and got punched in the face. We got together at halftime and the guys just stuck with the plan."

Gonzaga (26-0) had been unstoppable all season, winning all but one of its games by

double digits as it advanced to the WCC title game for the 24th straight year.

The Cougars (20-6) made the lopsided losses list twice, but exposed the Bulldogs' lone weakness in the first half at Orleans Arena: their defense.

**Notre Dame 80, Wake Forest 77:** Trey Wertz hit a deep three-pointer at the buzzer to cap a 17-2 closing run and the No. 11-seeded Fighting Irish rallied past the 14th-seeded Demon Deacons in the first round of the Atlantic Coast Conference tournament in Greensboro, N.C.

Tied at 77, Wake Forest's Daivien Williamson drove the lane but his floater was blocked by Cormac Ryan, who dribbled the other way to find a trailing Wertz for a winning three. Wertz celebrated by finding Ryan in the corner for a chest bump before getting mobbed by teammates.

Notre Dame moves on to face sixth-seeded North Carolina.

**Duke 86, Boston College 51:** DJ Stew-

ard scored 17 points, Mark Williams added 13 points and the 10th-seeded Blue Devils began their quest of winning five straight games in the Atlantic Coast Conference tournament.

No team has won five ACC tournament games in five days — but Duke (12-11) likely must do so to avoid missing the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1995.

**Miami 79, Pittsburgh 73:** Isaiah Wong scored 20 points to lead five Hurricanes starters in double figures in a win over the Panthers in the opening game of the Atlantic Coast Conference tournament.

**Drexel 63, Elon 56:** Mate Okros scored 14 points with four three-pointers and the sixth-seeded Dragons are headed to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in 25 years after defeating the eighth-seeded Phoenix in the championship game of the Colonial Athletic Association tournament.

Drexel was 10-for-17 from three-point range and was 29-for-51 in its three wins.

# Some MLB blue bloods have new homes

Associated Press

George Springer, Trevor Bauer and Francisco Lindor are wearing blue now.

Springer received the biggest contract in the offseason from the Toronto Blue Jays. Bauer got the most money per season from the Los Angeles Dodgers. Lindor was traded to the New York Mets in a six-player deal.

The three star players headline the list of big names on new teams.

Springer, a three-time All-Star outfielder and 2017 World Series MVP with Houston, signed a team-record \$150 million, six-year contract with the Blue Jays in January. He joined a roster that includes young sluggers Vladimir Guerrero and Bo Bichette, plus Cavan Biggio, Teoscar Hernandez and Lourdes Gurriel Jr.

"I really like the blue. It's a good color," Springer said after his first spring training game with Toronto. "It was a little weird but I'm over it. It's fun and I enjoy it."

Bauer, who won the NL Cy Young Award last season with Cincinnati, signed a \$102 million, three-year deal with the Dodgers last month. The reigning World Series champions already had a pair of Cy Young Award winners in Clayton Ker-

shaw and David Price.

"This uniform is special," Bauer said in a two-minute video announcing his decision to sign with Los Angeles. "It's more than clothing. It's a lifestyle."

Lindor, a four-time All-Star shortstop in Cleveland, was traded along with right-hander Carlos Carrasco to the Mets in January for young infielders Andrés Giménez and Amed Rosario, and two minor league prospects: right-hander Josh Wolf and outfielder Isaiah Greene.

He arrived to spring training with his hair dyed blue, something he also did during his time with the Indians.

"You can see that I am all blued out," Lindor said. "Everything is blue in my life right now — blue and orange."

Here are five more well-known players in different places:

## Nolan Arenado

The five-time All-Star third baseman was traded from Colorado to the St. Louis Cardinals for five players. Arenado, who won a Gold Glove in each of his eight seasons with the Rockies, joined a team that reached the postseason seven times in the past 10 years. The Cardinals last won a World Series in 2011.

Arenado hit .300 with a .937 OPS and averaged 40 homers and 124 RBIs between 2015-19. He led the league in homers three times in that span.

## Blake Snell

The 2018 AL Cy Young Award winner was traded from the Tampa Bay Rays to the San Diego Padres for four players in December. The left-hander left the mound with a 1-0 lead in the sixth inning of Game 6 of the World Series but the bullpen blew it and the Dodgers clinched the title with a 3-1 win.

Snell had a 3.24 ERA in 11 starts last season. He was 21-5 with a 1.89 ERA in 2018. The Padres had the second-best record in the NL in 2020, snapping a 13-year postseason drought. But they were swept in the NL division series by the Dodgers.

Snell will anchor a rotation that features newcomers Yu Darvish and Joe Musgrove.

## Yu Darvish

The four-time All-Star right-hander was traded to the Padres from the Chicago Cubs in a seven-player deal on the same day San Diego acquired Snell. Darvish has twice finished runner-up for a Cy Young Award, including last season when he was 8-3 with a 2.01 ERA in 12

starts.

Darvish has three years and \$59 million left on the \$126 million, six-year deal he signed with the Cubs before the 2018 season.

## Jon Lester

The six-time All-Star left-hander signed a \$5 million, one-year deal with the Washington Nationals. Lester is a three-time World Series champion, winning twice with Boston and once with the Cubs.

He's part of a rotation led by three-time Cy Young Award winner Max Scherzer, 2019 World Series MVP Stephen Strasburg and lefty Patrick Corbin.

## Jackie Bradley Jr.

The former All-Star center fielder signed a 24 million, two-year deal with Milwaukee last week after spending his first eight seasons in Boston.

Bradley was a Gold Glove winner in 2018 when the Red Sox won the World Series. He was an All-Star in 2016 when he set career highs with 26 homers and 87 RBIs.

Milwaukee, which has reached the postseason three straight seasons, also has Christian Yelich and Lorenzo Cain in its outfield.

# Strasburg fans 4 of 6 batters in his first spring outing

Associated Press

Stephen Strasburg pronounced his fastball command better than it was before his carpal tunnel surgery and said his first game action in nearly seven full months essentially was the same as any Grapefruit League debut after throwing 1½ innings Tuesday night against the Houston Astros.

"It didn't really feel any different than it has in past springs, so I guess, in a way, that's a relief," said the 2019 World Series MVP, who made just two starts

and pitched only five innings in 2020.

In 2019, he led the NL with 209 innings and 18 wins, then went 5-0 in the postseason — no pitcher ever had done that — while helping the Nationals win the franchise's first championship.

"This isn't my first rodeo when it comes to injuries and stuff," Strasburg said on a video conference with a chuckle, knowing he has made more than 10 trips to the injured list over the years and had Tommy John

surgery in 2012. "So I'm kind of at a point where I'm going to go out there and give it everything I have and roll with the punches."

Strasburg last pitched on Aug. 14.

## Yankees' Britton needs surgery on elbow

The Yankees failed to make it out of spring training without a significant injury.

Left-hander Zack Britton needs arthroscopic surgery to remove a bone chip from his

pitching elbow, and New York's No. 2 reliever behind closer Aroldis Chapman seems certain to miss the start of the season.

## Rangers' Hernandez has strain in right elbow

The Texas Rangers will be without one of their top relievers to start the season after hard-throwing Jonathan Hernandez was shut down from pitching for at least four weeks because of a ligament sprain in his right elbow.