

White House considers Syria deployment

Los Angeles Times

KHSHAM, Syria — At a makeshift military outpost abutting a natural gas field in eastern Syria, the signs of the country's violent upheaval are everywhere. Bombed-out concrete buildings lie in ruins. The pipes that once carried liquefied natural gas are shredded and twisted.

A tattered U.S. flag strung between 40-foot-tall gas processing towers flies high over the base, a visible symbol that American troops are here — and not planning on leaving soon.

"We've got the flagpole planted," said Army Lt. Alan Favalora, a Louisiana National Guard soldier at Conoco, the name the base acquired from the long-departed U.S. oil and gas firm that once operated the wells. "We want them to know we are committed to this region."

How committed President Joe Biden will be to keeping troops in Syria is uncertain, however.

The Biden administration does not appear to be in any rush to pull out the 900 U.S. troops who remain in the country, a relatively small force that some White House of-

ficials see as key to preventing a resurgence of the Islamic State and a rush to reclaim the area's oil fields by Syrian President Bashar Assad and his Russian and Iranian allies.

But White House officials have said they are reviewing the troop presence in Syria — an announcement that has raised concerns that Biden could reconsider the deployment as part of a larger scaling back of U.S. troops in the Middle East and a planned shift of Pentagon focus to Asia.

What Biden is going to do "is the one question I got from everybody," Gen. Kenneth "Frank" McKenzie Jr., the top U.S. commander in the Middle East, said in an interview after visiting eastern Syria on Friday. "I think the new administration is going to look at this, and then we're going to get guidance."

Robert Ford, who was an ambassador to Syria during the Obama administration, called the U.S. strategy "deeply flawed" and said Biden should withdraw the remaining troops who have helped the Syrian Democratic Forces — a Kurdish-led militia — carve out a semiautonomous enclave in the country's northeast.

"I don't think it's worth it," Ford said of the American deployment. ISIS "is largely contained and not in a position to threaten the U.S. homeland or even to send fighters to Europe."

The U.S. partnership with the SDF has helped cement its control over eastern Syria, creating an alternative to Assad's rule and maybe a bargaining chip if efforts to reach a political settlement of the civil war move forward.

But keeping troops in eastern Syria also helps the Pentagon control the Iraq-Syria border, containing Iran's growing influence in the region.

"We believe they still aspire to hold ground" in Syria and Iraq, said McKenzie. "But it's hard for them to gather, because when they do, we get them."

With the Biden administration only beginning to consider options in Syria, U.S. military commanders are careful not to rule out further withdrawals. But they warn that a pullout, along with cutbacks in air support, intelligence and other assistance to the SDF, would create a security vacuum that ISIS could exploit.

Blinken, Austin head to Asia in first trip abroad

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Threats from China and North Korea will loom large over the Biden administration's first Cabinet-level trip abroad, part of a larger effort to bolster U.S. influence and calm concerns about America's role in Asia.

A senior administration said Saturday that U.S. officials have tried to reach out to North Korea through multiple channels since last month, but have yet to receive a response, making consultations with the reclusive country's neighbors, Japan, South Korea and China, all the more critical.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin are heading to Japan and South Korea for four days of talks starting Monday as the administration seeks to shore up partnerships with the two key regional treaty allies. Blinken and Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sul-

livan, will then meet with senior Chinese officials in Anchorage, Alaska,

Their first official overseas visits are intended to restore what Biden hopes will be a calming and even-keeled approach to ties with Tokyo and Seoul after four years of transactional and often temperamental relations under the previous president, Donald Trump.

In his first months in office, Biden has already signaled his desire to return the Asia-Pacific — or Indo-Pacific, as has become more common in officialese — to the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda. In keeping with his broader "America is back" diplomatic theme, Biden has pledged to keep stability in the region at the core of his international initiatives.

On Friday, Biden participated in a virtual summit with the leaders of India, Japan and Australia. "A free and open Indo-Pacific is

essential," Biden told his fellow members of the so-called Quad. "The United States is committed to working with you, our partners and all of our allies in the region to achieve stability."

As the administration plots its strategy, the official said it would continue to consult with the Japanese and South Koreans, as well as with the Chinese, and had also reached out to numerous former U.S. officials involved in North Korea policy, including from the Trump presidency.

Biden's meeting with the Quad came less than a week after U.S. and South Korean negotiators overcame years of contentious discussions under Trump to reach a tentative deal on paying for the American troop presence in South Korea. That agreement, along with a similar one for Japan, will be front and center in Blinken and Austin's meetings.

Germany spent fraction of allies to host troops

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Germany spent \$118 million last year on hosting foreign forces, a fraction of what other major allies spend on cost-sharing and far less than the billions the U.S. military pumps into Germany's economy.

About \$53 million was spent on “follow-on” administrative costs such as land acquisition, the German press agency dpa reported. That was \$10 million more than last year, but the increase was connected to British, Dutch and Canadian forces in Germany, dpa reported.

Military construction project spending fell from \$66 million in 2019 to \$59 million last year, the report said, citing government data provided to federal parliament member Sevim Dagdelen.

The majority of spending was related to the U.S. military, which at about 32,000 troops maintains a much larger presence than other allied missions in Germany. But Berlin's contribution is still far less than other key U.S. allies when it comes to paying for bases.

On Wednesday, South Korea agreed to increase the sum it pays to support about 28,500 U.S. troops on the peninsula by 13.9%, bringing expenditures to \$1.03 billion this year. Japan this year will contribute \$1.9 bil-

lion to maintain tens of thousands of U.S. service members there.

The U.S. military functions as a major economic engine in parts of Germany, particularly in rural areas and small cities. In the area around Ramstein Air Base alone, the military injected \$1.2 billion into the economy in 2019, according to U.S. Air Forces in Europe data.

The U.S. Army in Bavaria contributes nearly \$1 billion annually to local economies, Bavarian government figures show.

Similarly, tens of millions of dollars flow into the economies of Stuttgart and Wiesbaden, where there are major military facilities, German officials have said.

Still, some left-wing German politicians have repeatedly criticized the costs associated with the basing of U.S. forces in Germany.

“It is high time to stop this massive waste of taxpayers' money ... it's time for the U.S. soldiers to go home,” Dagdelen, a member of The Left party, said in a statement.

The mismatch in military investment between the U.S. and Germany has long been an area of contention for presidential administrations and was a focal point for former President Donald Trump, which proposed a significant drawdown of U.S. forces. The Biden administration has put a temporary halt to that plan while it reviews America's overseas military posture.

US, Japan pull off a massive personnel drop

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — “The biggest US-Japan airborne operation in history” involved hundreds of Japanese soldiers parachuting from Air Force transport planes in the shadow of Mount Fuji, according to the 374th Airlift Wing.

Photos of Tuesday's training, dubbed Airborne 21, show paratroopers from the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force's 1st Airborne Brigade jumping from a C-130J Super Hercules assigned to Yokota's 36th Airlift Squadron. They landed at Combined Arms Training Center Camp Fuji.

The Air Force was fortunate to be able to support Airborne 21, an event led by the JGSDF, wing spokeswoman Capt. Caitlin Mott wrote in an email Friday to Stars and Stripes.

“It involved the largest personnel drop during a ground scheme of maneuver,” she said, echoing a wing Facebook post saying the training included “approximately 600 JGSDF paratroopers, 12 C-130J aircraft and 130 containment delivery system bundles.”

During Airborne 21, Yokota's aircraft dropped the Japanese supply bundles without malfunctions, Mott said.

The supplies were dropped to multiple locations, in theory supporting individual firing positions, she said.

Airman honored for rescuing woman from icy water

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

An airman who waded into freezing swamp water in North Dakota to rescue a 91-year-old woman from a flooding ambulance was honored this month for his heroism.

Tech. Sgt. Ryan Fontaine of the 219th Security Forces Squadron at Minot Air Force Base received the North Dakota National Guard's Woodrow W. Keeble Award at a ceremony in Fargo on March 6.

The award, named for one of the most highly decorated soldiers in North Dakota history and the first full-blooded Sioux to re-

ceive the Medal of Honor, recognizes “courage, fortitude and determination to protect or defend life, limb or property,” the state said in 2019.

Fontaine was driving on U.S. Highway 83 on Thanksgiving night 2019, coming downhill on an icy stretch of four-lane highway, when he noticed flashing lights and two vehicles parked on the shoulder. He stopped and saw an ambulance half-submerged in a frozen slough, the 119th Wing said in a statement the following month.

The three-member ambulance crew had escaped by breaking a side cab window with an ice scraper, but the cab was twisted in the

wreck, preventing the patient in the back from getting out through that window.

The crew tried to break the windows in the back with a fire extinguisher, but failed.

Using a jack from Fontaine's vehicle, the rescuers were able to break a window. A passerby named Woody Valdez-Perez provided a tow-rope before Fontaine and ambulance crew member Hasan Abdul-Jabbar made their way to the sinking vehicle.

Abdul-Jabbar looped the rope around Paulson, who her daughter said was “standing in water with ice chunks up to her arm-pits,” and then he eased her out as Fontaine and Valdez-Perez pulled her to safety.

Virus conspiracy theories a pain for nurses

Associated Press

Los Angeles emergency room nurse Sandra Younan spent the last year juggling long hours as she watched many patients struggle with the coronavirus and some die.

Then there were the patients who claimed the virus was fake or coughed in her face, ignoring mask rules. One man stormed out of the hospital after a positive COVID-19 test, refusing to believe it was accurate.

"You have patients that are literally dying, and then you have patients that are denying the disease," she said. "You try to educate and you try to educate, but then you just hit a wall."

Bogus claims about the virus, masks and vaccines have exploded since COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic a year ago. Journalists, public health officials and tech

companies have tried to push back against the falsehoods, but much of the job of correcting misinformation has fallen to the world's front-line medical workers.

In Germany, a video clip showing a nurse using an empty syringe while practicing vaccinations traveled widely online as purported evidence that COVID-19 is fake. Doctors in Afghanistan reported patients telling them COVID-19 was created by the United States and China to reduce the world population. In Bolivia, medical workers had to care for five people who ingested a toxic bleaching agent falsely touted as a COVID-19 cure.

Younan, 27, says her friends used to describe her as the "chillest person ever," but now she deals with crushing anxiety.

"My life is being a nurse, so I don't care if you're really sick, you throw up on me,

whatever," Younan said. "But when you know what you're doing is wrong, and I'm asking you repeatedly to please wear your mask to protect me, and you're still not doing it, it's like you have no regard for anybody but yourself. And that's why this virus is spreading. It just makes you lose hope."

ER nurse L'Erin Ogle has heard a litany of false claims about the virus while working at a hospital in the suburbs of Kansas City, Mo. They include: The virus isn't any worse than the flu. It's caused by 5G wireless towers. Masks won't help and may hurt. Or, the most painful to her: The virus isn't real, and doctors and nurses are engaged in a vast global conspiracy to hide the truth.

"It just feels so defeating, and it makes you question: Why am I doing this?" said Ogle, 40.

FEMA tapped to assist with migrant surge

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration tapped the Federal Emergency Management Agency to help respond to a surge of unaccompanied children crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, with the agency working to expand available lodging for migrants.

Undocumented migration has increased significantly since President Joe Biden — who campaigned on a pledge of offering more assistance to those seeking refugee status in the U.S. — took office, overwhelming facilities at the border already under strain because of the coronavirus pandemic.

In February, U.S. Customs

and Border Patrol officers encountered more than 100,000 migrants attempting to enter the U.S., an almost threefold increase from a year earlier.

The White House has come under fire as hundreds of immigrant children are detained in rudimentary Border Patrol facilities beyond the three-day limit dictated by a 1997 court settlement.

In addition to the FEMA assistance ordered Saturday, the administration in recent days announced its plans to increase the number of HHS facilities where children can be transferred, and boost the number of children that can be housed in existing facilities, despite coronavirus predictions.

Arizona state Republican criticized for voting comments

The Washington Post

Amid a contentious hearing over proposed restrictions on Arizona's vote-by-mail system, a Republican state lawmaker argued that voters who hadn't participated in recent elections should no longer automatically have absentee ballots mailed to them. The reasoning, said state Rep. John Kavanagh, is that Republicans care more about alleged voter fraud than Democrats — and that "everybody shouldn't be voting."

"Democrats value as many people as possible voting, and they're willing to risk fraud. Republicans are more concerned about fraud, so we don't mind putting security measures in that won't let everybody vote — but everybody shouldn't be vot-

ing," he told CNN last week.

"Not everybody wants to vote, and if somebody is uninterested in voting, that probably means that they're totally uninformed on the issues," Kavanagh said to the news outlet.

His comments have drawn the ire of voting rights experts and critics who accused the Republican of using rhetoric "straight out of Jim Crow," as author Ari Berman said, at a time when GOP-controlled legislatures are advocating stricter voting measures across the United States.

In an interview Friday, Kavanagh said his words were taken out of context and defended the measure to stop sending some voters mail-in ballots as a matter of election security.

Many states spring forward for daylight saving time

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The annual shift to daylight saving time rolled in at 2 a.m. local time Sunday in most of the United States.

No time change is observed in Hawaii, most of Arizona, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Marianas.

Standard time returns Nov. 7. A poll in 2019 by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 7 in 10 Americans preferred

not to switch back and forth to mark daylight saving time. But there was no agreement on which time clocks ought to follow.

Texas reports drop in daily virus cases

Associated Press

AUSTIN — The number of newly confirmed or suspected coronavirus cases in Texas rose by 4,638 on Saturday, down from a one-day increase of 6,078 reported Friday, according to the state health department.

The department reported a total of more than 2.7 million cases since the pandemic began and 45,474 deaths due to COVID-19, the illness caused by the virus.

The state's death toll is the third highest in the country, trailing California's and New York's, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

The seven-day rolling averages of both new cases and deaths in Texas have declined during the past two weeks, according to the Johns Hopkins data. The average number of new cases dropped from 7,964 daily on Feb. 25 to 4,648 on March 11 while the average number of deaths fell from 220.6 to 168.9 per day during the same time period.

California

LOS ANGELES — Coronavirus hospitalizations in California's most populous county have slipped below 1,000 for the first time in nearly four months, officials reported Saturday, as case rates also remain low and much of the state prepares for some restrictions to be lifted in the coming days.

The number of patients with COVID-19 in Los Angeles County hospitals hit 979, the lowest since Nov. 23, the county health department said.

There are 3,250 people hospitalized statewide, a drop of more than 85% since peaking around 22,000 in early January, the state Department of Public Health reported Saturday.

State officials announced Friday that 13 counties would be eligible to open restaurants, movie theaters, gyms and museums at limited capacity Sunday.

The easing of restrictions are

a result of the state hitting a 2 million equity metric aimed at getting more vaccines to low-income communities.

Illinois

CHICAGO — The Chicago River was dyed a bright shade of green Saturday after Mayor Lori Lightfoot reversed an earlier decision not to tint the waterway for second year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Crews on boats began dumping green dye into the riverfront about 7 a.m. after Lightfoot authorized the dyeing ahead of St. Patrick's Day, delighting pedestrians with the vivid scene.

Chicago residents Lori Jones and Mike Smith surveyed the green waters, saying they were glad the tradition that dates to 1962 was resumed this year.

The event was not publicized in advance "in order to minimize crowds and avoid congregating," the spokesman said.

"Furthermore, the Riverwalk will be closed on Saturday and Chicagoans looking to see the River during the day are urged to 'keep it moving' and celebrate safely and responsibly."

Indiana

INDIANAPOLIS — More than 800,000 Indiana residents have now been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, state health officials said Saturday.

A total of 1,256,381 first doses of vaccine have been administered across Indiana, and 816,080 individuals — or about 12% of Indiana's population — have been fully vaccinated, the Indiana Department of Health said.

Those fully vaccinated include individuals who have received a second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines or the single dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine, the state agency said.

Hoosiers age 50 and older, along with health care workers, long-term care residents and first responders are currently eligible to receive a COVID-19

vaccine.

Nevada

RENO — Health officials have confirmed the first northern Nevada case of a COVID-19 variant that originated in the United Kingdom, and they are trying to determine if the infection linked to a large gathering in Washoe County may have spread to others.

At least eight cases related to the variant have already been confirmed in southern Nevada. The first was in the Las Vegas area in late January.

The new case confirmed in Washoe County, which includes Reno and Sparks, involves a woman in her 30s whose infection is linked to a gathering of more than 60 people from multiple states, county health district officer Kevin Dick announced late Friday.

Seventeen additional COVID-19 cases have been linked to the same event, although not all of the people who have tested positive are from Washoe County and it's not yet known whether they are infected with the variant, Dick said.

North Carolina

DURHAM — Duke University issued a quarantine order for all of its undergraduates effective Saturday night due to a coronavirus outbreak caused by students who attended recruitment parties, the school said.

The university said in a statement that all undergraduate students will be forced to stay-in-place until at least March 21. Suspension or dismissal from the school are among potential punishments for "flagrant or repeat violators."

Over the past week, the school has reported more than 180 positive coronavirus cases among students.

There are an additional 200 students who may have been exposed and have been ordered to quarantine.

The school said in the state-

ment that the outbreak was "principally driven by students attending recruitment parties for selective living groups." Duke said it would provide a policy update on Thursday.

New Mexico

ALBUQUERQUE — With the slowing of the coronavirus outbreak, Albuquerque Public Schools will resume in-person learning for five days a week on April 5, though students can continue remote learning for the rest of the school year.

New Mexico's largest school district announced its startup date Friday after the state Public Education Department earlier in the week said all schools were expected to reopen classrooms after spring break.

The district's Board of Education was briefed on the reopening plan, but did not vote on it.

Mask-wearing will be required and social distancing will be expected, interim Superintendent Scott Elder said.

Washington

SEATTLE — Seattle's new COVID-19 vaccination site aims to administer as many as 22,000 shots per day if supply allows, but it's starting more modestly.

King County Executive Dow Constantine, Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan and Swedish Health Services CEO Guy Hudson welcomed the first patients as the site opened Saturday at the Lumen Field Event Center.

Durkan said the site will initially vaccinate around 5,000 people per week, but could eventually handle 150,000 per week, or about 22,000 per day, if enough doses are available. That would make it one of the country's largest mass vaccination sites.

The site was being staffed by an army of volunteers, including doctors, nurses and dentists.

Live remote translation was available for more than 20 languages via portable video monitors.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

102-year-old joins great-grandson's PE class

AZ AJO — Video of a 102-year-old woman in southern Arizona working out with her 6-year-old great-grandson in his virtual PE class has gained hundreds of thousands of views on social media.

Julia Fulkerson started working out with her great-grandson Brody Contreras when they were reunited after a year apart because of the coronavirus pandemic, KPHO-TV reported.

Men charged with taking sea turtle eggs

FL WEST PALM BEACH — Two Florida men were sentenced to federal prison for stealing 93 protected sea turtle eggs.

Carl Lawrence Cobb, 65, received nine months in West Palm Beach federal court, according to court records. Bruce Wayne Bivins, 65, received seven months. Both pleaded guilty to violating the Endangered Species Act, a federal law designed, in part, to protect imperiled species.

Officers with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission reported seeing the poaching and stopped Cobb's truck.

State worker finds alligator carcass in river

KS WELLINGTON — The carcass of an American alligator was recently found in a south-central Kansas river, and wildlife officials speculate the animal was likely being kept as a pet before being released into the wild when it

got too big to keep.

A Kansas Department of Transportation worker recently discovered the carcass in the Ninnescah River in Sumner County as he worked along the river bank, Kansas City television station WDAF reported.

Alligators are cold-blooded animals that can't survive the harsh winters of the Midwest and Plains states out in the wild.

Stolen 'Homeless Jesus' statue found smashed

MO ST. LOUIS — A 400-pound "Homeless Jesus" statue stolen from in front of a closed downtown St. Louis homeless shelter was found, but it was cut into pieces.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that the bronze statue of Jesus sleeping on a bench was stolen from the New Life Evangelistic Center. The Rev. Larry Rice said that surveillance video showed a man selling the statue to somebody in a scrapyard parking lot.

Zoo investigates after cheetah attacks worker

OH POWELL — Authorities were investigating after a cheetah attacked a worker at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium.

The incident happened when two animal program staff members were walking the harnessed 4-year-old cheetah, Isabelle, when a worker from the Heart of Africa region approached, the zoo said.

"At this time, Isabelle's care team had her sit and she was calm and purring. When the keeper approached them, Isa-

belle crouched down and lunged toward the Heart of Africa keeper, who works around giraffes and other hoofstock," the zoo said.

Officials suspect the scent of the other animals on the zoo-keeper triggered the cheetah's natural instinct to attack, but they are still investigating.

Biz owner: Billboard with shirtless man refused

UT PROVO — The owner of a Utah health and beauty business said a billboard company has refused to display their advertising featuring a man in an unbuttoned shirt.

The company Super Seed said they were told the images were inappropriate for the large digital billboard at a mall in Orem, the Daily Herald newspaper reported.

Owner Cesar Valentino Valdiva, who posed for the proposed billboard pictures, said the refusal to accept the advertising is sexist, since there are photos from lingerie company Victoria's Secret at University Place Mall.

Mayor wants giant Robocop statue for city

WI STEVENS POINT — A central Wisconsin city is making a play for a giant Robocop statue after a Detroit museum rejected it.

The mayor of Stevens Point wants to place the 11-foot statue in front of the city's police station or in a park to honor actor Peter Weller, a Stevens Point native who portrayed the titular cyborg in 1987's "Robocop."

Mayor Mike Wiza told Wis-

consin Public Radio he's been making calls to the artists about bringing the statue to his city.

Bill outlawing intentional balloon releases OK'd

DE DOVER — The Delaware Senate has approved an anti-pollution bill outlawing the intentional release of balloons into the environment.

The measure passed the Senate on a 19-1 vote and now goes to the House.

Supporters of the bill said the balloons, often used in celebrations ranging from birthday parties to funerals, contribute to litter and pose a danger to marine animals and other wildlife.

Flapping flag causing a stir at condominiums

ND FARGO — A rippling American flag is causing a stir in Fargo where a condominium owner is at odds with his condo association.

Andrew Almer said he's proudly flown his flag from his condo balcony for the last two years.

About two months ago, Almer said he started getting letters from the president of the Plum Tree Square condo association. Almer said he was told he needed to take his flag down because it's too noisy flapping in the wind, KVLV-TV reported.

Associations can restrict owners from flying the flag if it's in the best interest of the association.

Almer said the flag will fly, despite what could be a hefty penalty.

— From The Associated Press

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Georgetown wins Big East tournament

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Patrick Ewing climbed the ladder — only a few steps needed for the 7-footer — clipped the last string and held the net high.

Georgetown is the Big East champion again, with the greatest Hoya of them all leading the way.

Ewing is taking his team back to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2015 after the eighth-seeded Hoyas completed a surprising run to a Big East crown Saturday night with a stunning 73-48 rout of No. 17 Creighton.

On the 49th anniversary of the day Georgetown hired John Thompson, the late Hall of Fame coach who transformed the program into a national power and one of the most iconic brands in college basketball, the Hoyas won their record eighth Big East Tournament title and first since 2007.

Was it fate? Destiny? Maybe Big John, who died in August at age 78, smiling down on now-Coach Ewing and his Hoyas?

"I think so," Ewing said.

Georgetown won with a dominant performance inside Madison Square Garden, reminiscent of Ewing's playing days at the school.

The Hoyas (13-12) closed the first half on a 23-2 run that put them up 18 at the break against second-seeded Creighton (20-8).

Then they started the second half with a 16-3 spurt. Chudier Bile knocked down a three-pointer — holding the follow through for a beat — with 14:58 left that made it 52-21.

Ewing called it a huge step for a program that's struggled to recapture old glory, and began this season picked to finish last in the Big East.

"A lot of people discredited. Talked bad about us. We believed in ourselves. We worked hard. We fought hard," he said.

Ewing wondered aloud earlier this week if they had forgotten him at MSG. He complained that security asked to see his credentials as he was moving around the building where he starred for the New York Knicks and his No. 33 jersey hangs from the rafters.

Ewing said this championship was "right up there" with his greatest moments at The Garden.

"Different chapter of my life," he said.

Bile matched a season high with 19 points and Jahvon Blair had 18 for Georgetown. After missing 12 of their first 14 shots, the Hoyas finished shooting 46.6% from the floor.

Marcus Zegarowski scored 17 points to lead the Bluejays, who are 0-3 in Big East title games since joining the conference for the 2013-14 season.

Hoyas fans, the few dozen that were in the mostly empty building because of COVID-19 restrictions, chanted "This Is, Our House!" as the team prepared to accept the championship trophy.

"Just to see how happy he is, it makes me happy," Blair said about Ewing. "I'm just so happy for him."

Ewing and Thompson combined for three Big East Tournament championships, three Final Four appearances and a national title in 1984 during their time together at Georgetown.

Ewing aspired to be a head coach like his mentor. He spent 15 years as an assistant in the NBA, never getting a shot to be head coach — until his alma mater came calling.

"I'm here where a lot of people didn't think I had the ability to (be)," Ewing said. "And I'm proving everyone wrong."

The 58-year-old Ewing is in his fourth season with the Hoyas, and up until this week there hasn't been much to get excited about. The only postseason tournament appearance was a one-game stay in the 2019 NIT. At the start of this tournament, Ewing's record was 58-58 as head coach.

Now he is the first person in Big East history to be the most outstanding player on a Big East Tournament champion and coach a team to a Big East Tournament title.

Unlikely champs: Beavers, Yellow Jackets earn bids

Associated Press

Jose Alvarado couldn't contain his emotions as the horn sounded, collapsing in disbelief as his Georgia Tech teammates mobbed each other near mid-court.

He quickly ran to the celebration that included coach Josh Pastner — still sporting that can't-miss-it clear face shield.

"Coach, you're a champion, man!" Alvarado yelled as he joined him for a postgame TV interview amid fallen-from-the-rafters balloons and confetti.

The Yellow Jackets have their first Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament title in nearly three decades after beating No. 15 Florida State 80-75 in Saturday night's championship game. Just as importantly, they've secured an automatic NCAA Tour-

namment berth to end an 11-year drought.

"A lot of emotions: joy, happiness, everything," said Michael Devoe, the tournament MVP. "I mean, this goes down in history for us."

Devoe scored 20 points for fourth-seeded Georgia Tech (17-8), which shot 52% after half-time and repeatedly capitalized on mistakes by the Seminoles to win their first ACC Tournament crown since 1993 and fourth overall.

Oregon State 70, No. 23 Colorado 68: Maurice Calloo gave Oregon State an unexpected lift with 15 points and the Beavers won their first conference tournament title, holding off the Buffaloes in the Pac-12 title game.

Oregon State (17-12) opened its first conference title game in

33 years with a flurry of three-pointers and withstood a late push by Colorado (22-8) to become the first Pac-10/12 team to win the conference title after being picked to finish last.

No. 13 Texas 91, No. 12 Oklahoma State 86: Matt Coleman scored a career-high 30 points and Jericho Simms added a career-best 21, leading the Longhorns to the Big 12 Tournament title.

Kai Jones and Andrew Jones added 13 points apiece for third-seeded Texas (19-7).

The title was the first for the Longhorns in seven frustrating appearances in the Big 12 championship game, and their first conference tournament trophy since winning the old Southwest Conference title in 1995.

No. 19 San Diego State 68,

Utah State 57: Matt Mitchell scored 14 points to lead to the the Aztecs to the Mountain West Tournament championship.

San Diego State, which also won the regular-season championship, had lost six of its previous seven title game appearances, including the past two to the Aggies.

Ohio 84, Buffalo 69: Last March, the Bobcats were on the floor warming up for their quarterfinal opener when they were told the tournament was canceled. Nothing stopped them this year.

Jason Preston scored 22 points and Ohio dominated from the start to win its first Mid-American Conference Tournament championship since 2012, denying the Bulls a record third straight title.

Middleweight great Hagler dies at 66

Associated Press

Marvelous Marvin Hagler stopped Thomas Hearns in a fight that lasted less than eight minutes yet was so epic that it still lives in boxing lore. Two years later he was so disgusted after losing a decision to Sugar Ray Leonard — stolen, he claimed, by the judges — that he never fought again.

One of the great middleweights in boxing history, Hagler died Saturday at the age of 66. His wife, Kay, announced his death on the Facebook page for Hagler's fans.

"I am sorry to make a very sad announcement," she wrote. "Today unfortunately my beloved husband Marvelous Marvin passed away unexpectedly at his home here in New Hampshire. Our family requests that you respect our privacy during this difficult time."

Hagler fought on boxing's biggest stages against its biggest names, as he, Leonard, Hearns and Roberto Duran dominated the middleweight classes during a golden time for boxing in the 1980s. Quiet with a brooding public persona, Hagler fought 67 times in 14 years as a pro out of Brockton, Mass., finishing 62-3-2 with 52 knockouts.

"If they cut my bald head open, they will find one big boxing glove," Hagler once said. "That's all I am. I live it."

Hagler was unmistakable in the ring, fighting out of a southpaw stance with his bald head glistening in the lights. He was relentless and he was vicious, stopping opponent after opponent during an eight year run that began with a disputed draw against Vito Antuofermo in 1979 that he later avenged.

He fought with a proverbial chip on his shoulder, convinced that boxing fans and promoters alike didn't give him his proper due. He was so upset that he wasn't introduced before a 1982 fight by his nickname of Marvelous that he went to court to legally change his name.

"He was certainly one of the greatest middleweights ever but one of the greatest people that I've ever been around and promoted," promoter Bob Arum said. "He was a real man, loyal and just fantastic person."

Hagler would go on to stop Hearns in the third round, crumpling him to the canvas with a barrage of punches even as blood poured out of a large gash on Hagler's forehead that nearly caused the referee to stop

the fight earlier in the round.

Arum said Hagler simply willed himself to victory over Hearns, whose big right hand was feared in the division but couldn't keep Hagler at bay.

"That was an unbelievable fight," Arum said. "Probably the greatest fight ever."

Hagler would fight only two more times, stopping John Mugabi a year later and then meeting Leonard, who was coming off a three-year layoff from a detached retina, in his final fight in 1987. Hagler was favored going into the fight and many thought he would destroy Leonard — but Leonard had other plans.

While Hagler pursued him around the ring, Leonard fought backing up, flicking out his left jab and throwing combinations that didn't hurt Hagler but won Leonard points on the ringside scorecards. Still, when the bell rang at the end of the 12th round, many thought Hagler had pulled out the fight — only to lose a controversial split decision.

Hagler, who was paid \$19 million, left the ring in disgust and never fought again. He moved to Italy to act, and never really looked back.

Nobody comes for free in NFL free agency

Associated Press

The term in use these days is "legal tampering." Doesn't seem sensible, and some might call it the "cheating period" instead.

Regardless, on Monday, two days before the NFL's 2021 business year begins, the 32 teams and agents for the players will be making deals. Lots of deals, even if they aren't official until Wednesday.

"I hate calling it the legal tampering period because that just seems like that's a debacle of the English language," Rams general manager Les Snead says. "Legal tampering, and tampering is illegal? But we'll have to adjust based on that because there's no guarantee that you can re-sign (players)."

Even at a time when the sala-

ry cap has plummeted by \$16 million due to lost revenues during the COVID-19-impacted 2020 season, lots of money will be going to the most-prized players.

That likely will include Tampa Bay pass rusher Shaq Barrett; Green Bay All-Pro center Corey Linsley and standout running back Aaron Jones; Detroit wide receiver Kenny Golladay; San Francisco tackle Trent Williams; and Chargers tight end Hunter Henry. No superstars about to break the bank, but plenty of proven talent to help teams improve before turning attention to next month's draft.

Of course, free agency always is a buyer-beware situation.

"Yeah, we want talented players; but we want a good cohesive unit and guys who fit well together," Dolphins coach Brian

Flores says. "That's not always 11 stars. It's almost never that way."

"So we've scoured free agency, the draft, and I think we have a pretty good feel for the types of guys we are looking for from a skillset standpoint, but also from a locker room standpoint as people as well. ... That's an important factor that can't be overlooked. All of those things play a role."

Nine players have been given franchise tags: receivers Chris Godwin (Tampa Bay) and Allen Robinson (Chicago); offensive linemen Taylor Moton (Carolina), Cam Robinson (Jacksonville) and All-Pro Brandon Scherff (Washington); safeties Marcus Maye (New York Jets), Marcus Williams (New Orleans) and Justin Simmons (Denver); and defensive tackle

Leonard Williams (New York Giants).

Dallas locked up quarterback Dak Prescott with a four-year deal, and J.J. Watt, released this offseason by Houston, signed with Arizona. Those were the biggest names potentially available. Snead's Rams didn't use the tag, which could mean losing solid safety John Johnson, revitalized linebacker Leonard Floyd or center Austin Blythe.

Thus far, the Super Bowl champion Buccaneers have played the free agency game best this month. It helps when your high-priced quarterback is willing to redo his deal to open up spending room, something Tom Brady did. Another star, Panthers running back Christian McCaffrey, followed Brady's lead in reworking his contract.

Harden helps Nets roll past Pistons

Associated Press

NEW YORK — James Harden scored 12 of his 24 points in the fourth quarter and had his ninth triple-double with the Nets to help Brooklyn beat the Detroit Pistons 100-95 on Saturday night.

Harden also added 10 rebounds and 10 assists in his 55th triple-double as Brooklyn improved to 26-13 with its 12th win in its last 16 games.

"I play the game the right way," Harden said, "and hopefully good things happen for me."

Kyrie Irving added 18 points and Landry Shamet had 15 off the bench. DeAndre Jordan chipped in with 14 and Joe Harris contributed 10 points.

Whereas the Nets rolling, the Pistons are stuck in neutral.

"We want to win these types of games," said Delon Wright, who finished with 13. Jerami Grant scored 22 points as Detroit fell to 10-28. Saddiq Bey chipped in with 13. Mason Plumlee added 11 and Rodney McGruder had 10.

"It's a good thing that we're staying close

in these games," Wright said.

The second of three regular-season matchups between the Eastern Conference teams was Brooklyn's chance to get even for its 122-111 loss in Detroit on Feb. 9. That loss was part of a stretch in which the Nets dropped three of four.

Thirteen games later, Brooklyn has jelled into a legitimate championship contender while the Pistons have myriad weaknesses, such as three-point shooting.

After Wayne Ellington knocked down a three about 2 ½ minutes into the game, Detroit missed 19 straight three-point attempts until Wright's straightaway attempt from 26 feet out 4:42 into the third quarter ended the drought.

"We have to make shots," Wright said. "We got good looks so that's a good thing. We just have to knock them down."

Bucks 125, Wizards 119: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 33 points, 11 assists and 11 rebounds for his sixth triple-double of the season in Milwaukee's victory at short-handed Washington.

Jrue Holiday added 10 of his 18 points during the fourth quarter for the third-place

Bucks. They have won eight of nine.

Pacers 122, Suns 111: Malcolm Brogden scored 25 points and Domantas Sabonis had a triple-double with 22 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists to lead Indiana to a win at Phoenix.

Knicks 119, Thunder 97: RJ Barrett scored a career-high 32 points, and Julius Randle had a triple-double to lead New York to a win at Oklahoma City.

Hornets 114, Raptors 104: LaMelo Ball had 23 points and nine rebounds and host Charlotte beat short-handed Toronto in the Hornets' first game of the season with the general public allowed to attend.

Mavericks 116, Nuggets 103: Luka Doncic had 21 points and 12 assists, and Kristaps Porzingis scored 25 points in Dallas' victory at Denver.

Trail Blazers 125, Timberwolves 121: Carmelo Anthony scored 26 points and Damian Lillard added 25 points and 10 assists in Portland's victory at Minnesota.

Hawks 121, Kings 106: Trae Young scored 17 of 28 points in the third quarter, Clint Capela had 18 of his 24 points in the first half and host Atlanta beat Sacramento.

Lightning win, raise championship banner for fans

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Playing in front of their home fans for the first time this season, the Tampa Bay Lightning raised their 2020 Stanley Cup banner and beat the Nashville Predators 6-3 on Saturday night.

Tyler Johnson and Blake Coleman each had a goal and an assist for the Lightning. Alex Killorn, Brayden Point, Mathieu Joseph and Anthony Cirelli also scored. Erik Cernak and Ondrej Palat had two assists apiece.

Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 28 shots to earn his NHL-leading 17th win.

Erik Haula, Alexandre Carrier and Yakov Trenin scored for the Predators, who fell to 1-5-1 in their past seven games. Pekka Rinne made 21 saves.

With a maximum crowd of 3,800 in attendance, Tampa Bay hoisted its 2020 championship banner to the rafters and jump-

ed to a three-goal lead.

Rangers 4, Bruins 0: Chris Kreider scored his team-leading 14th goal, Artemi Panarin had an assist in his first game back since leaving the team, and visiting New York halted a three-game losing streak.

Panarin left Feb. 22 after a Russian tabloid printed allegations from a former coach that he attacked a woman in Latvia almost a decade ago, which he denies. His return clearly provided a lift for the Rangers.

Panthers 4, Blackhawks 2: Aleksander Barkov had two goals and an assist, and host Florida earned its third straight win.

Carter Verhaeghe had a goal and an assist for the Panthers. The winless streak matches the fourth-worst in team history.

Blue Jackets 4, Stars 3 (OT): Zach Werenski scored 4:55 into overtime and Elvis Merzlikins

made 27 saves, leading host Columbus to the victory. The winless streak matches the fourth-worst in team history.

Max Domi added a goal and an assist as the Blue Jackets snapped a three-game losing streak. Fleury made his 15th start in Vegas' last 16 games.

Jets 5, Maple Leafs 2: Adam Lowry broke a tie at 7:39 of the third period, leading visiting Winnipeg to the win.

Lowry added an assist, and Mark Scheifele and Mason Appleton also each had a goal and an assist to help the Jets take the three-game series 2-1.

Sharks 3, Ducks 1: Evander Kane scored for the third straight game, Martin Jones stopped 26 shots and visiting San Jose won its third straight for the first time this season.

Anaheim, which is in last place in the West Division, has dropped three straight.

Kevin Labanc and Dylan Gambrell also scored for the Sharks. Their win streak includes victories on consecutive nights during which they have outscored the Ducks 9-1.

Flames 3, Canadiens 1: Sean Monahan scored twice, Jacob Markstrom made 24 saves and host Calgary beat Montreal to sweep the two-game series.

Darryl Sutter coached his second game for the Flames after returning to the team when Geoff Ward was fired on March 4.

The Canadiens are 3-3-3 since Dominique Ducharme took over for the fired Claude Julien.

Monahan scored his 200th and 201st goals. Mikael Backlund also scored for Calgary. The Flames improved to 13-12-3, winning consecutive games for the first time in a month.