

Austin: US, Japan can beat ‘any competitor’

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — The United States and Japan can “outmatch any competitor” in the years ahead, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin told his Japanese counterpart Tuesday at the start of a series of high-level meetings.

On his first international trip since taking over as America’s top civilian military leader, Austin gave an upbeat assessment of the state of the alliance to Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi.

Also that afternoon, Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs Toshimitsu Motegi. The discussions were part in the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee, informally called 2+2.

The alliance remains a cornerstone in addressing today’s demands and challenges as the countries work together to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific, Austin said, as he, Kishi and a group of U.S. and Japanese generals and other officials met in a conference room at Japan’s Ministry of Defense in the Japanese capital.

“I am confident that working together we can meet any challenge and outmatch any competitor in the years ahead,” the defense secretary said.

Austin didn’t mention any competitors by name but, in a statement issued later in the day, the allies said China’s actions pose political, economic, military and technical challenges to the Japan-U.S. alliance and the global community, according to

Japanese broadcaster NHK.

The two countries, in the statement, also expressed concern over human rights in China, its growing assertiveness at sea and its new coast guard law, the report said.

Blinken, meanwhile, warned China against using coercion and aggression.

“We will push back, if necessary, when China uses coercion and aggression to get its way,” he said Tuesday according to the Reuters news agency.

Tensions have risen this year between Japan and China over the disputed Senkaku islands. China in February gave its coast guard authority to fire at boats entering waters claimed by China, to which Japan responded by permitting its coast guard crews to fire on foreign ships attempt-

ing to reach the Senkakus.

Blinken and Austin travel to South Korea on Wednesday for talks with their counterparts in the defense and foreign ministries there, too.

It’s especially meaningful that the Tokyo meetings are happening so close to the 10th anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, Austin said of the triple disaster of March 11, 2011. The magnitude-9.0 earthquake, the most intense ever recorded in Japan, created a massive tsunami that inundated the northeastern coast, killing more than 19,000 people and causing a meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. More than 20,000 U.S. troops worked alongside their Japanese allies to respond to the disaster.

N. Korea greets new US administration with threats

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — In North Korea’s first comments directed at the Biden administration, Kim Jong Un’s powerful sister on Tuesday warned the United States to “refrain from causing a stink” if it wants to “sleep in peace” for the next four years.

Kim Yo Jong’s statement was issued as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived in Asia to talk with U.S. allies Japan and South Korea about North Korea and other regional issues. They met officials in Tokyo on Tuesday before heading to Seoul for talks on Wednesday.

“We take this opportunity to warn the new U.S. administration trying hard to give off (gun) powder smell in our land,” she said. “If it wants to sleep in peace

for coming four years, it had better refrain from causing a stink at its first step.”

Kim Yo Jong, a senior official who handles inter-Korean affairs, also criticized the U.S. and South Korea for holding military exercises. She also said the North would consider abandoning a 2018 bilateral agreement on reducing military tensions and abolish a decades-old ruling party unit tasked to handle inter-Korean relations if it no longer had to cooperate with the South.

She said the North would also consider scrapping an office that handled South Korean tours to the North’s scenic Diamond Mountain, which Seoul suspended in 2008 after a North Korean guard fatally shot a South Korean tourist.

The North “will watch the future attitude and actions of the

(South Korean) authorities,” before determining whether to take exceptional measures against its rival, she said in her statement published in Pyongyang’s official Rodong Sinmun newspaper.

Challenges posed by North Korea’s nuclear arsenal and China’s growing influence loom large in the Biden administration’s first Cabinet-level trip abroad, part of a larger effort to bolster U.S. influence and counter concerns about the U.S. role in Asia following four years of former President Donald Trump’s “America first” approach.

A senior official from the Biden administration said Saturday that U.S. officials have tried to reach out to North Korea through multiple channels since last month, but had yet to receive

a response. The official was not authorized to publicly discuss the diplomatic outreach and spoke on condition of anonymity.

“This is Kim Yo Jong continuing to be the tip of the wedge North Korea tries to drive between South Korea and its U.S. ally,” said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul. “North Korea’s latest threats mean the allies have precious little time to coordinate their approaches on deterrence, sanctions and engagement.”

Biden’s presidency begins as Kim Jong Un faces perhaps the toughest moment of his nine-year rule. His country’s battered economy has decayed further amid pandemic border closures while his summits with Trump failed to lift crippling sanctions.

Squadron replaces pit bull morale patch

By **MATTHEW KEELER**
Stars and Stripes

OSAN AIR BASE, South Korea — The civil engineer squadron at Osan has replaced its pit bull morale patch because it too closely resembled a symbol associated with a white supremacist group, according to a wing statement Tuesday.

Col. John Gonzales, commander of the 51st Fighter Wing, ordered the change after an internal review “on all Unit Emblems, Mottos, Nicknames and Other Symbols” back in October and December, wing

spokesman Master Sgt. Joshua Garcia said in an email Tuesday to Stars and Stripes.

The morale patch of the 51st Civil Engineer Squadron “Mon-grels” depicted a pit bull with a striking resemblance to what the Anti-Defamation League has labeled as a racist symbol.

While the wing did not name a particular hate group, its statement said the squadron’s red, white and black patch was similar to a graphic used by a known and active extremist group in the United States.

According to the Anti-Defa-

mation League website, white supremacists use a specific pit bull graphic so often that it has become a white supremacist symbol itself. One racist group, Keystone United, formerly known as Keystone State Skinheads, adopted it as part of its logo.

Gonzales, according to the wing, said he found “that the similarity between the emblems could reasonably cause confusion between the unit and a known active extremist hate group.”

Gonzales acted in conjunc-

tion with Lt. Col. Ryan Walinski, commander of the civil engineer squadron, and Col. E. Jonelle Eychner, commander of the 51st Mission Support Group, according to the wing.

“To prevent any inappropriate association with that organization, we have decided to cease use of the current Morale Patch, and the unit will return to a previous version of the Morale Patch that bears no resemblance visually, and could not reasonably be considered to be associated with that extremist organization,” Gonzales said.

Special ops forces train Mozambique troops

By **JOHN VANDIVER**
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. special operations troops have launched a mission to assist counterterrorism forces in Mozambique, where there are growing concerns about escalating violence by Islamic State militants.

The two-month effort will focus on training Mozambican marines as the country tries to “prevent the spread of terrorism and violent extremism,” the U.S. Embassy in Maputo said Monday in a statement. The United States has also provided medical and communications equipment.

The U.S. effort, led by Special Operations Command Africa, comes during a time of increased violence in Mozambique, where nearly 670,000 people have been displaced by ISIS attacks in the mainly Muslim Cabo Delgado province.

Last week, the State Department designated the militants as a foreign terrorist group along with a similar ISIS affiliate in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Mozambique branch has orchestrated a series of “large scale and sophisticated attacks,” most notably resulting in the capture of the strategic port of Mocimboa da Praia near the border with Tanzania in Au-

gust, the State Department said. The port, positioned in an oil-rich area in northern Mozambique, is a cargo hub for the east African nation.

Mozambique’s government has appealed for international help to curb the insurgency, saying its troops need specialized anti-guerrilla training.

The arrival of U.S. commandos marks the entry of U.S. Africa Command into a region where past American military efforts have focused more on humanitarian campaigns.

The new counterterrorism mission also could serve as an opportunity for the U.S. to distinguish itself from Russia, which has attempted to deliver similar assistance, but with mixed results.

During the past two years, Russia has dispatched fighters from the state-sponsored Wagner Group, which operates in various countries, such as Libya, Central African Republic and Syria. But the Kremlin-backed fighters have performed poorly in parts of Africa, a March 9 analysis by the Rand Corp. think tank found.

It’s not clear whether U.S. forces will follow the two-month mission with other means of counterterrorism support, but the embassy suggested that more types of assistance could be on the way.

Americans less sure than allies on NATO support

By **JOHN VANDIVER**
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A majority of people in allied countries want to remain in NATO and think the alliance protects them from aggression, but skepticism runs higher in the United States than most other member states, a public opinion poll found.

NATO on Tuesday released its 2020 annual report, which included a poll commissioned by the alliance on attitudes toward the 30-member security pact.

The poll found that 62% of respondents would vote to stay in NATO, compared to 11% stating they would vote for their country to quit the alliance. The rest did not know or had no opinion.

The surveys of 28,635 adults in 30 NATO member countries were conducted between July 20 and Aug. 8, 2020, with an additional 28,517 polled Nov. 5-23. The poll had a margin of error of 3%, the statement said.

But Americans were less convinced. In the U.S., 51% of people polled thought NATO membership made an attack from an adversary less likely, while 17% disagreed and the rest weren’t certain. Fifty-seven percent of Americans polled said they would vote to stay in the alliance, while 10% would elect to leave.

Army pushed to deny DC's Guard request

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Army initially pushed to reject the Washington D.C. government's request for a modest National Guard presence ahead of the Jan. 6 rally that led to the Capitol riot, underscoring the deep reluctance of some higher-ups at the Pentagon to involve the military in security arrangements that day.

In an internal draft memo obtained by *The Washington Post*, the Army said the U.S. military shouldn't be needed to help police with traffic and crowd management, as city officials had requested, unless more than 100,000 demonstrators were expected.

The draft memo also said the request should be denied because a federal agency hadn't been identified to run the preparations and on-the-day operations; the resources of other federal agencies hadn't been exhausted; and law enforcement was "far better suited" for the task.

The Army leadership made its position clear in deliberations at the Pentagon the weekend before the event, citing those reasons among others, according to four people familiar with the discussions, who like others in this report spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal Defense Department matters.

The Army ultimately relented after facing pressure from acting defense secretary Christopher Miller and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark Milley, and realizing that D.C. officials weren't going to turn to the Justice Department for help instead, as the Army had wanted, the people said.

Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy agreed to support the request, so long as a lead agency was identified and all other federal agencies "exhausted their assets to support these events," according to the recommendation he gave in a revised final memo to Miller, who approved the request.

Still, the Army's initial impulse to consider refusing military involvement in the security arrangements — even though the Guard is trained to assist law enforcement during large-scale protests and has done so regularly for decades in Washington — shows the extraordinary steps officials at the Pentagon were taking to stay away from what was shaping up to be a politically toxic and volatile moment for the nation.

In the weeks since the riot, top Pentagon officials have emphasized that the Capitol Police and federal agencies didn't request military backup before the event, leaving the

Fencing around Capitol to be scaled back

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Amid strong bipartisan pushback, security officials say they will soon scale back fencing that has circled the U.S. Capitol and cut off the entire area to pedestrian and vehicular traffic since a mob attacked the building Jan. 6.

Timothy Blodgett, the acting House sergeant-at-arms, said Monday in a memo to members of Congress that the fencing will be scaled back in two phases in response to guidance from the U.S. Capitol Police that "there does not exist a known, credible threat" that warrants keeping the temporary barrier in place.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a letter to colleagues after Blodgett's announcement that the Capitol Police "will continue to monitor the threat posture, and plans will be adjusted if and as needed."

Blodgett said the outer perimeter fencing will be removed in the latter part of March and Independence and Constitution avenues, the two major thoroughfares that flank the Capitol, will be opened for traffic.

An inner perimeter will be moved closer to the Capitol building this week, providing reopened access to nearby streets and some sidewalks. Strings of razor wire atop the fence will also be removed.

Defense Department unprepared to respond rapidly when the situation got out of control. The draft memo, however, suggests that the Army leadership also had been disinclined to get involved from the start.

Reluctance at the Pentagon about the deployment of the D.C. Guard during the preparations also raises questions about when it is appropriate to use the U.S. military on domestic soil. While top Pentagon officials have emphasized that military force should be used to support domestic law enforcement only as a last resort, that maxim has traditionally been understood to apply to active-

duty forces — not the National Guard.

Unlike in the 50 states, where governors control the National Guard, the D.C. Guard answers to the president, who delegates authority to the defense secretary and Army secretary. The mayor of the District of Columbia can only request that the federal government deploy the D.C. Guard.

The thinking of Pentagon leaders before and during the riot is now facing scrutiny from lawmakers who have accused the Defense Department of reacting too slowly to the Capitol Police's 11th-hour plea for military assistance, as rioters breached the Capitol in a catastrophic security failure.

Maj. Gen. William Walker, the commanding general of the D.C. Guard, told lawmakers on March 3 that after receiving a panicked call from the chief of the Capitol Police, he had to wait three hours and 19 minutes before the Pentagon allowed him to send his available forces to the building.

Pentagon officials have denied that their response was delayed, describing the arrival of the D.C. Guard about three hours after the call for help as a quick rollout, considering that the military hadn't been postured or asked to provide backup to the Capitol Police if needed.

By the time of the riot, Pentagon leaders had become skittish about using the military to support law enforcement on domestic soil.

Last June, Milley and then-defense secretary Mark Esper were excoriated by lawmakers and retired military personnel for appearing alongside President Donald Trump as federal law enforcement cleared racial-justice protesters near the White House using force and pepper balls.

The Army leadership also felt strongly that the military shouldn't be used unless a federal agency was designated to lead the activities.

White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows told Miller and acting attorney general Jeffrey Rosen that the Justice Department would serve as the "lead" agency, according to people familiar with the arrangement.

The designation pertained only to the Justice Department, the FBI, the Defense Department and the Interior Department, the official said, and did not cover the Capitol, where Capitol Police oversee security.

The designation was so vague that officials in the D.C. government and at the D.C. Guard didn't even know that the Justice Department was functioning as the "lead agency." The Justice Department declined to comment.

Nations, EU divided on AstraZeneca shot

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — With coronavirus cases rising in many places, governments faced the grimmest of dilemmas Tuesday: push on with a vaccine that is known to save lives or suspend use of AstraZeneca over reports of dangerous blood clots in a few recipients, even as the European regulator said there was “no indication” the shot was responsible.

It has created a jagged divide across the globe, forcing politicians to assess the health risks of halting the shots at a time when many countries, especially in Europe, are already struggling to overcome logistical hurdles and vaccine hesitancy among their populations.

Sweden was the latest to join a swelling

group of European Union nations choosing caution over speed, even as the head of the European Medicines Agency said the agency is “firmly convinced” that the benefits of the AstraZeneca shot outweigh the risks.

Emer Cooke noted Tuesday that thousands of people across the EU develop thromboses every year for a variety of reasons and that there were no reports of increased blood clots in the clinical studies of the AstraZeneca vaccine. Still, experts would undertake a “very rigorous analysis” and make a recommendation Thursday, she said.

Europe has the luxury to be able to pick from several vaccine candidates — but the decision is still not an easy one on the Con-

tinental, where the virus is again surging and where the vaccination campaign has repeatedly stumbled.

The choice may be even more fraught elsewhere because many countries are relying heavily on AstraZeneca, which is cheaper and easier to handle than some other shots. The vaccine has so far played a huge role in the global initiative to ensure vaccines get to poorer countries known as COVAX.

In addition to the EMA, AstraZeneca and the WHO have said there is no evidence the vaccine carries an increased risk of blood clots. There have been 37 reports of blood clots among the more than 17 million people who have received the vaccine across the EU and Britain, the company said.

Senate confirms 1st Native American Cabinet head

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Monday confirmed New Mexico Rep. Deb Haaland as interior secretary, making her the first Native American to lead a Cabinet department and the first to lead the federal agency that has wielded influence over the nation’s tribes for nearly two centuries.

Haaland was confirmed by a 51-40 vote, the narrowest margin yet for a Cabinet nomination by President Joe Biden.

Four Republicans voted yes: Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, of Alaska; Susan Collins, of Maine; and Lindsey Graham, of South Carolina.

Democrats and tribal groups hailed Haaland’s confirmation as historic, saying her se-

lection means that Indigenous people — who lived in North America before the United States was created — will for the first time see a Native American lead the powerful department where decisions on relations with the nearly 600 federally recognized tribes are made. Interior also oversees a host of other issues, including energy development on public lands and waters, national parks and endangered species.

“Rep. Haaland’s confirmation represents a gigantic step forward in creating a government that represents the full richness and diversity of this country,” said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

“Native Americans for far too long have been neglected at the Cabinet level and in so

many other places,” Schumer said.

Haaland, a member of the Laguna Pueblo and a 35th-generation resident of New Mexico, thanked hundreds of supporters at a virtual party hosted by Native American organizations.

Her confirmation shows that tribal members are “visible” and being taken seriously, Haaland said after the vote. “And no, it should not have taken more than 200 years for a Native person to take the helm at Interior, or even be a Cabinet secretary for that matter.”

Haaland said she was “ready to roll up my sleeves” so Interior can play its part in Biden’s plan to “build back better” and “responsibly manage our natural resources to protect them for future generations.”

Homeland Security chief defends handling of border

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Faced with a rising number of migrants at the southwest border and criticism from all sides, the Biden administration’s head of Homeland Security insisted Tuesday that the situation is under control as he defended a policy of allowing teens and children crossing by themselves to remain in the country.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas conceded that a surge in the number of children, mostly from Central America, is a challenge for the Border Patrol and other agencies amid the coronavirus pandemic. But he rejected a Trump-

era policy of sending them immediately back to Mexico or other countries.

“They are vulnerable children and we have ended the prior administration’s practice of expelling them,” Mayorkas said in his most detailed statement yet on a situation at the border that he characterized as “difficult” but not the crisis that critics have portrayed.

The increasing number of migrants attempting to cross the border, which is at the highest level since 2019 but is on pace to rise to hit a 20-year peak, has become an early test for President Joe Biden as he seeks to break from his immediate prede-

cessor, President Donald Trump, who waged a broad effort to significantly curtail both legal and illegal immigration.

The number of children crossing by themselves rose 60% from January to more than 9,400 in February, according to the most recent statistics available. The overall increase is blamed on a number of factors, including the economic upheaval caused by the pandemic in Central America and two recent hurricanes in the region. U.S. officials have also conceded that smugglers have likely encouraged people to try to cross under the new administration.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman accused of faking photos of daughter's rivals

PA DOYLESTOWN — A Pennsylvania woman is accused of doctoring photos and video of her daughter's cheerleading rivals to try to get them kicked off the squad, officials said.

The Bucks County District Attorney's Office charged Raffaela Spone, 50, with three misdemeanor counts of cyber harassment of a child and related offenses.

Spone manipulated photos from social media of three girls on the Victory Vipers cheerleading squad in Chalfont to make it appear they were drinking, smoking and even nude, investigators said.

Spone also sent messages with the so-called "deepfake" pictures to the girls and suggested they kill themselves, officials said.

Coyote that attacked 5 people captured, killed

CA MORAGA — A coyote that attacked five people, including a 3-year-old girl, in the San Francisco Bay Area was captured and euthanized, wildlife officials said.

The coyote was captured and killed, "very close to one of the attack sites," Fish and Wildlife Capt. Patrick Foy told the San Francisco Chronicle.

DNA results later confirmed it was the same coyote responsible for several attacks since last summer.

California wildlife officials, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the police departments of Lafayette, Moraga

and Orinda helped in the 16-day search for the animal that included setting padded traps with bait.

Food truck owner admits to also selling guns

IL CHICAGO — The owner of a Chicago food truck admitted he illegally sold guns from his mobile eatery along with sandwiches piled high with salami, roast beef and turkey.

Terry Ferguson, 56, of Wilmette, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court to narcotics and gun-trafficking charges that included the 2015 sale of two dozen guns from the back of his truck known as "Chicago's finest Deli on Wheels."

The gun transaction was captured on video by an undercover agent for the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The guns, including 10 rifles, four shotguns and an array of pistols, were allegedly stolen by a Ferguson associate from a Chicago home.

Good Samaritans find, return kitten to couple

AK JUNEAU — A couple has been reunited with their 4-month-old kitten after it slipped out of their car on a ferry ride to Alaska.

Cassidy Timm and Blake Ward lost their cat within hours of leaving on a mainline ferry that began in Bellingham, Wash., and stopped throughout cities in Alaska, KTOO Public Media reported.

Their kitten, Spot, slipped through the sunroof of the couple's car, which was parked on the ferry. Timm and Ward

were moving back to Haines with all their pets, including Spot's mom and siblings.

A few days later, she was told Spot was in Juneau, about 6 miles from the ferry dock in the city. Another couple had heard Spot crying under their porch and took her in. They then posted on social media in order to locate her owner.

The couple gave her to volunteers, who donated a kennel and drove her to the airport. A regional airline even flew Spot home for free.

Woman hoping to find precious family heirloom

MN ST. PAUL — A 90-year-old Prior Lake woman whose prized family heirloom was mistakenly sold at an estate sale is trying to get it back.

It took Mary Lou Dosland almost two years to create "Winter Bird Feeder," a detailed needlepoint scene featuring a snow-covered bird feeder and more than a dozen birds. She then had the artwork, which came from a counted-cross-stitch kit by a Danish company named Eva Rosenstand, professionally framed.

Years later, she gave it to her son, who years after that believed he packed the piece with a box of belongings for his daughter. Instead, it was sold to someone who paid cash and could not be traced.

Dosland placed a classified ad in the St. Paul Pioneer Press that read: "Family heirloom mistakenly sold at estate sale two years ago. Handsome reward to return."

"No one has called yet, unfortunately," Dosland said.

Police find suspicious devices near church

NC BREVARD — Police in North Carolina evacuated local businesses after they found several suspected incendiary devices near a Baptist church and a county building.

Police in Brevard, a city of about 7,500 in western North Carolina, said they received a call for a report of the devices near the First Baptist Church of Brevard and the Transylvania County Community Services Building.

When officers responded, they found several small devices that had not detonated, police said in a news release.

The area was cordoned off and local establishments were evacuated as a precautionary measure, police said. There were no injuries.

University to restore 15th-century chapel

WI MILWAUKEE — Marquette University is working to restore a 15th-century chapel where Joan of Arc once prayed.

The St. Joan of Arc Chapel has stood on the Marquette campus since 1965, WTMJ-AM reported.

The structure was built in the early 1400s in the village of Chasse in France's Rhone Valley. Michael Maher, an associate professor of history at Marquette, said it was originally designed as a knight's burial chamber and Joan of Arc prayed in it before entering the Battle of Orleans.

— From wire reports

STARS  STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Stanford women take top overall seed

Associated Press

UConn is in its normal spot with a No. 1 seed for the women's NCAA Tournament. Familiar territory for Stanford and South Carolina, too.

It's a brand new day for North Carolina State. And the Huskies, while used to their position in the bracket, are facing some uncertainty after coach Geno Auriemma tested positive for the coronavirus.

N.C. State is a No. 1 seed for the first time, joining Stanford, South Carolina and Connecticut on the top lines for the San Antonio-themed regions for the women's tourney. The Cardinal earned the overall No. 1 when the field was revealed Monday night.

"The No. 1 seed is a great honor, obviously," N.C. State coach Wes Moore said. "Y'all know me, I'd rather just stayed a No. 2 and laid low."

Stanford coach Tara VanDerveer downplayed being the top choice.

"What I really tell our team

is seeds do not matter," she said. "It's not like you get any extra points when you show up at the gym."

VanDerveer said being healthy and excited to play was most important. Teams basically will be locked down in hotels except to head to practice or games as part of the stringent COVID-19 safety protocols.

Auriemma's Texas arrival will be delayed. He will remain in isolation for 10 days and can rejoin the team on March 24. The other members of UConn's travel party have tested negative for COVID-19.

Auriemma will miss the Huskies' opening game against High Point — one of four first-timers in the NAAs — and a potential second-round match-up against either Syracuse or South Dakota State.

"I'm an innocent bystander right now. I'm going to sit back and watch them do their thing," he said. "(Assistant coach Chris Dailey) is undefeated in tournament play. I

don't think you can get a coach who has a better record in the tournament than she does."

While the coronavirus caused many disruptions to the schedule throughout the regular season, it looks as if most of the teams in the field made it to the tournament healthy.

Stanford, which will open against Utah Valley, had quite the odyssey this season because of the coronavirus. It had to play on the road for nine weeks after Santa Clara County health officials announced they were prohibiting all contact sports in late November.

The Cardinal, who are looking for their third national championship, are the top seed in the Alamo region. The Hemisfair, Mercado and River Walk are the other region names.

For the past few years, earning one of the top 16 seeds would put a team at home in the tournament's first two rounds, but that's not the case this March. Every game will be

played in the San Antonio area because of the pandemic, with the last four rounds tipping off at the Alamodome.

This could be one of the most wide-open tournaments, with a dozen teams capable of winning the title. There were five No. 1 teams in The Associated Press women's basketball poll this year, including the Huskies, who finished the season at No. 1.

The national semifinals take place on April 2, and the championship game will be held April 4.

Tennessee continued its streak of making the NCAA Tournament all 39 years. Joining High Point as NCAA rookies are Stony Brook, Utah Valley and Bradley.

Notre Dame's run of 24 straight NCAA appearances came to an end. The Irish were one of the first four teams out of the tournament. They were joined just outside the field by Houston, DePaul and Oklahoma.

Six of top eight men's seeds are seeking first title

Associated Press

If you're tired of watching the same old powerhouses, this is an NCAA Tournament for you.

Duke, Kentucky and Louisville didn't qualify. UCLA, Michigan State and Syracuse barely did. North Carolina is a No. 8 seed.

The four No. 1 seeds are Gonzaga, Baylor, Illinois and Michigan. Those programs have combined for only one national championship — Michigan's in 1989. The last time the top four seeds had only one title between them was in 1990, when Michigan State, UNLV, Connecticut and Oklahoma were atop the regions. Out of that foursome, only Michigan State had won a championship prior to that year.

This year, six of the eight

teams on the top two seed lines are seeking a first national title. Ohio State is the only No. 2 seed that has already won one. You have to go all the way down to third-seeded Kansas before you'll find a team with multiple championships.

Here are a few more things to watch in this NCAA Tournament:

Chasing history

Gonzaga (26-0) is trying to become the first undefeated national champion since Indiana went 32-0 in 1976. Since then, four teams have entered the NCAA Tournament undefeated: Indiana State in 1979, UNLV in 1991, Wichita State in 2014 and Kentucky in 2015. Three of those reached the Final Four, but none

of them won it all.

But don't assume Gonzaga would have been better off losing during the regular season to take the pressure off. It's been even longer since a team won the national title with exactly one loss. The last team to do that was N.C. State (30-1) in 1974.

Weighing the numbers

The NET rankings raised some eyebrows this season. Colgate finished No. 9, but when it came to the tournament seedings, the Raiders were treated the way a Patriot League team is usually treated. They are a No. 14 seed.

Loyola Chicago is ranked 10th in the NET, but received a No. 8 seed.

"Colgate is a little bit of an out-

lier. You can tell by their seed we didn't base that off the NET," selection committee chairman Mitch Barnhart said. "I don't think there's a perfect metric out there. I think if everybody was looking for the perfect metric, you wouldn't have a committee that looked at it through the prism of different lenses."

New arrivals

Hartford and Grand Canyon, the two first-time participants in this tournament, have their work cut out for them. Hartford, which won the automatic bid from the America East Conference, is a No. 16 seed and will face Baylor in the first round. Grand Canyon, which won the WAC Tournament, is a No. 15 seed and takes on Iowa.

Source: Fitzpatrick to sign with Washington

Associated Press

Washington has agreed to sign veteran quarterback Ryan Fitzpatrick, according to a person with direct knowledge of the move.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity Tuesday because the deal cannot be official until the new league year starts Wednesday.

Fitzpatrick — or “FitzMagic” — gives Washington more experience at football’s most important position after it released Alex Smith. The team now has Fitzpatrick, journeyman-turned-playoff standout Taylor Heinicke and coach Ron Rivera favorite Kyle Allen under contract at quarterback.

Washington also has the 19th pick in the draft and could use one of its first few selections on a QB of the future. Fitzpatrick would be in the mix for the present on what’s expected to be a one-year deal.

Fitzpatrick is joining his ninth different NFL team at age 38 af-

ter stints with the St. Louis Rams, Cincinnati Bengals, Buffalo Bills, Tennessee Titans, Houston Texans, New York Jets, Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Miami Dolphins.

Broncos exercise option to re-sign LB Miller

The Denver Broncos have exercised star linebacker Von Miller’s 2021 option.

The move engages the final season of the six-year, \$114.5 million contract Miller signed in 2016 in the aftermath of his Super Bowl 50 MVP performance.

It also guarantees him \$7 million of his \$17.5 million base salary.

Winston returns to Saints with 1-year deal

The New Orleans Saints are bringing back quarterback Jameis Winston on a one-year contract.

The move announced by Saints general manager Mickey

Loomis comes on the heels of Drew Brees’ decision over the weekend to retire and provides Winston a chance to compete with Taysom Hill to be New Orleans’ next starter under center.

Pats focus on defense with four signings

The Patriots took a step back on defense last season. It’s prompted Bill Belichick to focus a lot of attention — and money — on that side of the ball at the unofficial start of free agency.

A person familiar with the deal said Monday the Patriots have agreed to sign edge rusher Matt Judon to a four-year, \$56 million deal — including \$32 million guaranteed — for the former Baltimore Ravens standout who totaled 15 ½ sacks in earning back-to-back Pro Bowl selections in 2019 and 2020.

New England also came to terms with free agent defensive tackle Davon Godchaux on a two-year, \$16 million deal with \$9 million guaranteed. Defen-

sive back Jalen Mills also is headed to Foxborough for four years and \$24 million. In addition, the Patriots announced defensive lineman Carl Davis also had re-signed for undisclosed terms.

Bucs re-sign Barrett, David, Gronkowski

Sackmaster Shaq Barrett, fellow standout linebacker Lavonte David and Rob Gronkowski will remain in Tampa Bay.

Just as he had done several times in New England, Tom Brady reworked his big-ticket contract last week to free up money in free agency. The Buccaneers used it to keep David, and on Monday, the first day of “legal tampering” before the NFL’s business year begins on Wednesday, the 28-year-old Barrett agreed to a four-year, \$72 million contract with \$36 million guaranteed, agent Drew Rosenhaus confirmed. Later in the day, Gronk agreed to return for his 11th season with Brady.

Indiana fires Miller after going 67-58 over 4 seasons

Associated Press

Indiana athletic director Scott Dolson fired coach Archie Miller after four mediocre seasons.

Miller was 67-58 with the Hoosiers. His teams never made the NCAA Tournament.

Miller’s \$10.3 million buyout was one of college basketball’s priciest but in a fiscal year where the COVID-19 pandemic cost the athletic department millions, Dolson says he raised enough money privately to pay for the coaching change.

In other college basketball news:

■ A former point guard sentenced to prison in 2019 for his role in a college basketball bribery scheme has a book coming out next year.

Merl Code’s “Black Market” will be published in March 2022.

Code, a Clemson point guard in the 1990s who later worked with Nike and Adidas, was among 10 individuals arrested in 2017 for their alleged plan to get top prospects to sign with managers who would handle their finances once they turned professional.

■ Iowa coach Fran McCaffery signed a four-year contract extension through 2027-28 on Monday after leading the eighth-ranked Hawkeyes to the Big Ten Tournament semifinals and their highest NCAA Tournament seeding since 1987.

The Hawkeyes are 21-8 and finished third in the Big Ten regular season at 14-6. They’ve been ranked in the top 15 every week this season and peaked at No. 5 last week. The team is a No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament and will play Grand Canyon on

Friday in Indianapolis.

McCaffery’s annual base salary of \$2.3 million for the next two seasons will remain unchanged.

■ DePaul fired coach Dave Leitao on Monday six years into his second tenure in another effort to lift a once-proud program.

The Blue Demons went 5-14 overall in a season that started about a month late because of COVID-19 issues. They finished last in the Big East for the fifth straight year at 2-13.

■ Minnesota fired Richard Pitino on Monday after the coach compiled a 54-96 regular-season record over eight years in the Big Ten and had only three conference finishes higher than 10th place.

■ Iowa State and men’s basketball coach Steve Prohm have agreed to part ways after one of

the worst seasons in the history of the program, athletic director Jamie Pollard announced.

The school said in a statement that Pollard and Prohm met in person Monday night and that Pollard would have additional comment Tuesday.

Brewers’ slugger Braun mulls retirement

Ryan Braun visited the Brewers’ spring training site Monday and said he hasn’t picked up a bat since the end of the 2020 season. The 2011 NL MVP became a free agent when the Brewers declined to exercise a \$15 million mutual option in his contract last October. “I’m strongly leaning in the direction of being done as an active player,” the 37-year-old Braun said.

Harden, Irving lead Nets past rival Knicks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Kyrie Irving scored 34 points, James Harden welcomed himself to New York's basketball rivalry with his 10th triple-double of the season, and the Brooklyn Nets beat the Knicks 117-112 on Monday night.

Harden finished with 21 points, 15 rebounds and 15 assists in his first game against the Knicks since arriving in Brooklyn two months ago and turning the Nets into one of the NBA's best teams.

The Nets agreed to the deal that brought Harden to Brooklyn on Jan. 13, playing short-handed that night at Madison Square Garden in a 116-109 victory over the Knicks. That made them just 7-6, but they are 20-7 since Harden's arrival, including 19-4 when at least two of their three superstars play.

Jeff Green scored 20 points as the Nets won for the 13th time in 14 games, even with Kevin Durant sitting out the last 12 of them with a strained left hamstring.

Julius Randle had 33 points, 12 rebounds and six assists for the Knicks.

Bucks 133, Wizards 122: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 31 points, 15 rebounds and 10 assists for his third consecutive triple-double to lead Milwaukee past Washington for its fourth consecutive victory.

The Bucks pulled away late after letting a 26-point third-quarter lead slip to five midway through the fourth.

Bradley Beal led the Wizards with 37 points after sitting out Saturday to rest a sore left knee. Russell Westbrook had 23 points and a season-high 17 assists. Washington has lost four in a row.

Lakers 128, Warriors 97: LeBron James had a triple-double with 22 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds, leading injury-depleted Los Angeles to a win at Golden State.

Montrezl Harrell backed up James' fourth triple-double of the season by scoring 27 points off the bench on 11-of-14 shooting as the Lakers won the season series with Golden State.

Clippers 109, Mavericks 99: Kawhi Leonard scored 22 points, Marcus Morris Sr. added 14 in a rare start and Los Angeles won at Dallas.

Luka Doncic had 25 points, 16 assists and 10 rebounds for the Mavs, and Kristaps Porzingis scored 22 points.

Paul George scored 15 as seven Clippers finished in double figures. Ivica Zubac had 15 points and 11 rebounds. Nicolas Batum, who sat while Morris made his third start of the season, had a couple of big three-pointers and scored 14. Reggie Jackson and Patrick Patterson scored

12 apiece.

Hornets 122, Kings 116: Terry Rozier scored 26 points, Gordon Hayward added 25 and Charlotte overcame a 15-point deficit in the second half and extended its winning streak to four games with a victory over visiting Sacramento.

De'Aaron Fox led the Kings with 29 points, while Richaun Holmes had 17 points and 15 rebounds.

The Hornets (20-18) trailed the entire way until Hayward came up with the play of the game — a steal and thunderous dunk — with 1:33 left.

Spurs 109, Pistons 99: Dejounte Murray had 19 points and 10 rebounds to lead a balanced attack as San Antonio won at Detroit.

The Pistons' leading scorer, Jeremi Grant, left the game in the third quarter after falling hard on his hip while trying to drive between Drew Eubanks and Rudy Gay.

Nuggets 121, Pacers 106: Nikola Jokic notched his 35th double-double with 32 points and 14 rebounds, leading host Denver over travel-weary Indiana.

Michael Porter Jr. and Will Barton each scored 20 points for the Nuggets.

Suns 122, Grizzlies 99: Devin Booker scored 27 points, Chris Paul added 18 and host Phoenix rolled past Memphis.

Pens beat Bruins, Malkin reaches 1,100th point

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Evgeni Malkin scored on a power play for his 1,100th career point, leading the Pittsburgh Penguins to a 4-1 defeat of the Boston Bruins on Monday.

Malkin is the third Russian-born player to reach 1,100 points in the NHL, joining Alex Ovechkin and Sergei Fedorov. Malkin has eight goals on the season and also had an assist while extending his point streak to eight games.

Tristan Jarry made a season-high 42 saves in the Penguins' sixth straight win. Sidney Crosby had a goal and two assists, and Jake Guentzel and Evan Rodrigues also scored.

Matt Grzelcyk scored a power-play goal for the Bruins, who

have four wins in their last 13 games. Jaroslav Halak made 22 saves in his fourth straight start.

Flyers 5, Rangers 4 (OT): Jakub Voracek scored 3:47 into overtime, sending visiting Philadelphia to the win.

Claude Giroux, Joel Farabee and Ivan Provorov each had a goal and an assist, and James van Riemsdyk also scored for the Flyers, who won for the third time in eight games. Voracek also had two assists, and Carter Hart finished with 20 saves.

Panthers 6, Blackhawks 3: Aleksander Barkov scored a tie-breaking short-handed goal in the third period, sending host Florida to its fourth consecutive win.

Barkov poked in a loose puck from right in front with 6:34 left.

It was the Panthers' first short-handed goal this season.

Predators 4, Lightning 1: Calle Jarnkrok had a short-handed goal and had three assists, helping Nashville to the road win.

Pekka Rinne stopped 38 shots and picked up his 14th career assist in the Predators' first victory against Tampa Bay in six meetings this season. Mattias Ekholm had a goal and an assist, and Eeli Tolvanen and Viktor Arvidsson also scored.

Golden Knights 2, Sharks 1: Max Pacioretty and Mark Stone each had a goal and an assist to help Vegas beat visiting San Jose.

Marc-Andre Fleury, making his 16th start in 17 games, finished with 23 saves to improve to 14-5-0 this season.

Flames 4, Oilers 3: Elias Lind-

holm, Dillon Dube and Andrew Mangiapane each had a goal and an assist, and host Calgary earned its third straight win under new coach Darryl Sutter.

Noah Hanifin also scored, Mikael Backlund had two assists and Jacob Markstrom stopped 28 shots. Sutter replaced Geoff Ward, who was fired March 4.

Canadiens 4, Jets 2: Tyler Tofoli had two goals for visiting Montreal, including an empty-netter in the final minute.

Canucks 3, Senators 2 (OT): J.T. Miller scored in overtime for visiting Vancouver, and Thatcher Demko made 44 saves.

Miller got his eighth of the season at 1:40. Jayce Hawryluk and Tanner Pearson scored in regulation for the Canucks.