

Invasion reorders West's calculations

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Not long after winding down 20 years of war, President Joe Biden now finds the United States entrenched in a conflict in Ukraine, even without sending in U.S. troops, that could have a more far-reaching effect on a larger cross section of Americans than Afghanistan or Iraq ever did.

Fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq cost the lives of more than 6,900 U.S. troops and more than 7,500 U.S. contractors, and American spending topped \$2.3 trillion. But those wars had little impact on how the vast majority of Americans lived their daily lives. It was a 20-year period where people experienced both the Great Recession and the longest U.S. economic expansion, touchstones that were little influenced by the two grinding conflicts.

Now, five months after the end of the war in Afghanistan, the

longest in U.S. history, Americans are entering complicated terrain with the Russian invasion in Ukraine. While Biden promises there will be no American forces on the ground there, he acknowledged the war waged by Russian President Vladimir Putin could have real impact on Americans' pocketbooks.

"A Russian dictator, invading a foreign country, has costs around the world," Biden told Americans in his State of the Union address on Tuesday night.

The financial tumult of the most significant military campaign in Europe since World War II is already being felt.

This past week saw U.S. crude oil prices surge about 13% to roughly \$113 per barrel and the cost of natural gas reached a record in Europe as the war stoked market fears about a supply shock.

Key stock market indices, vola-

tile for weeks, saw further losses as French President Emmanuel Macron warned "the worst is yet to come" after a lengthy phone call on Thursday with Putin.

Yet, in Washington, as well as in European capitals, there are signs of growing resolve to confront Putin and of a willingness to take on some economic pain.

It's a markedly different tone than in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks that spurred the Afghanistan War. Then-President George W. Bush implored Americans then to "stand against terror by going back to work" and suggested Americans "get down to Disney World" as his administration tried to restore faith in the U.S. airline industry. Over the next 20 years, U.S. service members and their families would largely carry the burden.

In Washington, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif, got ahead of the White House in pushing for

sanctions directly targeting Russia's energy sector. The administration has been hesitant to target Russian oil out of concern such a move would also imperil the economies of the U.S. and Western allies.

"Ban it," Pelosi said of Russian oil imports.

Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, introduced a bipartisan bill to do just that. The legislation would halt Russian oil imports to the U.S. by declaring a national emergency, something Biden could also do on his own.

"If there was a poll being taken and they say, 'Joe, would you support 10 cents more a gallon for the people of Ukraine?' ... I would gladly," Manchin said.

Whether that view is widely held in the U.S. could go a long way to determine if Biden's popularity will rebound after sinking to dismal levels.

Ukraine's military adapts after enduring initial push

The Washington Post

An outgunned but resilient Ukrainian military is adopting a two-prong strategy in the face of a flawed but fierce Russian assault, relying on hit-and-run tactics and the fortification of major cities as President Vladimir Putin's campaign enters a more perilous phase, military experts said.

The odds remain stacked against Ukraine, even as it exceeds Western intelligence assessments that had predicted Kyiv, the capital, would fall within days. Russian forces have begun employing siege tactics, aiming to flatten civilian infrastructure and exact maximum puni-

shment for Ukrainian resistance. While Russia has mostly failed, so far, to seize major cities and effectively supply its soldiers with food and fuel, the Pentagon believes it is probable that Russia will regroup and press its massive advantage in firepower.

John Spencer, a retired Army officer who studies urban warfare for the Madison Policy Forum, said Ukraine's top objective is to make the war as bloody as possible for Russia. Giving up secondary cities may become necessary to allow the government to endure in the capital as long as possible, he said.

"Not losing is winning in this case," Spencer said. "The Ukrainian strategy is not to lose."

Russia has bombarded Kyiv mostly with artillery and other long-range weapons, as a 40-mile convoy of tanks and other combat vehicles effectively remains stalled about 15 miles north of the capital and bogged down with logistical setbacks, a senior U.S. defense official told reporters Friday on the condition of anonymity, citing ground rules established by the Pentagon.

In other parts of the country, however, Russia's advances are more significant. In the northeastern city of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest, Russian forces have reached the outskirts after pounding neighborhoods with missiles, rockets and other weapons for days, the senior U.S.

defense official said.

In the south, Putin's forces also have advanced on the strategically important port city of Mariupol. Continued success would allow the Russians to look even farther west and assault Odesa, a port city of nearly 1 million people, possibly both by land and an amphibious assault by naval forces on ships in the Black Sea.

Ukrainian officials have indicated that after surviving the initial invasion, they intend to launch a counteroffensive. That is likely to favor armed ambushes rather than a major, open assault on the Russian military, said Douglas London, a retired senior CIA officer and an analyst at the Middle East Institute.

GAO denies bid protests over shipping contract

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The Defense Department is free to move ahead with its effort to streamline the global system of shipping household goods after a federal agency on Thursday denied bid protests by a pair of firms over the \$6.2 billion contract.

The U.S. Transportation Command in November awarded the hefty contract to Houston-based HomeSafe Alliance LLC for what the government describes as “complete door-to-door” transportation of household goods for the military, Coast Guard and federal employees.

A few weeks later, American Roll-On Roll-Off Carrier Group and Connected Global Solutions — both unsuccessful bidders in the solicitation — appealed the award to the Government Accountability Office.

The GAO announced on Thursday that it had denied their appeals. It has not yet issued written decisions outlining the basis for the denials.

HomeSafe will begin a transition period lasting through December during which it will develop and test interfaces with the fed-

eral government’s information technology system as well as establish customer service capabilities, the Transportation Command said in a news release Friday.

HomeSafe hailed the GAO’s decision in a statement Thursday, saying the firm would “dramatically improve the relocation experience for our service members, civilians and their families.”

American Roll-On said it was “disappointed” about the decision.

“We will review the GAO decision and evaluate next steps, including any further legal action,” the company said in a news release Thursday.

The protest denial is just the latest twist in the awarding of a contract for moving household goods.

American Roll-On Roll-Off Carrier Group was originally awarded the contract in April 2020.

HomeSafe and Connected Global Solutions appealed the award to the GAO, which sustained their protest in October 2020.

As a result, the government once again solicited bids and late last year selected HomeSafe, prompting the latest protest by American Roll-On and Connected Global.

Masks may soon be optional for Europe DODEA

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — For the first time in nearly two years, students at U.S. military bases in Europe may soon have the option of attending school without wearing a face mask.

“On installations where the command has deemed it appropriate and safe — mask use in DODEA schools will be optional until further notice,” Michelle Howard-Braham, the Department of Defense Education Activity-Europe director, said in a letter Friday to school families.

On Friday, Ramstein Air Base announced it would make masks optional for most people at its DODEA schools beginning March 21, in line with policies made by the German state of Rheinland-Pfalz. Anyone older than age 6 who is showing symptoms or whose close contacts have COVID-19 must continue to wear masks, base officials said.

Staff members and students were expected to find out by Monday what the policy would be at their schools, DODEA-Europe spokesman Stephen Smith said.

Base commanders would make the final determination in consultation with public health agencies, he said.

If a school adopts an optional face mask policy indoors, it will apply to all students and staff, regardless of vaccination status, Smith said.

Commanders and public health experts are reviewing COVID-19 transmission rates in their communities, Howard-Braham said in her letter. Host nation guidance will also be taken into consideration, “particularly when it comes to the need for mask use during travel to and from school and events,” she said.

Smith said schools will continue to maintain social distancing where possible, and follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention health protocols.

Some 25,000 military kids in DODEA-Europe have been wearing masks at school since the start of the 2020-21 school year, when most schools reopened their doors.

But the CDC last month revised its public indoor mask guidelines, relaxing mandatory mask wear in communities where hospitalizations remain low.

Navy details damage to submarine that struck underwater mountain

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The fast-attack submarine USS Connecticut, which struck an underwater mountain in October, sustained damage to its ballast tanks and sonar sphere, according to a Navy evaluation of the vessel in drydock.

The service is conducting a “thorough assessment of damage” to the Connecticut at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Wash., where it arrived on Feb. 8., Submarine Force U.S. Pacific spokeswoman Cmdr. Cindy Fields told Stars and Stripes in an email Friday.

“The initial assessment shows damage to forward main ballast tanks, the sonar sphere,

and the need to replace the sonar dome,” she said. “Neither the pressure hull nor the nuclear propulsion plant suffered damage.”

Despite the damage, the Connecticut made it to Guam from somewhere in the Indo-Pacific region under its own power, but on the surface. From Guam, it traveled to San Diego in December entirely on the surface across the Pacific.

Fields said that “based on the damage, there was no risk to the submarine’s buoyancy or stability.”

The anticipated length and cost to make repairs won’t be available until the Navy completes a detailed assessment of the submarine, Fields wrote in her email.

US, Japan display power over Pacific

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND MARI HIGA
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Air Force showcased the strength of its fighter and bomber fleets in Japan the past two weeks as tensions increased around the globe.

A pair of F-35A Lightning IIs from Alaska and two B-52 Stratofortresses from Louisiana joined Japanese F-15 fighters in the skies “near Japan” on Feb. 24 to practice “critical warfighting capabilities,” according to an email to Stars and Stripes from Pacific Air Forces and a statement from the Japan Air Self-Defense Force.

The 18th Wing at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa followed those drills with a show of force Wednesday by nearly 30 fighter jets, tankers and helicopters.

The unrelated exercises are “routine,” according to PACAF and 18th Wing statements, but one expert on Pacific military affairs believes the uptick in activity is a message to China as the world’s attention is fixed on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

“The U.S. is sending a message to China that the security of the Asia-Pacific is not forgotten,” Toshiyuki Shikata, a former lieutenant general in the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday.

Chinese President Xi Jinping is looking toward this fall’s Communist Party National Congress, where he wants to cement his place as China’s leader, Shikata said.

“He wants to be Mao Zedong,” Shikata said. “The first thing he wants to do after the National Congress is to make some

move on Taiwan. The U.S. is aware of that.”

Nothing about the exercises and the February deployments of Air Force and Japanese stealth fighters to Okinawa are routine, Shikata said.

F-35s from Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, deployed to Kadena on Feb. 20 for “integrated air operations” with the Japanese F-35s, PACAF said at the time.

Earlier in February, four B-52s and more than 220 airmen arrived on Guam from Barksdale Air Force Base, La., PACAF said Feb. 15. The bomber task force focused on refining joint command-and-control abilities, “global reach” and working together, PACAF said Thursday. The exercise was “not in direct response to another country’s actions.”

New Marine Corps regiment prepares to meet rising China

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS BASE HAWAII — The Marine Corps on Thursday cased the colors of a regiment that traces its lineage to World War I, then redesignated it as a unit specializing in expeditionary warfare with an eye on China.

In a ceremony abounding with pomp and parading at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, 3rd Marine Regiment was redesignated 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment, an evolution at the heart of the Marine Corps’ Force Design 2030 modernization effort.

“Force Design is bringing many changes to our formations,” regimental commander Col. Timothy Brady Jr. told the audience.

“We have to modernize and adapt to be successful in the operating environment of the future where adversaries’ technologies and capabilities will certainly continue to advance,” he said.

“But there are some things that will not change. The Marine Corps will continue to be our nation’s premier expeditionary force, and readiness and the individual Marines and sailors will continue to be the most important elements of our Corps.”

Brady and fellow keynote speaker Gen. Eric Smith, the assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, touted the capabilities that the littoral regiment is expected to attain in full as

it continues to evolve over the next couple years.

“The [littoral regiment] will be optimized for conducting expeditionary advanced base operations in support of the joint force and with our allies and partners in contested, austere and distributed maritime environments,” Brady said.

“It will support our ability to seize and defend key maritime terrain,” he said. “It will integrate with and expand joint networks and sensors in command-and-control capabilities. It will support maritime domain awareness and provide long-range precision fires in support of naval operations.”

The concept behind the littoral regiment “brings with it a purpose-built formation ready to deploy and fight tonight,” Smith said.

The 3rd Littoral Regiment is the first of three regiments the Marine Corps plans to form in the Pacific and are “specialized to deal with the rising threat of China,” Smith told reporters during a conference call Monday.

While they extolled the future of the redesignated regiment, both speakers lauded the history upon which the littoral regiment builds.

“Please don’t ever mistake change for walking away from our roots,” Smith said. “That’s not happening. Everything transfers from the 3rd Marines.”

S. Korean drone hits water tower at US outpost

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — A small South Korean military drone crashed into and left minor fire damage atop a water tower at a U.S. military outpost in Busan, according to a South Korean military spokesman.

The collision occurred around 9:14 a.m. Thursday at the Busan Storage Center, a small installation in the southern coastal city, a spokesman said under the customary condition of anonymity.

Sgt. 1st Class Adam Ross, spokesman for the 19th Expeditionary Sustainment Command, confirmed the incident to Stars and Stripes by phone Friday and said no injuries were reported. Damage to the water tower is cosmetic, he added.

Local fire crews extinguished the flames in 20 minutes, a Busan Fire Department official told Stars and Stripes by phone Friday. He said “sparks were flying up” when first responders arrived.

The South Korean military spokesman said the drone was operated using a hydrogen fuel cell. It appeared to be a small, multirotor variant, based on images taken at the scene Thursday by a soldier with the sustainment command that were shared with Stars and Stripes.

Harris marks 'Bloody Sunday' in Ala.

Associated Press

SELMA, Ala. — Vice President Kamala Harris visited Alabama on Sunday as the nation marked a defining moment in the fight for the right to vote, a trip that came as congressional efforts to restore the landmark 1965 Voting Rights Act have faltered.

Harris was traveling to Selma, Ala., to commemorate the 57th anniversary of "Bloody Sunday," the day in 1965 when white state troopers attacked Black voting rights marchers attempting to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The na-

tion's first female vice president — as well as the first African American and Indian American in the role — spoke at the site often referred to as hallowed ground in the fight for voting rights for minority citizens.

State troopers on March 7, 1965, beat and tear-gassed peaceful demonstrators, including young activist John Lewis, who later became a longtime Georgia congressman. The images of the violence shocked a nation and helped galvanize support for passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Her visit to the city that served as the cradle of the Voting Rights Act came as Democrats unsuccessfully tried to update the landmark law and pass additional measures to make it more convenient for people to vote.

The sweeping legislation called the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act would restore the preclearance requirement and create nationwide standards for how elections operate — such as making Election Day a national holiday and allowing early voting nationwide — and establish rules for

redistricting criteria.

The annual Bloody Sunday remembrance has become a regular stop for politicians to pay homage to the foot soldiers of the civil rights movement and to make calls for action.

Harris was to visit with civil rights leaders before speaking at the foot of the bridge. The bridge, named for a Confederate general and reputed Ku Klux Klan leader, has become an enduring symbol of the civil rights movement.

Harris also planned to take part in the annual event's symbolic march across the bridge.

Central Iowa hit by tornado; several dead

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — Six people were killed Saturday when a tornado swept through central Iowa, damaging buildings and knocking down trees and power lines, authorities said.

Emergency management officials in Madison County said four were injured in addition to those killed when the tornado touched down in the area southwest of Des Moines at about 4:30 p.m. Among those killed were children and adults.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds issued a disaster proclamation for

the county, which allows state resources to be used to assist with response and recovery efforts.

"Our hearts go out to all those affected by the deadly storms that tore through our state today," Reynolds said. "Our hearts ache during this time, but I know Iowans will step up and come together to help in this time of need — they already are."

Madison County Emergency Management Director Diogenes Ayala said 25 to 30 homes were badly damaged by the tornado.

"This is the worst anyone has seen in a very long time," he said.

Officials didn't identify those killed, but said they were not all in the same location.

Wendy Burkett told The Des Moines Register she and two of her three daughters were in their house Saturday afternoon when her husband, Tony, called her from a nearby shed where he was working and alerted her about a tornado warning.

They hurried with their daughters to their basement as the tornado roared by within seconds.

But within about a minute, the tornado passed by, and while the family was unhurt, their home was in ruins amid debris all around, even in the trees.

The National Weather Service in Des Moines tweeted later Saturday that initial photos and videos from the damage around the community of Winterset suggested it was at least an EF-3 tornado, capable of causing severe damage, on the Enhanced Fujita scale. It said weather service teams would investigate the damage Sunday and further assess a potential rating.

N. Korea confirms new tests for spy satellite

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea performed data transmission and other key tests needed to develop a spy satellite, state media said Sunday, in the second such tests in about a week, indicating the country intends to conduct a prohibited long-range rocket launch soon.

The moves come as North Korea has been carrying out a

spate of ballistic missile launches — including one detected by its neighbors Saturday — in what experts have called an attempt to add new weapons systems to its arsenal and pressure the United States into making concessions amid stalled diplomacy.

On Sunday, the North's Korean Central News Agency said it conducted "another important test" the previous day

under its plan to develop a reconnaissance satellite. It said authorities tested the satellite's data transmission, reception and ground-based control systems.

Outside experts believe North Korea fired a ballistic missile carrying a camera to perform the tests described in the KCNA report. Last Monday, North Korea said it tested a camera designed to be

placed on a reconnaissance satellite and released space-based photos of Earth, a day after its rivals said it conducted a ballistic missile launch.

It's unclear if North Korea has developed a sufficiently capable camera to be installed on a spy satellite, as the satellite photos the country released last Monday didn't include high-resolution imagery.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Teen had bleach at school to make mustard gas

MD URBANA — A western Maryland teen brought bleach to school as part of a plan to make mustard gas there, officials said.

The Frederick County Sheriff's Office said a 14-year-old Urbana High School student watched a TikTok video on how to make mustard gas, then shared it on Snapchat, indicating that he planned to make mustard gas at school, news outlets reported.

The school was evacuated after staff alerted the school resource officer to the threat and said a student brought a potentially hazardous material into the building, the sheriff's office said.

The potentially hazardous material found with the student in his backpack was determined to be bleach, the sheriff's office said. No other ingredients needed to make mustard gas were found, sheriff's office spokesman Todd Wivell said.

Suburban home is free, if you can move it

IL ELGIN — A mid-century modern home in suburban Chicago is being offered for free to anyone willing to move it to a new location before it's scheduled to be demolished.

At least one person may be seriously interested in the 2,300-square-foot home on Kane County property recently annexed by the city of Elgin, the Chicago Sun-Times reported.

But moving the home is no small task. The weight of the house, which is constructed of brick and metal, and nearby power lines make it tough to re-

locate. Julia Thavong, preservation planner for the Kane County Development Department, said the cost to complete the relocation is about \$500,000.

"So, not for the faint of heart," Thavong said.

The home is one of six expected to be leveled for the redevelopment. But the developer agreed to wait until spring in case anyone wants to move the home, which was designed by local architect John Schmidtke.

VFW post needs more members or it will close

MI ONAWAY — A Veterans of Foreign Wars post in northern Michigan is in danger of closing because of a lack of active members.

The VFW in Onaway has only five members out of 70 who are regularly involved at Post 5857, Commander Robert Skinner told The Alpena News.

He said the district could take control of Post 5857 if eight board seats aren't filled.

"Some of the active members we do have are older and crippled up like myself and that makes it harder yet," Skinner said.

75-year-old accused of being fake police officer

MO KANSAS CITY — A 75-year-old Jackson County man faces charges for allegedly pretending to be a police officer and pulling over a driver.

KCTV-TV reported that the Missouri State Highway Patrol launched an investigation after a driver became suspicious after being pulled over. The driver told the patrol that after he passed another vehicle, that

driver began following him closely, flashed his headlights and activated emergency lights.

The alleged victim said the man took his driver's license and pretended to run a computer check. The alleged victim noted the license plate identifiers of the vehicle that pulled him over, which led to the arrest.

The suspect is not a police officer but worked decades ago for Kansas City police and the highway patrol.

Battery charge sought for teacher who hit student

IN ELKHART — A northern Indiana teacher accused of striking a student across the face was arrested on a preliminary charge of battery, authorities said.

Michael Hosinski, 61, of Osceola, was taken into custody on a preliminary charge of battery, the Elkhart County Sheriff's Office said.

A request for formal charges has been submitted to the prosecutor's office, the office said.

Baugo Community Schools had asked investigators to look into the case on Feb. 25 after Hosinski was captured on surveillance video slapping a student in the face hard enough to knock the student into a hallway wall at Jimtown High School. The student then fell to the floor as Hosinski tried to lead the student by the arm down the hallway.

Charity finds marijuana among donated goods

ND MINOT — Workers sorting through donations for the Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch in Minot made an

unexpected discovery recently.

And, the source of the donation may be even more surprising.

An individual handling a garbage bag of donations found what appeared to be marijuana.

The marijuana was traced to the Berthold Police Department, KXNews reported.

Berthold Police Chief Al Schmidt said his department takes donations of clothes, blankets and other items to the Minot ranch. A recently closed case involved marijuana, and the evidence was set out to be destroyed, he said.

"What we pretty positively believe happened is that when the donations were put into the truck, that marijuana that was supposed to be destroyed was inadvertently placed in there with them," said Schmidt. "Which is an unfortunate accident."

Aquarium to set free group of 11 sea turtles

MS GULFPORT — The Mississippi Aquarium's first group of sea turtles to recover from New England's most recent cold-stunning season will soon be swimming free.

The aquarium plans to release 11 Kemp's ridleys — the world's smallest sea turtle and the most endangered species regularly found in U.S. waters.

The turtles being released on Friday were among dozens sent to the aquarium in late 2021 by New England Aquarium in Boston. They had washed ashore in Massachusetts after rapidly chilling water left them lethargic and ill.

— From wire reports

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Combine will help clear battle for No. 1

Associated Press

Kayvon Thibodeaux looked like a lock to be this year's top overall selection in the NFL Draft — until Aidan Hutchinson played his way into the conversation.

Now, with less than eight weeks until draft night, offensive linemen Ikem "Ickey" Ekwonu and Evan Neal are in the debate as well.

This four-man race to the top has become a hot topic at this week's annual scouting combine and has rekindled a familiar question: Who's No. 1? With no quarterbacks likely to be selected right away, the guys in the trenches are the favorites.

"You have to take the player you think is the best fit for the organization and makes the biggest difference," Jacksonville Jaguars general manager Trent Baalke said earlier this week in Indianapolis. "If that's an offensive tackle, you do it. If it's an edge rusher, you do it. This draft has a lot of unique players. There may not be that clear No. 1, but there are a lot of good football players at the top."

Baalke's job is to sort it all out in a draft that comes with several unique features.

First off, Baalke is drafting first for the second straight year; no team other than Cleveland has held that distinction since 1988. The Browns picked No. 1 in 1999-2000 and 2017-18.

Plus, the Jags already have their franchise quarterback after taking Trevor Lawrence last year. Lawrence's presence presumably gives Baalke the option of adding either a coveted pass-rushing cornerstone, a massive pass protector who can keep Lawrence upright and healthy for years to come, or a trade that could fill multiple holes.

The one seemingly virtual certainty: A

seven-year run of quarterbacks going first or second will end. None is likely to even make the conversation.

Until recently, Thibodeaux, the All-American out of Oregon, appeared to be the odds-on favorite. He had seven sacks last season despite missing 2½ games with a sprained ankle that slowed him through some other games. But with his stock apparently waning amid questions about his consistency from play to play, Thibodeaux went on the offensive Friday.

"I can't really compare it to other guys and what they do because I know that I have great teams that I went up against, and I had a lot of great opportunities to show what I can do," he said, describing his aggressive style.

If Thibodeaux's slide continues, Hutchinson could emerge on top.

The former Michigan star broke the school's single-season record with 14 sacks, led the Wolverines to a Big Ten title and their first playoff appearance while becoming the third defensive player to finish as the Heisman Trophy runner-up. He did it all after recovering from a fractured right ankle that ended his 2020 season. Just don't expect Hutchinson to make the pitch.

"I've been playing football for a long time, so I know what pressure is, I know the type of player I am and that calms me a little bit," he said. "I think we're all trying to be the best players we can be, and whichever team picks us is going to get a good player."

The bigger surprise might be the recent emergence of Ekwonu and Neal, though it certainly makes sense for Jacksonville after the Jags allowed 32 sacks and Lawrence finished near the bottom of the league in passer rating (71.9).

It's not clear yet which player is the best

overall lineman.

Ekwonu got his nickname from a former coach who thought he looked like former Bengals running back Ickey Woods. Last season, Ekwonu was an All-American and the ACC offensive lineman of the year.

He's the son of a doctor who played college basketball, a mother who ran high school track and at 6-foot-4, 310 pounds, seems to have combined the best of both worlds. Only two North Carolina State players have gone No. 1 overall: DE Mario Williams to the Houston Texans in 2006 and QB Roman Gabriel to the Oakland Raiders in the 1962 AFL draft.

"I wouldn't be shocked if I went No. 1 overall," Ekwonu said. "I feel like that is something I put the work in for. I feel like when the time comes, I would deserve it."

Neal checked in at 6-7½ and a svelte 337 pounds after arriving on campus at 385. The three-year starter at Alabama helped pave the way for two Heisman winners, two straight national championship appearances and a 2020 title.

But what really turned heads was his viral video of a box jump. And if Neal's name is called first on April 28, he would be the first Alabama player to earn the honor since Joe Namath was picked by the New York Jets in the 1965 AFL draft. Quarterback/halfback Harry Gilmer was taken No. 1 in 1948 and is the last member of the Tide selected first in an NFL draft.

Could the drought finally end with Neal? Stay tuned.

"You have a whole lot of Alabama players that were worthy of having the No. 1 spot, and for that to be me, that'd be extremely special," Neal said. "What prospect wouldn't want to go No. 1 overall?"

Heels top Duke, spoil Coach K's Cameron finale

Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — North Carolina ignored all the attention surrounding the final home game for retiring Hall of Fame coach Mike Krzyzewski, as well as the fourth-ranked Duke's emotionally charged, rowdier-than-usual crowd.

Instead, the rival Tar Heels walked into Cameron Indoor Stadium and fearlessly spoiled Coach K's perfect send-off to the postseason.

Armando Bacot scored 23 points and the Tar Heels shot 59% after halftime to upset the Blue Devils 94-81 on Saturday night, a major reversal from a blowout loss in the first meeting that raised questions about UNC's ability to compete against the nation's top teams.

First-year coach Hubert Davis had shrugged off the "pageantry" from Krzyzewski's final home game, saying the team needed to tune out all the extra

emotion and do one thing: compete.

"All week, we just talked about our competitive fight," Davis said, "that we had to do three things: We had to plant our feet, we had to stand our ground and we had to fight. ... I just felt like, as the game went on, we started to just gain more and more confidence."

In the final minutes, North Carolina (23-8, 15-5 Atlantic Coast Conference) was stretch-

ing the lead to double figures, hitting clinching free throws and leaving the "Cameron Cra-zies" in disbelief that Krzyzewski's final home game after 42 years at the helm of Duke would end this way.

The day had begun with more than 90 former Blue Devils players joining Krzyzewski on the court for a pregame photo and the coach with 1,196 career victories and five NCAA championships.

No. 13 Vols top No. 14 Razorbacks

Associated Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — In the first half, No. 13 Tennessee looked totally prepared for the SEC Tournament and beyond. After that, things got more precarious.

Freshman guard Zakai Zeigler, whose family was left homeless by a fire in New York City last weekend, made two key free throws in the final seconds to help the Volunteers hold off No. 14 Arkansas 78-74 Saturday.

Tennessee (23-7, 14-4 Southeastern Conference), which led by 24 points in the first half, wrapped up the No. 2 seed for the SEC tournament. The Volunteers went the final 6:04 without a basket, but still closed out a 16-0 mark at home this season.

"This league has been brutal," Tennessee coach Rick Barnes said. "Every night you go out there's a struggle. We can't keep throwing lifelines out there."

No. 6 Kansas 70, No. 21 Texas 63 (OT): David McCormack had 22 points and 10 rebounds and threw down the clinching dunk in overtime as the host Jayhawks clinched the No. 1 seed in the Big 12 Tournament.

Jalen Wilson had 17 points and 13 rebounds, and Christian Braun had 13 points and 11 boards as Kansas (25-6, 14-4) wrapped up at least a share of the regular-season conference title.

No. 2 Arizona 89, California 61: Oumar Ballo scored 16 points and Benedict Mathurin added 13 as the host Wildcats topped the Bears to become the first Pac-12 team to win 18 conference games.

Arizona (28-3, 18-2) finished undefeated at home, 17-0, in its first season under coach Tommy Lloyd. Pelle Larsson and Justin Kier

scored 13 points each.

No. 3 Baylor 75, Iowa State 68: James Akinjo scored 20 points and the host Bears clinched a share of the Big 12 title with a fifth consecutive win.

Akinjo put the Bears (26-5, 14-4) ahead to stay with a three-pointer with 3:37 left, followed seconds later by a driving reverse layup. They had fallen behind after building a 25-point lead in the game's first 12 minutes.

No. 5 Auburn 82, South Carolina 71: Jabari Smith scored 21 points and K.D. Johnson had 18 as the host Tigers topped the Gamecocks and won their fourth Southeastern Conference title.

Auburn (27-4, 15-3 SEC) celebrated on the court amid a flurry of orange and blue confetti. The team held at least a share of the SEC lead all season.

No. 7 Kentucky 71, Florida 63: Oscar Tshiebwe had 27 points and 15 rebounds for his 25th double-double of the season, as the visiting Wildcats secured the No. 3 seed in next week's Southeastern Conference Tournament.

Kentucky (25-6, 14-4 SEC) ended a two-game road skid in league play and won its fourth straight in Gainesville. They never trailed in this one, and Tshiebwe was a big reason why.

No. 8 Purdue 69, Indiana 67: Eric Hunter Jr. scored 17 points and Sasha Stefanovic added 15 to help the host Boilermakers rally past their archrival.

Zach Edey added 10 points and 11 rebounds as Purdue (25-6, 14-6 Big Ten) snapped a season-high, two-game losing streak.

No. 11 Villanova 78, Butler 59: Justin

Moore scored 16 points and Jermaine Samuels added 15 as the visiting Wildcats built a big early lead and handed the Bulldogs their fifth straight loss.

Oklahoma State 52, No. 12 Texas Tech 51: Bryce Thompson made a go-ahead 3-pointer with 19.4 seconds left as the host Cowboys eliminated the Red Raiders from the Big 12 title race.

Terrence Shannon missed a contested jumper just before the buzzer for Texas Tech, and Oklahoma State (15-15, 8-10) celebrated a win in its season finale. The Cowboys are banned from postseason play because of NCAA rules violations, so they can't play in the Big 12 Tournament next week.

No. 17 UCLA 75, No. 16 Southern California 68: Jaime Jaquez Jr. scored 27 points, and the host Bruins defeated the Trojans to claim the No. 2 seed in next week's Pac-12 Tournament.

No. 18 UConn 75, DePaul 68: Adama Sanogo scored a game-high 26 points as the host Huskies snapped the Blue Demons' three-game winning streak. Sanogo also had 11 rebounds, giving him his eighth double-double of the season.

No. 22 Murray State 71, Morehead State 67: Tevin Brown scored 23 points to lead the host Racers over the Eagles for their 20th consecutive victory, the Ohio Valley Conference tournament title and an automatic spot in the NCAA Tournament.

LSU 80, No. 25 Alabama 77 (OT): Tari Eason scored 20 points and had a key block that led to his go-ahead dunk with 38 seconds left in overtime as the host Tigers scored the final six points to escape.

LeBron leads Lakers past Warriors with 56 points

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — LeBron James scored a season-high 56 points, and the Los Angeles Lakers beat the Golden State Warriors 124-116 on Saturday night to snap a four-game losing streak.

"I felt pretty good with my game tonight, every part of the floor, and I was able to make a couple plays to help us win," said James.

He had his third-most points in a regular season game, finishing with at least 50 for the 13th

time. He had a career-best 61 for Miami against Charlotte in 2014.

James was 19-for-31 from the field, shaking off a blow to his right elbow in the first half. Russell Westbrook added 20 points, and Carmelo Anthony had 14.

Mavericks 114, Kings 113: Dorian Finney-Smith hit a three-pointer from the right corner with 3.3 seconds left and host Dallas, playing without All-Star guard Luka Doncic, overcame a 19-point deficit for the second time this week to beat Sacramento.

Doncic was listed on the injury report as having a left toe sprain.

Heat 99, 76ers 82: Tyler Herro and Jimmy Butler each scored 21 points, and host Miami pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat Philadelphia,

Gabe Vincent scored 16 points and Caleb Martin added 14 for the Heat, who are 11-2 in their last 13 games.

Hornets 123, Spurs 117: Terry Rozier scored 31 points and host Charlotte beat San Antonio, leaving Spurs coach

Gregg Popovich a victory short of the tying the all-time NBA record for most wins by a head coach.

Grizzlies 124, Magic 96: Ja Morant had 25 points and seven assists, Desmond Bane scored 24 points on 10-for-15 shooting and host Memphis routed Orlando.

Timberwolves 135, Trail Blazers 121: Karl-Anthony Towns had 36 points and 15 rebounds, and host Minnesota beat short-handed Portland for its fourth straight win.

Ovechkin scores 764th, Caps beat Kraken

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — When Alex Ovechkin lost the puck, Tom Wilson picked it up and finished off a highlight goal reminiscent of his younger days as an elite scorer.

Saturday night provided another reminder about how Ovechkin has been one for a long time — and he isn't slowing down.

Ovechkin took another step toward tying Jaromir Jagr for third place on the NHL career goals list, picked up two assists for a three-point game and led the Washington Capitals past the Seattle Kraken 5-2 for their second consecutive win on the heels of three consecutive losses.

Washington's longtime captain scored on the power play for a second consecutive game, his 34th goal of the season and 764th of his career. He's two back of tying Jagr, one of only two players between him and Wayne Gretzky.

"It's just nonstop," said Wilson, who scored his 18th goal of the season. "He just has a drive that I've never seen before, and it shows in his game. He just keeps going, and he's a machine. When he's playing like that, you just try and complement him any way he can and get him the puck because he's a force to be reckoned with."

The Caps have now won two in a row at home after losing their previous six games there.

Coyotes 8, Senators 5: Nick Schmaltz scored twice and had five assists for a franchise-record seven points as host Arizona recovered from a five-goal rally by Ottawa.

Schmaltz helped set up four straight goals in the third period after the Coyotes fell behind. Carson Keller scored twice, including a goal that made it 5-all, and Lawson Crouse put Arizona ahead with a power-play tally.

Playing his second NHL game, Coyotes rookie Matias Maccelli scored his first career goal to give Arizona a 4-0 lead midway through the second period. Parker Kelly then scored twice as the Senators got five goals in little over six minutes to go ahead 5-4 early in the third period.

The Coyotes, who beat NHL points leader Colorado on Friday, have won two in a row.

Predators 8, Sharks 0: Juuse Saros made 20 saves for his third shutout of the season, Matt Duchene scored twice and Nashville handed San Jose its most lopsided shutout loss at the Shark Tank.

Matt Luff and Michael McCarron also scored two goals apiece for the Predators. Yakov Trenin and Mikael Granlund also scored, and Roman Josi had four assists to help Nashville win for the third time in nine games.

Bruins 5, Blue Jackets 4 (SO): David Pastrnak scored in the shootout and had an assist to lift surging Boston to a win at Columbus.

The Bruins have won seven of eight and are three points ahead of Washington for the top wild card and seventh seed in the Eastern Conference playoffs. Boston also is two points behind third-place Toronto in the Atlantic Division.

Flames 4, Avalanche 3 (OT): Johnny

Gaudreau scored 37 seconds into overtime, Elias Lindholm had two goals and Calgary won at Colorado in a matchup between two of the Western Conference's top teams.

Gaudreau took a pass off the boards from Lindholm and beat Pavel Francouz to the glove side for the winner.

Flyers 4, Blackhawks 3: Cam Atkinson had two goals and an assist, Joel Farabee chipped in three assists and host Philadelphia edged Chicago.

Oskar Lindblom and Derick Brassard also scored for the Flyers, who won for just the fourth time in the last 25 games while continuing their home-ice dominance of the Blackhawks. Philadelphia has won 16 straight regular-season contests at home against the Blackhawks, dating back to Nov. 9, 1996.

Islanders 2, Blues 1: Oliver Wahlstrom and Brock Nelson each scored, Ilya Sorokin made 27 saves and host New York held on to beat St. Louis.

Panthers 6, Red Wings 2: Anton Lundell scored twice, Aleksander Barkov had three assists and Florida beat Detroit to finish a five-game homestand 2-3-0.

Canucks 6, Maple Leafs 4: Alex Chiasson had the go-ahead score in Vancouver's three-goal third period, Thatcher Demko made 34 saves and the Canucks rallied to win at Toronto.

Canadiens 5, Oilers 2: Nick Suzuki scored the winner and added two assists as Montreal won at Edmonton for its seventh victory in its past eight games.

MLB talks resume; Scherzer likes playoff 'ghost win'

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Max Scherzer favors a radical reworking of the playoffs, one that would have the higher seed in the first round of an expanded postseason start a best-of-five series with a 1-0 lead.

Major League Baseball and locked-out players, who resumed talks Sunday, both would expand the postseason from 10 teams — that's been the field since 2012, other than the 16 teams in the pandemic-shortened 2020 season.

The union prefers 12 and the parties appear headed toward that number, but Scherzer said players would consider 14 if

clubs agree to the "ghost win" format.

Under MLB's 14-team plan, the division winner with the best regular-season record in each league would get a bye and advance directly to the Division Series. The two other division winners would choose their opponents and be at home for an entire best-of-three round.

The division winner with the second-best record would choose its opponent from among the three lowest-seeded wild-card teams. The division winner with the third-best record would then get to pick from among the remaining two wild cards. The

top wild card would face whichever team is left over after the division winners make their choices and also play all games at home.

Selections would be televised. "We felt like competition could be eroded in that scenario, and we had specific examples of different players who spoke up that highlighted that specifically," Scherzer said after Tuesday's breakdown in labor talks.

"Continuing on from those division winners down, we didn't see the proper incentive for those other two division winners," the New York Mets pitcher added. "We didn't understand

why they didn't want to take us up on a more competitive format."

The lockout was in its 95th day Sunday, five days after Commissioner Rob Manfred canceled the first two series of the regular season. Players were expected to respond Sunday to MLB's latest offer, the last before talks ended Tuesday.

Before talks broke down, players said they could agree to a 12-team postseason subject to an overall agreement. There remains a possibility 14 teams could return to discussions, depending on tradeoffs in the end stages of negotiations.