

## Russia keeps up attacks as sides hold talks

*Associated Press*

LVIV, Ukraine — Russia and Ukraine kept a fragile diplomatic path open with a new round of talks on Monday, even as Moscow's forces pounded away at Kyiv and other cities across the country in a punishing bombardment that the Red Cross said has created "nothing short of a nightmare" for the civilian population.

Meanwhile, a convoy of 160 civilian cars left the encircled port city of Mariupol along a designated humanitarian route, the city council reported, in a rare glimmer of hope a week and a half into the lethal siege that has pulverized homes and other buildings and left people desperate for food, water, heat and medicine.

The latest negotiations, which were held via video conference,

were the fourth round involving higher-level officials from the two countries and the first in a week. The talks ended without a breakthrough after several hours, with an aide to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy saying the negotiators took "a technical pause" and planned to meet again Tuesday.

The two sides had expressed some optimism in the past few days. Mykhailo Podolyak, the aide to Zelenskyy, said over the weekend that Russia was "listening carefully to our proposals." He tweeted Monday that the negotiators would discuss "peace, ceasefire, immediate withdrawal of troops & security guarantees."

Previous discussions, held in person in Belarus, produced no lasting humanitarian routes or

agreements to end the fighting.

Ahead of the talks, air raid alerts sounded in cities and towns around the country overnight, from near the Russian border in the east to the Carpathian Mountains in the west, and fighting continued on the outskirts of Kyiv. Ukrainian officials said Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces shelled several suburbs of the capital.

Ukrainian authorities said two people were killed when the Russians struck an airplane factory in Kyiv, sparking a large fire. The Antonov factory is Ukraine's largest aircraft manufacturing plant and is best known for producing many of the world's biggest cargo planes.

Russian artillery fire also hit a nine-story apartment building in

the northern Obolonskyi district of the city, killing two more people, authorities said. Firefighters worked to rescue survivors, painstakingly carrying an injured woman on a stretcher away from the blackened and smoking building.

And a Russian airstrike near a Ukrainian checkpoint caused extensive damage to a downtown Kyiv neighborhood, killing one person, Ukraine's emergency agency said.

In the southern city of Mariupol, where the war has produced some of the greatest suffering, the city council didn't say how many people were in the convoy of cars headed westward for the city of Zaporizhzhia. But it said a ceasefire along the route appeared to be holding.

## Pregnant woman, baby die after hospital bombing

*Associated Press*

MARIUPOL, Ukraine — A wounded pregnant woman who was taken on a stretcher from a maternity hospital that was bombed by Russia last week has died, along with her baby, The Associated Press has learned.

Images of the woman, whom the AP has not been able to identify, were seen around the world, personifying the horror of an attack on civilians.

She was one of at least three pregnant women tracked down by AP from the maternity hospital that was bombarded Wednesday in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol. The other two survived, along with their newborn daughters.

In video and photos shot by AP journalists after the hospital attack, the wounded woman stroked her bloodied lower left abdomen as emergency workers carried her through the rubble, her blanched face mirroring her shock at what had just happened.

It was among the most brutal moments so far in Russia's now 19-day-old war in Ukraine.

The woman was taken to another hospital, closer to the front line, where doctors tried to save her. Realizing she was losing her baby, medics said, she had cried out to them, "Kill me now!"

Dr. Timur Marin said Saturday that the woman's pelvis had been crushed and her hip detached. Her baby was delivered via cesarean section but showed "no signs of life," he said.

They tried to save the woman, and "more than 30 minutes of resuscitation of the mother didn't produce results," Marin said. "Both died."

In the chaos after the airstrike, medical workers did not get her name before her husband and father took away her body. Doctors said they were grateful that she didn't end up in the mass graves being dug for many of Mariupol's dead.

Accused of attacking civilians, Russian officials claimed the maternity hospital had been taken over by Ukrainian extremists to use as a base and that no patients or medics were left inside. Russia's ambassador to the

United Nations and the Russian Embassy in London falsely described the AP images as fakes.

Associated Press journalists, who have been reporting from inside blockaded Mariupol since early in the war, documented the attack and saw the victims and damage firsthand. They shot video and photos of several bloodstained, pregnant mothers fleeing the blown-out maternity ward as medical workers shouted and children cried.

The AP team tracked down some of the victims Friday and Saturday after they were transferred to another hospital on the outskirts of Mariupol. The port city on the Sea of Azov has been without supplies of food, water, power or heat for more than a week. Electricity from emergency generators is reserved for operating rooms.

As survivors described their ordeal, explosions shook the walls, causing medical workers to flinch. Shelling and shooting in the area is sporadic but relentless. Emotions ran high, even as doctors and nurses focused on their work.

# US heads to Norway for giant NATO drills

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

Several thousand U.S. Marines and sailors are among the roughly 30,000 troops from 27 NATO and partner countries taking part in Norway's largest military exercise since the end of the Cold War.

The biennial Cold Response exercise kicked off Monday and includes land, sea and air drills. This year's record number of attendees was confirmed months before Russia began its invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24.

"I think this exercise is a good counterpart, a good companion to the ongoing reinforcement of the (alliance's) eastern flank that has been taking place since Russia's invasion began," Charles Kupchan, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said in a telephone interview.

The war is prompting fears of further Russian aggression in other parts of Europe, and some of the activities in the drill are planned for areas less than 200 miles from the Russia-Norway border.

The II Marine Expeditionary Force is the largest American military unit participating

in the exercise, Defense Department spokesman John Kirby said in a briefing last week, adding that some 3,000 Marines are taking part.

Elements of 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, 2nd Marine Division, II MEF Information Group and 2nd Marine Logistics Group will conduct numerous field training exercises above and below the Arctic Circle, U.S. European Command told Stars and Stripes on Thursday.

Third Battalion, 6th Marines will train with allies on the Dutch amphibious transport ship HNLMS Rotterdam, the command said.

Overall, about 220 aircraft and more than 50 ships are taking part in the drills, and the total number of participants has more than doubled from the last edition in 2020, making it the largest Norway-led exercise in over three decades, according to the Norwegian military.

Both American and Norwegian officials have attempted to assuage worries that the Cold Response exercise could exacerbate tensions between NATO and the Kremlin.

The United States and other NATO allies have so far refused to send troops into Ukraine, although they have been arming Ukrainians

and have imposed harsh sanctions on Moscow. The U.S. has also sent thousands of troops to Eastern European NATO member states amid concerns that Russian forces may try to enter their territory.

Moscow declined an offer to observe the exercise this year despite acceptance of similar invitations in the past, Lt. Gen. Yngve Odlo, head of the Norwegian joint operations headquarters, told government broadcaster NRK earlier this month.

Norway is a long-standing member of NATO, whereas fellow Nordic countries Sweden and Finland are not, though they are considered security partners.

Interest in NATO membership, however, has markedly increased in both countries amid Russia's latest attack. Under the alliance treaty's Article 5, an attack on one ally is considered an attack on all members and calls for a collective defense. Both Sweden and Finland are participating in Cold Response.

The events in Ukraine follow worries over possible Russian aggression in the Arctic that have grown over the past decade alongside the Kremlin's military buildup in the region.

## US, China officials meet on Chinese support for Russia

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Advisers to Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping met in Rome on Monday to discuss China's support for Russia in its invasion of Ukraine, even as the Kremlin denied reports that it had requested Chinese military equipment to use in the war.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan and senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi spoke, with the Biden administration increasingly concerned that China is using the Ukraine war to advance Beijing's long-term interest in its competition with the U.S. Sullivan was seeking clarity on Beijing's posture and was warning the Chinese anew that assistance for Russia — including helping it avert sanctions imposed by the U.S. and Western allies — would be costly for them.

"I'm not going to sit here publicly and brandish threats," Sullivan said Sunday ahead of his trip to Rome. "But what I will tell you is we are communicating directly and privately to Beijing that there absolutely will be consequences" if China helps Russia "backfill" its losses from the sanctions.

In advance of the talks, Sullivan bluntly warned China to avoid helping Russia evade punishment from global sanctions. "We will not allow that to go forward," he said. Russia on Monday denied it needed China's help.

"No, Russia has its own potential to continue the operation, which, as we have said, is unfolding in accordance with the plan and will be completed on time and in full," said Dmitry Peskov, President Vladimir Putin's spokesman.

## Marines arriving in Australia for another 6-month rotation

By SETH ROBSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

A contingent of up to 2,200 U.S. Marines has begun arriving for a six-month rotation to Australia's northern city of Darwin, the Marine Corps and Australian Defence Department announced Monday.

During their 11th deployment to Darwin since 2012, Marines will train with Australian troops and other friendly forces to respond to a crisis in the region, the Marines said in their statement.

"It is an honor to build upon the continuing legacy of the outstanding U.S.-Australian alliance and AUKUS agreement," the rotational force's commander, Col. Chris Steele, said in the statement, referring to a defense pact reached last year between America, Australia and Britain.

The force includes a command

element from the 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, with most Marines coming from Southern California. They're supported by a detachment from U.S. Army Pacific, the statement said.

"We are excited to ... integrate two highly capable and interoperable forces that advance our shared goals, demonstrate the strength and endurance of our alliance, and contribute to regional security," Steele said.

The U.S. military often uses the term "interoperability" to describe the ability of one country's armed forces to use another country's training methods and military equipment.

Up to 2,200 Marines from Camp Pendleton, Calif., will be in Darwin until the rotation wraps up in October, according to a statement from the Australia Defence Department.

# Energy costs rise for US bases in Europe

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — U.S. military installations throughout Europe are estimating they will collectively pay at least \$50 million more for gas and electricity in the next year, amid soaring wholesale energy prices exacerbated in some cases by a reliance on Russian natural gas.

Bases in Germany, Belgium and Italy expect to pay as much as double for electricity this fiscal year compared with what they paid last year. Gas cost estimates vary, but most bases expect a nearly 50% increase over the same time period.

The rising costs are already affecting some service members and Defense Department workers whose bills are coming close to exceeding their combined off-base housing and utility allowances.

The ceiling on costs remains uncertain as energy prices in Europe climb in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. They were already rising because of low natural gas reserves, high demand and rising costs for carbon emissions.

For example, Naval Support Activity Naples expects to pay about \$22 million for electricity and \$1.4 million for natural gas during the current fiscal year, which began Oct. 1, 2021. That's roughly double what the base paid last fiscal year, said Lisa Woodbury Rama, a spokeswoman for Naval Facilities Engineering Command Europe Africa Central.

With more than six months left in the fiscal year and uncertainty about how the

war in Ukraine and economic sanctions on Russia will affect natural gas supplies, the base does not have exact figures, she said.

"Hopefully the volatility in the market will level off in the not-too-distant future, production will increase, and as we get into warmer months, demand will lessen and rates will begin to come down again," Woodbury Rama said.

Italy buys about 40% of its natural gas from Russia, the newspaper *Corriere della Sella* reported this month. If Russia were to reduce supply in retaliation for economic sanctions, prices could rise sharply, the newspaper reported.

Meanwhile, the European Union pledged last week to cut its dependence on Russian gas by two-thirds by the end of the year, which could allow other nations to sell gas at higher prices due to increased demand.

U.S. Army Garrison Vicenza expects a 97% increase in its electricity bill and a 258% increase in its gas bill this fiscal year, base spokesman Rick Scavetta said.

If that estimate holds, the garrison will pay about \$13.8 million and \$7.2 million for electricity and gas, respectively, this fiscal year, Scavetta said.

Likewise, Italy's Aviano Air Base expects to pay about \$13.3 million this fiscal year for electricity, a 93% increase. Its gas bill is expected to rise about 53% to an estimated \$1.4 million this fiscal year, said 1st Lt. Myron McRae, an Aviano spokesman.

In Germany, five U.S. Army garrisons

that jointly contract for utilities expect to pay 44% more for electricity this year.

U.S. Army Garrison Benelux in Belgium estimated 57% and 39% increases for electricity and gas, respectively, Heeter said.

The Navy could not provide figures for its other base in Italy, Naval Air Station Sigonella in Sicily, or for Naval Station Rota in Spain and Naval Support Activity Souda Bay in Crete.

Bases aren't the only ones feeling the pinch. Some active-duty, civilian and other military community members, particularly in Italy and Germany, are being forced to cope with the strain on their budgets from the exorbitant rise in utility prices.

Petty Officer 1st Class Caroline Crumbacker, who is assigned to NSA Naples, was already trying to reduce her energy consumption.

Even so, her February bill for three months of electricity was about \$311, nearly \$100 more than she usually pays.

Crumbacker's monthly basic housing allowance from the Navy covers her expenses even with the dollar-euro exchange rate, she said. But if Crumbacker's utility costs rise above the monthly amount she receives for rent, gas and electric and other services, such as internet, she would have to pay for the difference out of pocket.

The Italian Regulatory Agency for Energy, Networks and Environment calculates that consumers like Crumbacker will pay at least 55% and 42% more, respectively, for electricity and gas during the first quarter of 2022.

## Former Navy SEAL wins more gold with ski team

By SETH ROBSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

A retired naval officer who lost both legs to an improvised bomb in Afghanistan took home a second Paralympic gold medal as part of a winning U.S. cross-country ski relay team on Sunday.

Former Navy SEAL Dan Cnossen, 41, of Topeka, Kan., and three teammates had the fastest time in the mixed 4x2.5km relay on the final day of the Beijing 2022 Games at the Zhangjiakou National Biathlon Centre.

The team finished in 25:59.3,

ahead of silver medalists China and bronze winners Canada, according to the Games' official website.

A veteran with deployments to Iraq and Southeast Asia, Cnossen was injured in September 2009 after stepping on a bomb during a nighttime assault in Helmand province, Afghanistan, he told *Stars and Stripes* by phone Saturday.

One of his relay teammates, six-time Paralympian Oksana Masters, 32, of Louisville, Ky., was born in Ukraine, with both of her legs damaged by in utero radiation poisoning from the

Chernobyl nuclear reactor incident, according to her Team USA biography.

The team also includes Sydney Peterson, 20, of Lake Elmo, Minn., whose left arm and leg are impaired, and Jake Adicoff, 26, of Sun Valley, Idaho, who has been legally blind since birth, according to Team USA.

"For me, it's an honor to represent the U.S. on this international field," Cnossen said.

The former lieutenant commander spent two years in hospitals recovering from the loss of his legs, but began cross-country skiing in West Yellow-

stone, Mont., during his rehabilitation and started training for the Paralympics in 2011.

He debuted at the 2014 Games in Sochi, Russia; in 2018, he won his first gold medal in the 7.5 km biathlon, which involves skiing and target shooting, in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

Navy SEAL training taught Cnossen to process pain, he said.

"For me, what works best is to really drill into technique and the mechanics of skiing," he said. "That shifts my mind away from the pain."

# US eases mask policies across Japan bases

By JOSEPH DITZLER  
*Stars and Stripes*

TOKYO — Two of the largest U.S. military installations in Japan have dropped their mask requirements, effective Monday, another sign that COVID-19 is loosening its hold on personnel stationed in the country.

Yokota Air Base, the airlift hub in western Tokyo that also serves as headquarters for U.S. Forces Japan, and Kadena Air Base on Okinawa, home of the 18th Fighter Wing, dropped their mask mandates, regardless of vaccination status but with some exceptions, according to base commanders' announcements.

Masks must be worn outside any U.S. military installation by anyone under the status of forces agreement, which covers the

rights and responsibilities of the U.S. military in Japan, including family members, according to the U.S. Forces Japan public health policy update Monday.

Defense Department schools at Yokota also dropped mask requirements for indoors and on buses, according to a notice sent to parents by four principals at base schools on Monday.

Masks are still required at medical and dental providers on both bases.

At Yokota anyone with COVID-19 symptoms, a positive test or exposure to someone with the infection "should" wear a mask until medically cleared, according to an order signed Saturday by base commander Col. Andrew Campbell.

Kadena on its website said

anyone in those situations has to wear a mask. Masks are also still required inside the Air Mobility Command terminal, according to an update on the Kadena website.

Yokosuka Naval Base, homeport of the U.S. 7th Fleet south of Tokyo, is also preparing to ease its on-base mask guidelines, according to base spokesman Randall Baucom.

The base will require masks on anyone inside a child care facility but wearing a mask indoors will become the exception rather than the rule, Baucom wrote in an email Monday to Stars and Stripes.

The change follows the USFJ policy update. The command will keep the off-base mask requirement in place along with "aggres-

sive Japan-entry testing protocols for SOFA personnel," while permitting base commanders to loosen their mask requirements, according to USFJ spokeswoman Air Force Lt. Col. Brooke Brander.

"With current high levels of vaccination and high levels of population immunity, the risk of medically significant disease, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19 is greatly reduced for most people," Brander wrote Monday in an email to Stars and Stripes.

USFJ eased its mask requirement, she wrote, in keeping with the Japanese government's public health measures and guidance from the Defense Department and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## US astronaut still set to ride a Russian spacecraft home

*Associated Press*

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — U.S. astronaut Mark Vande Hei has made it through nearly a year in space, but faces what could be his trickiest assignment yet: riding a Russian capsule back to Earth in the midst of deepening tensions between the countries.

NASA insists Vande Hei's homecoming plans at the end of the month remain unchanged, even as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has resulted in canceled launches, broken contracts and an escalating war of words by the Russian Space Agency's hardline leader. Many worry Dmitry Rogozin is putting decades of a peaceful off-the-planet partnership at risk, most notably at the International Space Station.

Vande Hei — who on Tuesday breaks the U.S. single spaceflight record of 340 days — is due to leave with two Russians aboard a Soyuz capsule for a touchdown in Kazakhstan on March 30. The astronaut will have logged 355 days in space by then, setting a new U.S. record. The world record of

438 continuous days in space belongs to Russia.

Retired NASA astronaut Scott Kelly, America's record-holder until Tuesday, is among those sparring with Rogozin, a long-time ally of Vladimir Putin. Enraged by what's going on in Ukraine, Kelly has returned his Russian medal for space exploration to the Russian Embassy in Washington.

Despite the conflict down here, Kelly believes the sides "can hold it together" up in space.

"We need an example set that two countries that historically have not been on the most friendly of terms, can still work somewhere peacefully. And that somewhere is the International Space Station. That's why we need to fight to keep it," Kelly told The Associated Press.

Vande Hei, 55, a retired Army colonel, moved into the space station last April, launching on a Soyuz from Kazakhstan with Pyotr Dubrov and another Russian.

## Oscar-winning 'Body Heat' actor Hurt dies at age 71

*Associated Press*

William Hurt, whose laconic charisma and self-assured subtlety as an actor made him one of the 1980s' foremost leading men in movies such as "Broadcast News," "Body Heat" and "The Big Chill," has died.

He was 71.

Hurt's son, Will, said in a statement that Hurt died Sunday of natural causes. Hurt died peacefully, among family, his son said. The Hollywood Reporter said he died at his home in Portland, Ore. Deadline first reported Hurt's death. Hurt was previously diagnosed with prostate cancer that had spread to the bone in 2018.

Hurt was four times nominated for an Academy Award, winning for 1985's "Kiss of the Spider Woman." After his breakthrough in 1980's Paddy Chayefsky-scripted "Altered States" as a psychiatrist studying schizophrenia and experimenting with sensory deprivation, Hurt quickly emerged as a mainstay of the '80s. In Lawrence Kasdan's 1981

steamy neo noir "Body Heat," Hurt starred alongside Kathleen Turner as a lawyer coaxed into murder. In 1983's "The Big Chill," again with Kasdan, Hurt played the brooding Vietnam War veteran Nick Carlton, one of a group of college pals who gather for their friend's funeral.

Among Hurt's greatest performances was James L. Brooks' 1987 comedy "Broadcast News," as an anchorman who symbolized the emerging fusion of entertainment and journalism.

Hurt, always an intelligent screen presence, gradually morphed into a character actor. He received his fourth Oscar nomination for his small but potent role in David Cronenberg's 2005 thriller "A History of Violence." Hurt continued to work constantly in the years leading up to his death: 10 episodes of "Damages"; Marvel films, including "Avengers: Endgame" and "Black Widow," as military officer Thaddeus Ross; and 14 episodes on Amazon's "Goliath."

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Police: Man stabbed 2 workers at MoMA, fled**

**NY** NEW YORK — Video from the Museum of Modern Art shows the moment a man leaped over a reception desk and stabbed two employees as they tried to flee Saturday.

The video released by New York City police shows a man police identified as 60-year-old Gary Cabana entering the museum lobby through a revolving door then climbing onto the desk and jumping over it as a man carrying what appears to be a walkie-talkie tries to stop him. Police are still searching for Cabana.

The man, wearing a black wool hat and a surgical mask, approaches three employees who are trapped in the small space and stabs one of them — a young woman who is able to run away seconds later — though not before she is stabbed again in the back. The attacker then stabs the second employee as the man with the walkie-talkie hurls a notebook at him. That appears to distract the attacker long enough for the second victim to flee.

Authorities said Saturday the two museum employees, a 24-year-old man and 24-year-old woman, were both stable with non-life-threatening injuries.

According to police, Cabana was denied entrance Saturday for previous incidents of disorderly conduct.

**Assistant principal fired over kids' book choice**

**MS** JACKSON — An assistant principal in a Mississippi school district has been fired after he read a children's book to a class of second

graders that district leaders said was inappropriate.

Toby Price was fired last week after reading "I Need a New Butt," a children's book by Dawn McMillan, to students at an elementary school in Byrum, a suburb of the state capital of Jackson. He had served in the post for three years until his firing.

The book depicts a young child trying to find a new butt after he discovers his "has a huge crack," a description reads.

Price said he had read the book, which has a suggested age range from 4 to 10 years old, at previous school districts, but never heard any pushback or complaints. As far as he knows, he said, no complaints have been filed regarding his latest reading, at Gary Road Elementary in Byrum.

A letter from Hinds County Schools Superintendent Delesicia Martin cited "unnecessary embarrassment, a lack of professionalism and impaired judgment" on Price's part in picking the book and for those reasons, he was fired. Price said he plans to appeal his termination at a hearing later this month.

**2 horses euthanized, others isolated at park**

**NE** GRAND ISLAND — Two horses were euthanized and a barn housing more than 100 horses is on 21-day quarantine at Fonner Park in Grand Island as investigators work to determine the source of an equine illness.

Eight horses were scratched from Friday afternoon's racing because of the quarantine on Barn R, The Grand Island Independent reported.

One horse was euthanized on

Wednesday and the second was put down on Thursday after they developed high temperatures and mobility problems, Fonner Chief Executive Officer Chris Kotulak said. He described the quarantine, which began Thursday, as a precautionary step.

The illness is believed to be the equine herpes neurological virus but the park was awaiting test results, he said.

**State troopers get paid \$3K for body cameras**

**RI** PROVIDENCE — State troopers in Rhode Island will be getting a \$3,000 stipend for wearing body cameras, under their new labor agreement.

The state's deal with Rhode Island State Police troopers includes the one-time payment to compensate for added duties related to the cameras, The Providence Journal reported. A union for state troopers ratified the agreement on Friday.

Alana O'Hare, a spokesperson for Gov. Dan McKee, said a recent pilot program revealed that the body cameras added to troopers' duties and responsibilities.

The camera program "represents a change in working conditions and adds additional duties and responsibilities to today's troopers and police officers," O'Hare told The Journal.

**'Manufacturing Madness' hypes state-made items**

**SC** COLUMBIA — Manufacturers across South Carolina are holding a March Madness-style competition to decide what is the coolest thing made in the state.

The competition narrowed the field from 175 nominated things down to 16 items made in the state, from boats to SUVs to diapers to Girl Scout uniforms to F-16 jets.

Voting is taking place all this month at [scmanufacturingmadness.com](http://scmanufacturingmadness.com), narrowing the field down to eight and then to a winner, which will be announced March 30 at a Statehouse ceremony.

Other things made in South Carolina that made the cut include bricks, paper for lottery tickets, refrigerators, atomizers, generators, steel and side-by-side ATVs.

**'Bounty' for invasive Bradford pear trees**

**NC** RALEIGH — A new program in North Carolina is placing a "bounty" on invasive Bradford pear trees as they spread through forests in the state.

The initiative is set to start with an April 23 event in Greensboro and could expand to more locations in the fall, according to North Carolina State University's website. It will allow people to get up to five new native trees for their yards in exchange for cutting down the same number of Bradford pears.

"We probably won't eradicate Bradford pear from North Carolina," said Kelly Oten, a forestry professor at the university who's helping to launch the program. "But we do want to increase awareness about how this tree is harming the environment, reduce how many people plant them and encourage people to replace their own trees with something else."

— From wire reports

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# After 2 odd years, a 'normal' tourney

*Associated Press*

Any hoops fan hungering for a return to normal this March might have looked at the bracket when it finally came out and wondered what ever changed.

Gonzaga is the tournament's top seed. Kansas and Arizona are No. 1s, as well. Duke and Kentucky are right up there as Nos. 2s and the defending champion, Baylor, is the other top seed and a force to be reckoned with again, too.

But all that sameness felt like more of a celebration when the pairings were set this Selection Sunday. The most-anticipated reveal of the year felt like a party again, even if it might have been pushed down a notch on the ticker by the unexpected return of Tom Brady to the NFL in an announcement that came just as Dick Vitale and Co., were starting to break down the 68-team draw.

"This was a really special year because we all realized what we missed," Villanova coach Jay Wright said.

For the first time since 2019, the teams will scatter across the country to eight cities for 48 games over the first four-day weekend of America's unofficial hoops holiday. Then, they will move to four cities for the Sweet 16. And they will cut down the nets in New Orleans, where the Final Four runs April 2-4.

It figures to be a much different atmo-

sphere than in Indianapolis last year, where all 67 games were held in a makeshift bubble with limited fans. A year after COVID-19 scrubbed the event completely, 2021 offered a tournament that put the NCAA under the glare of the spotlight for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the inequities between the men's and women's events.

This year, the women's tournament is being branded as "March Madness," just like the men's. That bracket was revealed on Sunday, just like the men's. The No. 1 seeds in that one: South Carolina, Louisville, North Carolina State and Stanford.

As always, there was a decent-sized menu of snubs and oversights to debate. On the men's side, Xavier didn't make it despite four wins against teams that qualified for the 68-team field. Texas A&M made the final of the SEC Tournament but got snubbed, too. Among those making the cut were Michigan, despite 14 losses, and Indiana and Rutgers, which had 13 each.

The Big Ten got its fair share of love, with a nation-high nine teams, which made it surprising to some that the conference's tournament champion, Iowa, was stuck with a 5 seed.

Leading the Hawkeyes this year is Keegan Murray, a 23-point-per-game scorer who is one of the best inside-outside threats

in the game.

Kansas guard Ochai Agbaji is something rare in college—a senior, and one who averages around 20 points and five rebounds a game and also plays great defense. He withdrew from the NBA draft last season and has led the Jayhawks to their first No. 1 seed since 2018.

Also, there's Kentucky's Oscar Tshiebwe, one of dozens who switched schools via the amped-up transfer portal that is displaying a penchant for reshaping college hoops—and college sports—in the blink of an eye.

"It's all about staying in the moment and having more fun than anybody in the tournament," said Tshiebwe's coach, John Calipari.

The best way to have fun, of course, is winning it all. Baylor did that last year in a title-game romp over Gonzaga. Just like last year, both are No. 1 seeds again, with the Zags the 3-1 favorite to win the title, according to FanDuel Sportsbook.

Arizona was next at 6-1, followed by Kentucky (17-2) and Baylor (10-1).

"A great learning experience," Gonzaga's Drew Timme said on ESPN of last year's second-place finish. "Obviously, things didn't go the way we wanted. But it allowed for a lot of self-growth for the program. We're excited for the challenge."

## Despite loss, S. Carolina is women's overall No. 1

*Associated Press*

Dawn Staley and South Carolina are once again a No. 1 seed in the women's basketball NCAA Tournament—a familiar role for the Gamecocks.

South Carolina earned the top overall seed in this year's tournament field, which was announced Sunday night. The Gamecocks have been No. 1 in a region six times since 2014.

The women's tournament also is getting back to a familiar setting.

For the first time since 2019, the tournament will feature games on campus sites with fans in the stands.

"I just think the semblance of normalcy, I hope brings back some good feelings and the excitement and the hoopla that is

part of this event, which is what makes it so great, is the fans," UConn coach Geno Auriemma said. "I think having them back is going to make all the difference in the world."

Auriemma's Huskies are a No. 2 seed in this year's competitive field.

North Carolina State, Stanford and Louisville are the other No. 1 seeds.

Staley isn't buying the argument that as the top seed her Gamecocks will have an easy road to winning their second national championship.

"They said that the No. 1 overall seed has an easier path to the Final Four. I don't see that," Staley said. "But I do believe we're going to play our best basketball from here on out."

Potentially awaiting Aliyah Boston and the Gamecocks in the regional final could be Caitlin Clark and No. 2 Iowa in a matchup of two top players in the sport.

While there will be much familiarity to the tournament, there also are some major changes—including expanding the field to 68 teams.

This year's bracket grew to match the men's field with the play-in games on Wednesday and Thursday. The Gamecocks, who top the Greensboro Region, will face the winner of Howard and Incarnate Word—one of the First Four games.

Expanding the field was one of the many changes to the women's basketball tournament in the wake of inequities revealed

at last season's NCAAs.

North Carolina State is the top seed in the Bridgeport Region and could face UConn in the regional final. The Huskies finally are getting healthy with reigning Associated Press player of the year Paige Bueckers working her way back from a knee injury that sidelined her for two months.

"They have all the pieces, all of their players playing," said women's basketball selection committee chair, Nina King. "Relative to Bridgeport, we place the teams on the seed lines on an S-curve. When we place them in the regionals we try and stay true to the S-curve. ... It's how it fell this year and that's why Connecticut is in Bridgeport."

# Short retirement: Brady back on Bucs

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Tom Brady's retirement lasted 40 days.

Brady said Sunday he's returning to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers for his 23rd NFL season.

The seven-time Super Bowl champion announced his decision on Twitter and Instagram, saying he has "unfinished business." The news stole the spotlight from the NCAA's Selection Sunday.

"These past two months I've realized my place is still on the field and not in the stands," Brady wrote. "That time will come. But it's not now. I love my teammates, and I love my supportive family. They make it all possible. I'm coming back for my 23rd season in Tampa."

Brady led the Buccaneers to a Super Bowl title following the 2020 season and NFC South championship last season. He teamed with coach Bill Belichick to win six Super Bowls during 20 seasons with the New England Patriots.

The 44-year-old Brady led the NFL in yards passing (5,316), touchdowns (43), completions (485) and attempts (719) in 2021, but the Buccaneers lost at home to the Los Angeles Rams in the divisional round.

"Tom Brady loves to play football as much as anyone I have ever been around," Buccaneers coach Bruce Arians said. "As Tom said, his place right now is on the football field. He is still playing at a championship level and was as productive as anyone in the league last season. We are ecstatic that he decided to continue playing and working toward winning another championship."

Brady cited his desire to spend more time with his wife, supermodel Gisele Bündchen, and three children when he decided to walk away from the game on Feb. 1. But he changed his mind about staying home, a day after attending the Manchester United match against Tottenham Hotspur. Brady sat with the Glazer Family, who own Manchester United and the Buccaneers.

His reversal sent shock waves throughout the sports world, and his teammates and Buccaneers fans reacted with jubilation.

All-Pro right tackle Tristan Wirfs called it "unreal." Receivers Mike Evans and Chris Godwin shared their joy in emojis.

Giants safety Logan Ryan said Brady's return is "good for football." Rams star cornerback Jalen Ramsey tweeted: "THANK YOU! throw that last touchdown on somebody else."

Many Hall of Fame players across several sports returned to playing after retiring, including Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson and Bob Cousy in the NBA, Brett Favre and Reggie White in the NFL, Guy Lafleur and Mario Lemieux in the NHL.

The Buccaneers are hopeful star tight end Rob Gronkowski also returns. Brady convinced his buddy to unretire to join him in Tampa in 2020. The team lost Pro Bowl guard Ali Marpet, who retired at age 28. But Godwin is staying after getting the franchise tag.

## Hinostroza, Sabres defeat Leafs in outdoor game

Associated Press

HAMILTON, Ontario — Vinnie Hinostroza had two goals and an assist, Peyton Krebs also scored twice and the Buffalo Sabres defeated the Toronto Maple Leafs 5-2 in the Heritage Classic outdoor game Sunday.

Tage Thompson added an empty-net goal and Craig Anderson made 36 saves in the Sabres' victory at a windy Tim Horton Field, home of the CFL's Hamilton Tiger-Cats.

"It's really special, being able to chip in and help the team win," Hinostroza said. "Obviously we got the win, that's the biggest thing. There's so many distractions this weekend with family over and everyone at the hotel enjoying themselves, but our team did a great job putting that in the background and coming in and realizing we have a big game to win here."

"I'm really proud of our team." Toronto's Auston Matthews scored his NHL-leading 45th goal, Ondrej Kase also scored

and Petr Mrazek made 31 saves. Matthews faces a possible suspension for cross-checking Buffalo defenseman Rasmus Dahlin.

**Avalanche 3, Flames 0:** Nathan MacKinnon scored two goals and Darcy Kuemper stopped a career-best 46 shots in his fourth shutout of the season as host Colorado beat Calgary in a matchup of the top teams in the Western Conference.

MacKinnon scored on a power play in the first period and added another goal in the third. Mikko Rantanen sealed it on an empty-net tally with 1:38 remaining to help the Avalanche post their best record through 60 games in franchise history (42-13-5, 89 points).

**Penguins 4, Hurricanes 2:** Brian Boyle, Danton Heinen and Zach Aston-Reese scored to take some of the pressure off Sidney Crosby, Tristan Jarry stopped 41 shots and host Pittsburgh edged Carolina.

Crosby scored an empty-net-

ter to reach the 20-goal plateau for the 14th time as the Penguins beat the Metropolitan Division-leading Hurricanes for the first time in three tries, thanks in part to the secondary scoring that's been lacking in recent weeks.

**Blue Jackets 6, Golden Knights 4:** Eighteen-year-old rookie Cole Sillinger recorded the first hat trick of his NHL career, Elvis Merzlikins made 23 saves and Columbus beat visiting Vegas.

Sillinger, the league's youngest player who has eight goals in his first 56 games, scored once in the first period and twice in the second.

**Predators 6, Wild 2:** Roman Josi scored twice to establish a career high with 17 goals this season, leading Nashville past Minnesota to spoil the start of a franchise-record nine-game homestand for the Wild.

**Jets 4, Blues 3 (OT):** Pierre Luc-Dubois scored in overtime and Connor Hellebuyck made 28 saves for visiting Winnipeg.

The Jets broke a two-game losing streak and have won 10 of their last 12 games in St. Louis. The Blues have lost five of seven.

**Lightning 2, Canucks 1:** Ross Colton and Victor Hedman scored in the first six minutes, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made the early goals stand as visiting Tampa Bay snapped a three-game skid.

**Kings 3, Panthers 2 (SO):** Jonathan Quick, playing in his 700th game, stopped Anthony Duclair's shot during the fifth round of the shootout to give Los Angeles the victory over visiting Florida.

**Islanders 4, Ducks 3:** Kyle Palmieri scored twice, Ilya Sorokin made 39 saves and New York capped a six-game homestand by beating Anaheim for its third straight win.

**Canadiens 4, Flyers 3 (OT):** Cole Caufield scored 2:10 into overtime to give Montreal a comeback victory over host Philadelphia in a matchup of last-place clubs.

# Suns get 14-0 start, then rout Lakers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Devin Booker scored 30 points, Deandre Ayton had 23 points and 16 rebounds and the NBA-leading Phoenix Suns routed the Los Angeles Lakers 140-111 on Sunday night.

LeBron James led the Lakers, who have lost 10 straight road games, with 31 points, seven rebounds and six assists. He did not play in the fourth quarter.

James reached a milestone with his 10,000th career assist in the second quarter on Carmelo Anthony's three-pointer. James is the only player in NBA history with at least 30,000 points, 10,000 rebounds and 10,000 assists.

Booker also had 10 assists and four steals. Mikal Bridges added 18 points to help the Suns move 40 games over .500 at 54-14.

The Suns broke it open in the first five minutes. They went on a 14-0 run — punctuated by back-to-back 27-foot three-pointers by Booker — to take a 16-6 lead, and kept pouring it on.

Ayton said he feels “disrespected” when teams such as the Lakers employ a small lineup against him.

“That’s just my thing,” he said. “I’m punishing teams like that.”

**Nets 110, Knicks 107:** Kevin Durant scored a season-high 53 points, making the tiebreaking three-pointer in a sensational show for a crowd that included Kyrie Irving, and host Brooklyn took a win.

Durant's three-pointer snapped a 103-all tie with 56 seconds remaining. He added

four more free throws to keep the Nets ahead, finishing one point shy of his career high. Durant also had nine assists and six rebounds in his 60th career 40-point performance.

Irving attended his first Brooklyn home game this season, though still unable to play in New York. There is no longer a mandate that spectators are vaccinated against the coronavirus, but there is still one requiring it for someone who works there. Irving has not been vaccinated.

**Mavericks 95, Celtics 92:** Luka Doncic returned from a hamstring scare to hit a tying three-pointer with a 1:21 left, Spencer Dinwiddie made the winner with nine seconds to play and Dallas won at Boston to spoil Kevin Garnett's special day.

With Garnett courtside awaiting the post-game ceremony to retire his uniform No. 5, the Mavericks won for the seventh time in eight games and snapped the Celtics' five-game winning streak.

Doncic, who left in the first half rubbing his left leg, finished with 26 points and eight rebounds.

**Hawks 131, Pacers 128:** Trae Young scored 33 of his 47 points in the first half and host Atlanta beat Indiana.

Danilo Gallinari and De'Andre Hunter had 15 points apiece for the Hawks, 10th in the Eastern Conference. Atlanta shot 54.8%.

The Hawks have won 13 of 15 at home and two straight overall. They had a season-high 77 points in the first half.

**76ers 116, Magic 114 (OT):** Joel Embiid

had 35 points and 16 rebounds and visiting Philadelphia kept rallying, finally beating Orlando in overtime.

Down by 17 points in the first half and trailing by 10 in the fourth quarter, the Sixers were behind 113-109 with 1:25 left in OT.

James Harden hit one of two free throws with 6.7 seconds left in overtime to give the 76ers a two-point lead. Cole Anthony missed a three-pointer at the horn for the Magic.

**Grizzlies 125, Thunder 118:** Desmond Bane scored 21 points and Memphis fended off a late push to win at Oklahoma City.

Jaren Jackson Jr. added 18 points and Ja Morant had 17 for the Grizzlies.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the Thunder with 31 points and seven assists.

**Clippers 106, Pistons 102:** Marcus Morris scored 31 points and Luke Kennard had 16 against their former team, helping Los Angeles overcome an 18-point deficit to win at Detroit.

Reggie Jackson, another former Piston, had with 15 points, nine assists and eight rebounds.

Jeremi Grant scored 21 points for Detroit. Cade Cunningham had 19 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds.

**Pelicans 130, Rockets 105:** Jonas Valanciunas had 32 points and 10 rebounds and host New Orleans beat Houston to snap a four-game skid.

Jaxson Hayes added for 21 points for the Pelicans. Jalen Green led the Rockets with 17 points.

# Briscoe pulls away late in Phoenix for first Cup win

Associated Press

AVONDALE, Ariz. — Chase Briscoe jumped out of his car and was obviously emotional, kneeling by his No. 14 for a few seconds before a couple voice cracks during his post-race television interview.

The 27-year-old Briscoe took his lumps last season as a NASCAR Cup Series rookie. Now, he's a winner.

“It’s unbelievable — I was crying the whole last lap,” Briscoe said.

Briscoe raced to his first Cup Series victory, executing two great restarts over the final 20

laps to pull away from Ross Chastain and Tyler Reddick on Sunday at Phoenix Raceway. Briscoe's childhood idol was NASCAR great Tony Stewart, and the Indiana native now drives Stewart's car for Stewart-Haas Racing.

Briscoe channeled some of Stewart's late-race moxie during a battle between three drivers who had never won in the Cup Series. It's more evidence of the parity across the series in the Next Gen cars, with four drivers winning the first four races this season.

Chastain and Reddick — both

driving Chevrolets — made things interesting over the final laps, but Briscoe's Ford was simply too strong. On the final restart with four laps left, the 27-year-old Briscoe started on the inside, dipped low on the dogleg apron, and was able to hold off the rest of the field.

Briscoe was one of the top drivers in the Xfinity Series in 2019 and 2020 before getting the invitation from Stewart-Haas Racing to take over the No. 14. He had just three top 10s as a rookie and finished 23rd in the season standings.

This year, however, he got off

to a good start this season with a third-place finish at Daytona in February.

“You get humbled really quickly in the Cup Series and learn just how good everybody is,” Briscoe said. “These guys, even who are running 30th, are some of the best race car drivers in the world. You learn really quickly you’ve got to go to work and figure it out.”

Briscoe — who said Phoenix was one of his least favorite tracks before his Sunday success — acknowledged there were some white-knuckle moments late, especially on the restarts.