

# STARS AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23, 2022

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## NATO: 7K to 15K Russians killed in war

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — NATO estimated on Wednesday that 7,000 to 15,000 Russian soldiers have been killed in four weeks of fighting in Ukraine, where the country's defenders have put up stiffer-than-expected resistance and denied Moscow the lightning victory it hoped for.

A senior NATO military official said the estimate was based on information from Ukrainian officials, what Russia has released — intentionally or not — and intelligence gathered from open sources. The official spoke on condition of anonymity under ground rules set by NATO.

When Russia unleashed its invasion Feb. 24 in Europe's biggest offensive since World War II and brandished the prospect of nuclear escalation if the West intervened, a swift toppling of Ukraine's democratically elected government seemed likely.

But with Wednesday marking four full weeks of fighting, Russia is bogged down in a grinding military campaign, with untold numbers of dead, no immediate end in sight and its economy crippled by Western sanctions. U.S. President Joe Biden and key allies are meeting in Brussels and Warsaw this week to discuss possible new punitive measures and more military aid to Ukraine.

In the runup to the meeting, the Biden administration on Wednesday made a formal de-

termination that Russian troops have committed war crimes in Ukraine and said it would work with others to prosecute offenders.

"Today, I can announce that, based on information currently available, the U.S. government assesses that members of Russia's forces have committed war crimes in Ukraine," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement released as he was traveling to Brussels.

The assessment was based on a "careful review" of public and intelligence sources since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine last month, he said.

America's top diplomat said the United States would share that information with allies, partners and international institutions tasked with investigating allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

As Biden left the White House on Wednesday for the flight to Europe, he warned there is a "real threat" Russia could use chemical weapons and said he will discuss that danger with the other leaders.

The war's economic and geopolitical shockwaves — with soaring energy prices, fears for global food supplies, and Russia and China aligning in a new world order with Cold War echoes — have reverberated across a planet yet to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis.

In an apparent reflection of growing divisions in Russia's top echelons, top official Ana-

toly Chubais has resigned, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the Interfax news agency.

Chubais, the architect of Russia's post-Soviet privatization campaign, had served at a variety of top official jobs over three decades. His latest role was as Putin's envoy to international organizations. Peskov would not say if Chubais had left the country.

With his olive-drab T-shirts, unshaven face and impassioned appeals to governments around the world, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been transformed into a wartime leader and Russian President Vladimir Putin's No. 1 antagonist. Addressing Japan's parliament on Wednesday, Zelenskyy said four weeks of war have killed thousands, including at least 121 of Ukraine's children.

"Our people cannot even adequately bury their murdered relatives, friends and neighbors. They have to be buried right in the yards of destroyed buildings, next to the roads," he said.

Repeatedly pushed back by hit-and-run Ukrainian units armed with Western-supplied weapons, Russian troops are shelling targets from afar, falling back on tactics they used in reducing cities to ruins in Syria and Chechnya.

Major Russian objectives remain unfulfilled. The capital, Kyiv, has been shelled repeatedly but is not even encircled.

## Tornado tears through New Orleans and its suburbs

*Associated Press*

ARABI, La. — A tornado flipped cars, ripped off rooftops and deposited a house in the middle of a street in the New Orleans area, part of a storm front that caused damage in places as it blew from Texas to South Carolina. Two deaths were attributed to the weather.

Other tornadoes spawned by the same storm system had hit parts of Texas and Oklahoma on Monday, killing a woman north of Dallas and causing multiple injuries and widespread damage, before moving eastward.

The National Weather Service confirmed that tornadoes touched down Tuesday night in St. Bernard Parish, which borders New

Orleans to the southeast, and in Lacombe, across Lake Pontchartrain from the city. Parish officials gave no details on how the person died; they said multiple other people were injured.

Louisiana activated 300 National Guard personnel on Wednesday to assist St. Bernard Parish with route clearance, security and engineering support.

New Orleans television stations broadcast live images of the storm as it barreled across the metropolitan area. In the tornado's aftermath, rescue workers were searching through Arabi, just east of the city's Lower 9th Ward, where St. Bernard Parish President Guy McInnis said the tornado caused significant damage in an area

wrecked by Katrina.

Many residents also suffered damage just last year when Category 4 Hurricane Ida swept through. Stacey Mancuso's family just completed repairs to their home in Arabi after Ida ripped off the roof and caused extensive water damage. As Tuesday's tornado tore through their street, she huddled in the laundry room with her husband, two children, ages 16 and 11, and dogs as part of their new roof blew away.

"We're alive. That's what I can say at this point. We still have four walls and part of a roof. I consider myself lucky," said Mancuso. Still, the twister was the third time they've had major weather damage since Katrina in 2005.

# DOD to launch suicide prevention committee

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has called for a new independent review committee to address and prevent suicide in the military, chief Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Tuesday.

“As part of the secretary’s priority of taking care of our people, he has directed the department to create a Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee,” Kirby said. “This committee will conduct a comprehensive review of the department’s efforts to prevent suicide.”

The committee, which is expected to begin its work no later than May 14, will visit military installations in the United States and throughout the

world as part of its research, he said.

“It’s imperative, the secretary believes, that we continue to take care of all our teammates and reinforce that mental health and suicide prevention remain a key priority,” Kirby said. “You’ve heard the secretary say many times, ‘mental health is health, period.’ Ultimately, that health is critical to our readiness.”

The committee will begin visiting installations in August and is expected to send an initial report for Austin’s review by Dec. 20, according to the Pentagon.

It will then send a report of its final findings and recommendations to Congress by Feb. 18.

“This independent review committee will help us wrap

our arms around this and really try to come up with some more innovative solutions for how to prevent suicide and how to make sure that everybody’s getting the mental health support that they need and deserve,” Kirby said.

In 2020, 580 active-duty, Reserve and National Guard troops died by suicide, he said, “so clearly, obviously, we have more work to do.”

Suicides in the military in 2020 increased from 504 in 2019 and 543 in 2018, according to a Defense Department report in September. Suicide data for 2021 has not yet been made available.

“[Austin has] seen enough based on the 2020 data and the anecdotal reporting that’s been coming in throughout the

course of 2021 ... to know that we’ve got to do something different,” Kirby said. “We’ve got to try to take additional and more creative action here.”

The committee will be made up of mental health professionals and “people with senior organizational leadership expertise,” he said. Individuals selected for the committee will be announced at a later date.

“There’ll be a significant amount of reliance on outside experts — that’s what independent [reviews are] all about,” Kirby said. “We want them to be able to be brutally honest with us about what they’re finding and therefore, their ability to do that — the freedom that they have to do that — is going to be important to the secretary.”

# Biden, allies eyeing Russia with new NATO force

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Kremlin nuclear saber-rattling, further reinforcement of NATO in the east and the imposition of additional sanctions on Russia will be among the issues confronting President Joe Biden on Thursday, when he arrives in Brussels for emergency talks.

Biden and other NATO heads of state attending the meeting will make official the formation of four new multinational battlegroups, which NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on Wednesday called a “first step” in a long-term restructuring of forces.

The battlegroups will be formed in Romania, Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria, and they will resemble similar units in the Baltic countries and Poland.

NATO is also preparing longer-term plans for “major increases of forces” along the eastern flank as the alliance adapts to the Russia threat, Stoltenberg said. Those decisions are expected to be finalized in June.

Allies are convening for the emergency summit as the 30-nation pact contends with

the long-term security implications of Russia’s war on Ukraine, which is expected to change how NATO operates in Europe for years to come.

Biden, who also will meet with U.S. troops deployed to Poland during his swing through Europe, is expected to unveil tighter sanctions on Russia during talks with European Union officials.

The NATO meeting comes one month into Russia’s full-fledged invasion of Ukraine, where its forces have met stiff resistance by Ukrainian troops armed with an array of weaponry provided by the United States and other allies.

Between 7,000 and 15,000 Russians have been killed during the first four weeks of fighting and thousands more injured, a NATO official said Wednesday on condition of anonymity.

A senior U.S. defense official told reporters Tuesday that Russia continues to face logistical problems as it struggles to get supplies to troops. Russian morale also could be sinking, the official said. Some Russian soldiers developed frostbite because they lacked cold-weather gear and

had to be pulled from the battlefield, the official said, adding that food and fuel also appear to be in short supply.

“They are having continued logistics and sustainment issues, and again because the Ukrainians have done a good job frustrating their efforts to resupply,” the official said.

Still, concerns remain that the war could escalate in unpredictable ways.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov appeared Tuesday on CNN and repeatedly declined to rule out using nuclear weapons.

“If it is an existential threat for our country, then it can be (used),” he said.

Stoltenberg on Wednesday condemned such remarks.

“Russia must stop its nuclear saber-rattling. It is dangerous and it is irresponsible,” he said.

U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Tuesday that Russia’s rhetoric about nuclear options will be a discussion topic for NATO allies in Brussels.

Meanwhile, Biden will work with allies on longer-term adjustments to NATO force posture on the eastern flank, he said.

# GOP senators grill Jackson on several fronts

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson returned to the Senate for a third day of hearings Wednesday as Republicans try to paint her as soft on crime and Democrats herald the historic nature of her nomination to become the first Black woman on the high court.

“America is ready for the Supreme Court glass ceiling to shatter,” Sen. Dick Durbin, the Judiciary Committee chairman, said as Jackson’s last day answering senators’ questions began.

Republican Sen. Thom Tillis, of North Carolina, continued GOP questioning of Jackson’s record in sentencing convicted criminals to prison time, but in a less confrontational way.

“It seems as though you’re a very kind person, and that there’s at least a level of empathy that en-

ters into your treatment of a defendant that some could view as maybe beyond what some of us would be comfortable with, with respect to administering justice,” Tillis said.

He also acknowledged that Jackson would probably be confirmed to the Supreme Court.

In Tuesday’s marathon hearing, Republicans aggressively questioned her on the sentences she has handed down to sex offenders in her nine years as a federal judge, her advocacy on behalf of terror suspects at Guantanamo Bay, her thoughts on critical race theory and even her religious views. At one point, Republican Sen. Ted Cruz, of Texas, read from children’s books that he said are taught at her teenage daughter’s school.

Several GOP senators grilled Jackson on her child pornography sentences, arguing they were

lighter than federal guidelines recommend. She said she based the sentences on many factors and said some of the cases had given her nightmares.

Jackson spent her first day of hearings answering GOP concerns and highlighting her empathetic style on the bench. The committee’s Republicans, several of whom have their eyes on the presidency, tried to brand her as soft on crime.

On Thursday, the committee will hear from legal experts before an eventual vote to move her nomination to the Senate floor.

Democrats have been full of praise for President Joe Biden’s Supreme Court nominee, noting that she would not only be the first Black woman but also the first public defender on the court, and the first with experience representing indigent criminal defendants since Justice Thurgood Mar-

shall. Republicans praised that experience, too, but also questioned it, focusing in particular on work she did roughly 15 years ago representing detainees at the U.S. facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Jackson said public defenders don’t pick their clients and are “standing up for the constitutional value of representation.”

Picking up on a thread started by Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., Cruz questioned Jackson on some of her sentences for child pornographers. In most of those cases, prosecutors or others representing the Justice Department generally argued for sentences that were lighter than those recommended by federal guidelines.

Jackson defended her decisions by saying she takes into account not only sentencing guidelines but also the stories of the victims, the nature of the offenses and the defendants’ histories.

## Scientists worry virus variant may push up US COVID cases

Associated Press

With coronavirus cases rising in parts of Europe and Asia, scientists worry that an extra-contagious version of the omicron variant may soon push cases up in the United States too.

Experts are also keeping their eyes on another mutant: a rare delta-omicron hybrid that they say doesn’t pose much of a threat right now, but shows how wily the coronavirus can be.

The United States will likely see an uptick in cases caused by the omicron descendant BA.2 starting in the next few weeks, according to Dr. Eric Topol, head of Scripps Research Translational Institute.

“It’s inevitable we will see a BA.2 wave here,” he said.

One reason? After two months of falling COVID-19 cases, pandemic restrictions have been lifted across the U.S. Many people are removing masks and returning to indoor spaces like restau-

rants and theaters.

And the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows the share caused by BA.2 is up significantly. The CDC reported Tuesday that the variant made up about 35% of new infections last week.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government’s top infectious disease expert, told ABC’s “This Week” over the weekend he also thinks the U.S. will likely face an “uptick” similar to what’s happening in Europe. He said he doesn’t think it will be a “surge.”

The United Kingdom has “had the same situation as we’ve had now,” Fauci said. “They have BA.2. They have a relaxation of some restrictions such as indoor masking and there’s a waning of immunity” from vaccines and past infections.

One reason BA.2 has gained ground, scientists have said, is that it’s about 30% more contagious than the original omicron.

## Moderna says vaccine works for kids under 6

Associated Press

Moderna’s COVID-19 vaccine works in babies, toddlers and preschoolers, the company announced Wednesday — and if regulators agree, it could mean a chance to finally start vaccinating the littlest kids by summer.

Moderna said it would ask regulators in the United States and Europe in the coming weeks to authorize two small-dose shots for youngsters under 6. The company is also seeking to have larger-dose shots cleared for older children and teens in the U.S.

The nation’s 18 million children under 5 are the only age group not yet eligible for vaccination. Competitor Pfizer currently offers kid-sized doses for school-age children and full-strength shots for those 12 and older.

But parents have anxiously awaited protection for younger tots, disappointed by setbacks

and confusion over which shots might work and when. Pfizer is testing even smaller doses for children under 5, but had to add a third shot to its study when two didn’t prove strong enough. Those results are expected by early April.

The younger the child, the smaller the dose being tested. Moderna said a quarter of the dose it uses for adults worked well for youngsters under age 6.

Moderna enrolled about 6,900 tots in a study of the 25-microgram doses. Early data showed after two shots, youngsters developed virus-fighting antibody levels as strong as young adults getting regular-strength shots, the company said in a press release.

Moderna said the small doses were safe, and the main side effects were mild fevers like those associated with other commonly used pediatric vaccines.



# Taliban cancels girls' higher education

*Associated Press*

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghanistan's Taliban rulers decided against opening schools to girls above the sixth grade, reneging on a previous promise and opting to appease their hardline base at the expense of further alienating the international community.

The unexpected decision, confirmed by a Taliban official Wednesday, came at the start of the new school year in Afghanistan. It is bound to disrupt Taliban efforts to win recognition from potential international donors, at a time when the country is mired in a worsening humanitarian crisis.

The international community has been urg-

ing Taliban leaders to open schools and give women their right to public space. A statement by the ministry earlier in the week urged "all students" to come to school.

The decision to postpone a return of girls going to school in higher levels appeared to be a concession to the rural and deeply tribal backbone of the hardline Taliban movement, that in many parts of the countryside are reluctant to send their daughters to school.

The decision to cancel the return of girls to school came late in the night on Tuesday, Waheedullah Hashmi, external relations and donor representative with the Taliban-led administration, told The Associated Press.

"It was late last night that we received word from our leadership that schools will stay closed for girls," said Hashmi. "We don't say they will be closed forever."

The surprise decision also comes as the movement's leadership has been summoned to southern Kandahar by the reclusive Taliban leader, Haibatullah Akhunzada, amid reports of a Cabinet shakeup, according to an Afghan leader, who is also a member of the leadership council. He spoke on condition of anonymity, because he was not authorized to speak to the media. He said it is possible some of the senior interim Cabinet positions could be changed.

## Utah GOP governor vetoes transgender sports ban

*Associated Press*

SALT LAKE CITY — Utah Gov. Spencer Cox vetoed a ban on transgender students playing girls' sports on Tuesday, becoming the second Republican governor this week to overrule state lawmakers taking on youth sports amid broader culture wars as LGBTQ visibility grows.

Leaders in the GOP-dominated Legislature, however, quickly called a veto override session and indicated they had enough support to keep the ban in place.

There's also pushback against Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb's Monday decision to veto a statewide ban. Holcomb said Indiana's Legislature had not demonstrated that transgender kids had undermined fairness in sports.

Cox, for his part, referenced the potential effects on transgender youth.

"I struggle to understand so much of it and the science is conflicting. When in doubt, however, I always try to err on the side of kindness, mercy and compassion," Cox wrote in a letter to Utah legislative leaders.

The vetoes come as Cox and Holcomb's counterparts in nearly a dozen conservative-leaning states have enacted similar legislation and politicians have honed in on transgender kids in sports as a campaign issue in states ranging from Missouri to Pennsylvania.

As election season approaches, Republican leaders in Utah said listening to their constituents inspired the move to override the veto.

"Doing nothing is taking a step backward for women," Utah Senate President Stuart Adams said in a statement. "Finding a solution to this complicated issue is necessary to maintain fair competition now and in the future."

Shortly after announcing his veto, the governor also called for a special session to provide taxpayer funding for lawsuits filed against school districts and youth sports organizations, an apparent acknowledgment that his veto would not stand.

In Utah, there are four transgender players out of 85,000 who are competing in school sports after being ruled eligible by the state's high school athletic association. Only one competes in girls sports. There are no public concerns about competitive advantages.

## 2nd Texas National Guard general abruptly dismissed

**BY ROSE L. THAYER**

*Stars and Stripes*

AUSTIN, Texas — The commander of the Texas National Guard's 36th Infantry Division was replaced last week after just five months on the job. It was the second swift change of leadership for the state Guard following months of concerns over its security mission along the Texas-Mexico border.

Maj. Gen. Thomas Suelzer, who became adjutant general of the Texas Military Department one week ago, announced Thursday that he replaced Maj. Gen. Charles Aris with Brig. Gen. Ronald "Win" Burkett II as commander of the 36th Infantry Division. The department held a ceremony in October to install Aris as

the division commander.

Burkett previously served as the deputy commander for U.S. Army North, where he focused on defense support to civil authorities and support coordination activities.

Suelzer announced the transition just days after Gov. Greg Abbott appointed Suelzer to replace Maj. Gen. Tracy Norris as adjutant general. Norris and Aris will retire, according to the Texas Military Department.

Transitions for both command positions are typically announced in advance and include a formal public ceremony. The announcements made last week were effective immediately and officials said "appropriate" ceremonies are in the planning stages.

As Suelzer stepped into command, he said in a statement that he would "work tirelessly to rebuild trust within our organization," which has become embroiled in months of media coverage about the challenges surrounding the 10,000 Texas Guard troops deployed on a mission known as Operation Lone Star.

Troops have dealt with late paychecks, limited access to necessary equipment and cramped living conditions for a mission that some soldiers have said lacks purpose. Texas Military Department has said the quick escalation of the border mission caused many of the problems because the state has never had so many troops on assignment for such an extended period of time.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Cold War-era submarine parts to be on exhibit

**SC** MOUNT PLEASANT — A state naval museum in South Carolina has decided after years of debate to take apart a Cold War-era submarine and save some of its artifacts for an exhibit.

The Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum board voted unanimously to dismantle the USS Clamagore, The Post and Courier of Charleston reported.

The Clamagore was stationed in Key West, Fla., during the Cold War, when it was known as the “Grey Ghost of the Florida Coast.” The Guppy-class sub was decommissioned in 1975 and has been docked at the Mount Pleasant military attraction since 1981.

Some of the artifacts will be used to create an exhibit about the Clamagore on the neighboring Yorktown aircraft carrier, said Rorie Cartier, executive director at Patriots Point.

### Police seek driver after car stunt ends in crash

**CA** LOS ANGELES — Police sought the public’s help to identify a hit-and-run driver who crashed while attempting a stunt on an extremely steep Los Angeles street while spectators recorded videos.

The incident occurred in the hilly Echo Park area, according to a police press release. A rented Tesla sped up a street, jumped over the cross street at the top of the hill and descended down the equally steep other side of the hill, crashing into trash cans and two parked vehicles.

The police department said the Tesla was abandoned at the scene and there was no description of

the driver.

### Man accused of train stabbing also had gun

**NM** ALBUQUERQUE — Authorities said a man accused of stabbing two people and injuring a third on a commuter rail train in Albuquerque also had a gun at the time.

New Mexico State Police found the handgun in the backpack of Luis Sanchez, 33, when he was arrested, according to a criminal complaint. He was charged with aggravated battery, possession of a firearm or destructive device by a felon and resisting, evading or obstructing an officer.

Rail Runner officials said Sanchez got into an argument with another male passenger and allegedly stabbed that passenger in the back and lower abdomen. As security attempted to step in, police said Sanchez stabbed a female security guard in the neck. He then slashed an elderly woman on her shoulder, according to the complaint.

### Traveling beer gardens return to city’s parks

**WI** MILWAUKEE — Mobile beer gardens will be back in Milwaukee parks starting in May.

Two fire trucks serving beer, brats, hot dogs and pretzels will start making their rounds May 11 in Juneau Park and May 25 in Froemming Park. WDJT-TV reported the trucks will visit 10 parks before Labor Day.

Milwaukee County Parks Director Guy Smith said in 2021, the trucks served 55,000 pints of beer, 2,000 root beer floats, 7,700 brats and hot dogs and 4,500 pretzels. All revenue goes toward im-

proving the parks.

### Police think pot shops hit by same burglars

**ME** GORHAM — The robbery of an estimated \$59,000 worth of weed products from a Maine marijuana business in October is just one of a string of weed-related burglaries in New England that police suspect are being organized by the same group.

The group cut through the wall of a warehouse in Gorham and ran away with nearly 30 pounds of marijuana and 500 THC vaping cartridges, The Portland Press Herald reported.

A warrant granted by a Maine judge in January shows multiple recreational marijuana businesses and medical marijuana dispensaries in Maine and Rhode Island have been burglarized in the past two years, the newspaper reported.

### Ex-official sentenced to nearly 4 years in prison

**LA** SHREVEPORT — A former government official in a north Louisiana parish was sentenced to nearly four years in prison for defrauding a federal summer feeding program for children.

The U.S. Attorney’s Office in Shreveport said former Caddo Parish Commissioner Lynn Cawthorne, 55, was sentenced to 46 months. His sister and co-defendant, Belena C. Turner, 50, also was sentenced to 46 months.

Both pleaded guilty to wire fraud in November. Prosecutors said they made claims and received more than \$1 million for the Summer Feeding Service Program. But an investigation

showed they spent much less on food. They were ordered to jointly pay \$837,690 in restitution to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

### Governor signs law to ban ‘Carolina Squat’

**VA** LYNCHBURG — Virginia’s governor signed into law a ban on squatted trucks just weeks after a crash that left a 27-year-old man dead.

The legislation signed by Gov. Glenn Youngkin prohibits modifications that make a vehicle’s front bumper 4 or more inches higher than the rear bumper. Critics of the modification — sometimes called the “Carolina Squat” — have said the upward tilt may leave drivers unable to clearly see ahead.

A similar ban went into effect in North Carolina last year.

### Man assaults another driver after car crash

**DE** NEW CASTLE — A Delaware man was charged with assaulting another driver with an anti-theft device after a crash in New Castle, state police said.

When troopers arrived, they learned that a man broke a pickup truck’s driver’s side window with an anti-theft device, then assaulted the driver with it, police said. The man threatened to kill everyone inside the vehicle, including three young girls, then ran off, police said.

Police found the man still running about a mile away. He was charged with second-degree assault, aggravated menacing, terroristic threatening and other offenses.

— From wire reports

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# Source: Chiefs deal WR Hill to Dolphins

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Kansas City Chiefs traded wide receiver Tyreek Hill to Miami for a package of draft picks on Wednesday, and the Dolphins are giving the three-time All-Pro a \$120 million, four-year contract extension, a person familiar with the moves said.

The Chiefs will get the Dolphins' first- and second-round picks along with their fourth-rounder in this year's draft, and fourth- and sixth-round picks next year, the person said on condition of anonymity because terms were not announced.

Hill's agent, Drew Rosenhaus, said the next extension from Miami includes \$72.2 million guaranteed.

The Chiefs had been in discussion with Hill on a contract extension in part because they

were seeking relief from a tight salary cap situation. But the talks had stalled over the past few days, and Hill's representatives requested permission to seek a trade, which came together quickly with multiple teams expressing interest in him.

## Titans trade for WR Woods to replace Jones

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Tennessee Titans have traded for wide receiver Robert Woods in a deal sending a sixth-round pick in the 2023 draft to the Los Angeles Rams.

The Titans announced the deal Wednesday after first clearing some much-needed space under the salary cap. They also announced they signed back linebacker Dylan

Cole to a one-year deal.

Woods is a nine-year veteran who tore his left ACL in practice on Nov. 12, the first significant injury of his career. The 6-foot, 195-pound receiver has played 125 games with 570 catches for 7,077 yards and 35 touchdowns with Buffalo and the Rams.

The move helps replace seven-time Pro Bowl receiver Julio Jones, who was released by the Titans last week.

In other signings:

■ Terron Armstead has become the Miami Dolphins' latest big free agent move, announcing Tuesday night that he's joining the team after spending his first nine NFL seasons with the New Orleans Saints.

Armstead instantly becomes the presumed starter at left tackle for the Dolphins, whose

offensive line struggled at times last season. His decision came one day after visiting Miami, then leaving without a deal completed.

Armstead is a three-time Pro Bowl selection — 2018, 2019 and 2020 — but was limited to eight games for the Saints last season while dealing with a knee injury and COVID-19-related issues.

■ Three years ago at the Pro Bowl, Danielle Hunter autographed a jersey and gave it to his NFC teammate, Za'Darius Smith, with an inscription that raised the possibility of a future reunion.

Smith agreed to a three-year contract worth \$42 million with the Vikings on Tuesday, giving the team a pass-rushing boost it badly needed to complement Hunter.

# Confidence has helped Arizona's Koloko elevate game

Associated Press

Christian Koloko saw the play develop from across the lane, slid into position and blocked the shot with one hand.

Seconds later, after an offensive rebound, another TCU player had the audacity to challenge Arizona's 7-foot shot swatter. Denied, two-handed this time.

Once a skinny freshman with limited offensive skills, Koloko has transformed himself into an anchor at both ends of the court during Arizona's run to the Sweet 16.

"Christian plays with much more swagger this year," Arizona associate head coach Jack Murphy said. "He's always been a talented kid. He's taken a huge leap this year and a lot of it has to do with confidence."

Koloko's road to Thursday's Sweet 16 game against Houston began in Douala, a port city in western Cameroon.

As a lanky kid, he played multiple sports with kids in the

neighborhood, with a particular affinity for soccer. When Koloko started to grow and his interest in basketball rose, his path to the hoop was filled with obstacles.

His friends weren't all that interested in basketball, so he didn't have anyone to play against. Koloko's neighborhood didn't have any courts, so he'd have to walk a couple of miles to get shots up or play pickup games. Even then, the courts were often dotted with weeds, the rims sometimes broken.

"It was hard, but I just had no other choice," he said.

Koloko developed his game enough to get an invite to the NBA's Basketball Without Borders camp. The raw, skinny kid drew plenty of attention, earning several scholarship offers in the United States.

With his length and potential, Koloko drew the attention of several big-name schools. He chose to play for Sean Miller at Arizona, joining a recruiting class that included highly touted

players Nico Mannion, Josh Green and Zeke Nnaji.

Koloko didn't see much playing time as a freshman on a talent-loaded team, averaging 2.3 points in 8.3 minutes per game. His scoring average increased to 5.3 in 2020-21, but the pandemic stunted his development because he wasn't on campus for offseason workouts.

Koloko took a huge leap forward this season.

Working with Wildcats strength coach Chris Rounds, Koloko has added 20 pounds to his frame since his freshman year through the weight room and a better diet.

The addition of coach Tommy Lloyd, known for his player development skills in 22 years as an assistant at Gonzaga, accelerated Koloko's progress on the court. Lloyd also gave Koloko a confidence injection, giving him the freedom to just play without having to worry about a quick hook if he made a mistake.

"Him knowing there really

wasn't anyone behind him where he's looking over his shoulder, that made a huge difference," Murphy said.

It sure has.

Koloko expanded his offensive repertoire beyond dunks and vastly improved his footwork to average 11.9 points and 7.9 rebounds this season. He's become a dominant force on the defensive end, blocking 2.8 shots per game, first in the Pac-12 and 13th nationally.

The junior has ratcheted his game up even more as Arizona pushed toward the Sweet 16.

Koloko had 13 points, 10 rebounds, four assists and four blocked shots in the Wildcats' win over UCLA in the Pac-12 Tournament title game. He kicked off the NCAA Tournament against Wright State with 17 points, 13 rebounds, six assists and five blocked shots — the first Division I player since Colgate's Adonal Foyle in 1996 to hit those marks in an NCAA Tournament game.



# Yankees, Judge far apart in arbitration

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — The New York Yankees exchanged proposed salaries with slugger Aaron Judge, who asked for a raise from \$10,175,000 to \$21 million on Tuesday and was offered \$17 million.

Judge's was the highest request among the 31 major league players who swapped figures with their teams before Tuesday's deadline, and the Yankees submitted the largest offer. He and the club are expected to discuss a long-term agreement.

"If we're able to talk and get something done before the season starts, that'd be ideal," Judge said last week.

The outfielder led the Yankees with a .287 batting average, 39 homers, 98 RBIs and .916 OPS last year in his healthiest and fullest season since 2017. He turns 30 on April 26 and is eligible for free

agency after the World Series.

"I want to be a Yankee for life. I want to wear these pin-stripes for the rest of my career and represent this great organization and bring a championship back to the city. But you never know what the future holds for you. That's kind of out of my hands," he said at the end of last season. "All I can really do is continue to show up here, continue to try to lead these guys and give all I can for this team and this city every single day. And, whatever happens on the flip side of that with contracts and this and that, getting traded, it's out of my control."

New York reached agreements with outfielder Joey Gallo (\$10,275,000), second baseman Gleyber Torres (\$6.25 million), left-hander Jordan Montgomery (\$6 million), right-hander Jameson Taillon (\$5.8 million), infielder

Isiah Kiner-Falefa (\$4.7 million), right-hander Chad Green (\$4 million), left-hander Wandy Peralta (\$2.15 million), right-hander Jonathan Loáisiga (\$1.65 million), infielder/outfielder Miguel Andújar (\$1.3 million), right-hander Clay Holmes (\$1.1 million) and catcher Kyle Higashioka (\$935,000).

Arbitration-eligible players who didn't reach agreement with their teams are set to have their cases heard by three-person panels over video conference after opening day, a scheduling oddity necessitated by baseball's 99-day lockout.

The deadline to exchange salary arbitration numbers was delayed from mid-January until Tuesday. No dates have been set for hearings, which usually occur in February. Teams and players can continue to negotiate and may agree on a deal at any time.

Five players from the World Series champion Atlanta Braves are among those in arbitration hearings. Atlanta general manager Alex Anthopoulos could wind up with potentially awkward hearings against third baseman Austin Riley, shortstop Dansby Swanson, outfielder Adam Duvall and pitchers Max Fried and Luke Jackson. Anthopoulos told The Athletic on Tuesday that Atlanta's clubhouse was "rattled" when popular slugger Freddie Freeman left for the Los Angeles Dodgers as a free agent after Anthopoulos traded for Matt Olson from Oakland.

Riley has asked for \$4.2 million and been offered \$3.95 million, while Swanson wants \$10 million vs. the team's offer of \$9.2 million. Duvall asked for \$10,275,000 vs. \$9,275,000, Fried \$6.85 million vs. \$6.6 million, and Jackson \$4 million vs. \$3.6 million.

## Top-ranked women's tennis player Barty retires at 25

Associated Press

BRISBANE, Australia — Ash Barty did things on her own terms as she won three Grand Slam singles titles and spent more than two consecutive years at No. 1 in the women's tennis rankings.

She retired on her own terms, too. At the age of 25, just two months after winning the Australian Open title.

The announcement stunned the tennis world on Wednesday.

"I just know at the moment, in my heart, for me as a person, this is right," Barty said, her voice shaky at times, during a six-minute video posted on her Instagram account Wednesday in Australia.

Saying it was time to "chase other dreams," Barty, who announced her engagement to trainee golf professional Garry Kissick in November, said she no longer feels compelled to do

what she knows is required to be the best she can be at tennis.

"It's the first time I've actually said it out loud and, yeah, it's hard to say," Barty said during an informal interview with her former doubles partner, Casey Dellacqua. "I don't have the physical drive, the emotional want and everything it takes to challenge yourself at the very top level any more. I am spent."

This is not the first time Barty walked away from tennis: She was the Wimbledon junior champion at age 15 in 2011, presaging a promising professional career, but left the tour entirely for nearly two years in 2014 because of burnout, overwhelmed by the pressure and travel required.

She played professional cricket back home in Australia, then eventually returned to her other sport.

Barty went on to win singles

major championships on three different surfaces — on clay at the 2019 French Open, on grass at Wimbledon last year and on the hard courts of Melbourne Park in January, becoming the first Australian player in 44 years to triumph at the nation's Grand Slam tournament.

But she hasn't played a tournament since being presented with her Australian Open trophy by seven-time Grand Slam singles champion Evonne Goolagong Cawley, her mentor and Indigenous and Australian tennis icon, after a straight-sets final victory over Danielle Collins.

"I am so supportive of Ash that she does what makes her happy," Goolagong Cawley told The Associated Press. "I can't wait to see what happens in the next chapter of Ash's life, and what helps her achieve her dreams."

Barty won 15 tour-level titles in singles and 12 in doubles since first turning pro in 2010. She spent 121 weeks at No. 1 in the rankings, including the last 114 in a row.

Her announcement was all the more stunning from an on-court perspective given her recent run of success: Barty had won 25 of her last 26 matches and three of her past four events.

Only one other woman has walked away from the sport while atop the WTA rankings: Justine Henin was No. 1 when she retired in May 2008.

In a statement released by the WTA, CEO Steve Simon called Barty "the ultimate competitor."

During her 21-month sabbatical from tennis as a teen, Barty played cricket with the Brisbane Heat of the Women's Big Bash League.

# Hurricanes storm past Lightning

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Martin Necas and Tony DeAngelo scored on Carolina's slumping power play, and the Hurricanes stopped a four-game slide by topping the Tampa Bay Lightning 3-2 on Tuesday night.

"We played our game and it worked out," Necas said.

Sebastian Aho also scored for Carolina, and Seth Jarvis had two assists. Frederik Andersen made 27 saves for just his second win this month.

Nick Paul scored in his first Tampa Bay game and Alex Killorn closed the gap with 59.3 seconds remaining. Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 38 shots, but the Lightning lost for the fifth time in their last seven games.

The Hurricanes went six consecutive games without a power-play goal and then scored two within a seven-minute span in the second period. They accounted for the team's first two goals.

**Blues 5, Capitals 2:** Nathan Walker scored the go-ahead goal hours after being called up, helping St. Louis snap a three-game skid with a win at Washington.

Brandon Saad and Brayden Schenn each had a goal and an assist, and captain Ryan O'Reilly scored on the power play for the Blues, who had lost seven of their past nine games.

David Perron added an empty-netter to extend his goal-scoring streak to seven

games, and Ville Husso made 19 saves for his 16th victory of the season.

**Kraken 4, Coyotes 2:** Carson Soucy had two goals and Daniel Sprong scored in his first game with Seattle in a win at Arizona.

Soucy scored the first and last goal in a five-goal second period, and Morgan Geekie added one in the third as the expansion Kraken won their third game in the last four while beating the Coyotes for the first time in three meetings.

**Penguins 5, Blue Jackets 1:** Jake Guentzel scored twice during a furious second-period surge, and host Pittsburgh breezed past Columbus.

Radim Zohorna and Bryan Rust also scored during the second for the Penguins. Evgeni Malkin added a power-play goal in the third as they won their third straight. Tristan Jarry stopped 26 shots to improve to 7-1 in his last eight starts.

**Islanders 3, Senators 0:** Semyon Varlamov made 24 saves in his first shutout of the season, leading host New York past Ottawa.

Scott Mayfield, Anders Lee and Zach Parise scored in the third period. Brock Nelson finished with three assists as the Islanders won for the sixth time in eight games.

**Devils 7, Rangers 4:** Jack Hughes scored twice and host New Jersey broke loose for five second-period goals — four in a six-minute span — to erase an early deficit.

Nico Daws made 31 saves for the Devils.

Ryan Graves, P.K. Subban, Dawson Mercer, Tomas Tatar and Yegor Sharangovich also scored for New Jersey.

**Red Wings 6, Flyers 3:** Jakub Vrana scored twice and host Detroit won for the second time in nine games, defeating Philadelphia.

Tyler Bertuzzi had a goal and two assists, and Oskar Sundqvist, acquired from St. Louis on Monday, contributed an empty-netter and an assist in his Red Wings debut.

**Jets 4, Golden Knights 0:** Connor Hellebuyck made 42 saves, and host Winnipeg blanked Vegas.

Nikolaj Ehlers and Mark Scheifele each had a goal and an assist for the Jets. Pierre-Luc Dubois and Neal Pionk also scored, and Blake Wheeler and Kyle Connor each had two assists.

**Stars 5, Oilers 3:** Roope Hintz and Denis Gurianov scored 24 seconds apart late in the third period to rally host Dallas, as Edmonton lost for the first time this season after scoring first.

**Kings 6, Predators 1:** Adrian Kempe and Quinton Byfield each scored twice, and short-handed Los Angeles scored three times in the first 11 minutes to defeat visiting Nashville.

**Sharks 4, Flames 3:** Logan Couture and Alexander Barabanov scored in a 28-second span in the third period, rallying San Jose at Calgary.

# With Antetokounmpo back, Bucks romp past Bulls

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE— Giannis Antetokounmpo had 25 points and 17 rebounds in his return to the lineup, and the Milwaukee Bucks extended their recent mastery of the Chicago Bulls with a 126-98 blowout Tuesday night.

Antetokounmpo missed the Bucks' 138-119 loss at Minnesota on Saturday due to a sore right knee. Milwaukee played without All-Star forward Khris Middleton, who was dealing with a sore left wrist.

Jrue Holiday had a game-high 27 points to go along with seven assists as the Bucks won for the 15th time in their last 16 meetings with the Bulls, including all three matchups this season. Chicago's

lone win during that stretch came in their 2019-20 regular season finale, when the Bucks rested their starters because they were locked into the East's No. 3 play-off seed.

"Jrue was being Jrue," Antetokounmpo said. "Jrue was being aggressive, making good decisions, getting downhill, getting everybody involved, guarding Zach (LaVine). Everybody was doing their job. Obviously we knew that Khris wasn't playing, and Khris is a big part of our team and what we do here, but at the end of the day, even with the team that we have, we're a great team."

Brook Lopez had 10 points and six rebounds in 24 minutes for Milwaukee after making his first

start since the season opener. The 7-footer had come off the bench for the Bucks' last three games after missing 67 due to a back injury that required surgery.

**Magic 94, Warriors 90:** Franz Wagner made three free throws with 12.2 seconds left and dunked on an inbounds play for the final points, leading host Orlando over Golden State.

Mo Bamba's three-pointer with 52 seconds left gave the Magic an 89-88 lead. Wendell Carter Jr. led Orlando with 19 points and Wagner had 18.

With the Warriors' loss, the NBA-leading Phoenix Suns (58-14) clinched first place in the Pacific Division.

**Nuggets 127, Clippers 115:** Nikola Jokic bounced back from a rare poor shooting performance, scoring 30 points to lead host Denver over Los Angeles.

The Nuggets had dropped four of six, including a 124-104 home loss to the Celtics on Sunday night in which Jokic missed 15 shots.

**Hawks 117, Knicks 111:** Trae Young had 45 points and eight assists in his first game at Madison Square Garden since last season's playoffs, leading a late surge that sent Atlanta past New York.

Picking up right where he left off last spring, Young made seven three-pointers, including one that tied the game at 105 with 2:54 to play.