

## NATO boosts its defenses in Europe

BY JOHN VANDIVER

*Stars and Stripes*

NATO is activating nuclear, biological and chemical defenses in response to concerns that Russia may be preparing a chemical attack on Ukraine, a potential action that the alliance's top official said Thursday could put neighboring nations at risk.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, after a meeting of allied heads of state, said the alliance also agreed to send Ukraine gear to protect its people from chemical attacks.

The equipment on the way could include personal protective gear, medical supplies, chemical agent detectors and training for decontamination, Stoltenberg said.

Meanwhile, recent Russian nuclear saber-rattling also has prompted NATO commanders to prepare for the worst, he said.

"We are taking measures to support Ukraine and defend ourselves," Stoltenberg said.

U.S. Air Force Gen. Tod Wolters, NATO's supreme allied commander and head of U.S. European Command, was tasked with activating nuclear and chemical "defense elements," said Stoltenberg, who didn't

elaborate on what that entailed.

U.S. President Joe Biden, who took part in the NATO talks in Brussels before heading to meetings with the G-7 and European Union on Thursday, has warned that Russia could be seeking a pretext to carry out a chemical attack in Ukraine.

Stoltenberg said any such action by Moscow would "totally change the nature of the conflict" and could have a "direct effect on NATO countries."

"It will be a blatant violation of international law," he said. "It will have widespread consequences and of course be extremely dangerous."

In Brussels, NATO also agreed to the establishment of four new battlegroups in Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Hungary. The units, which include forces from across the alliance, are part of NATO's efforts to enhance defenses on the eastern flank. Bigger changes are also anticipated in the months ahead as NATO prepares for long-term changes to its force posture.

A significantly larger NATO force is expected in the east, but details won't be finalized until June when heads of state meet again in Madrid, Stoltenberg said.

During the meeting, Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed NATO leaders virtually, calling on members to send in more weaponry.

So far, the United States and other allies have rushed in billions of dollars of equipment, including anti-tank Javelins and Stinger anti-aircraft missiles.

Zelenskyy said his country needs more, such as anti-ship missiles and long-range air defenses.

"I ask you to reassess your positions and think about security in Europe and in the whole world. You can give us just 1% of all of your airplanes, just 1% of your tanks," Zelenskyy said.

After the talks, Stoltenberg told reporters that allies are committed to supplying weapons to Ukraine, but that NATO has "a responsibility to prevent this conflict from becoming a full-fledged war in Europe."

Also on Wednesday, NATO announced that Stoltenberg, who had planned on stepping down from his post this year, will remain in his role through September 2023 to help guide the alliance through the challenges posed by Russia.

Stoltenberg, a former Norwegian prime minister, has been NATO's top official since 2014.

## Marine Corps updates standards for uniforms, hair

BY WYATT OLSON

*Stars and Stripes*

Updates to uniforms and grooming standards announced Wednesday by the Marine Corps will impact troops from head to toe.

The Corps decided on the changes last month, but they became official with the publication of an administrative memo to all Marines.

Among the updates is the authorization allowing Marines to maintain a thicker head of hair.

The limit for so-called "bulk of hair," which is the thickness of hair lying flat on the scalp, has been extended from 2 to 3 inches, according to the memo.

The Marine Corps remains the only service that does not allow women to sport po-

nytails while in uniform after the Coast Guard authorized the style last summer.

The Corps now allows men to "edge up" their hairlines.

This cut is used for "undesirable" hair that extends beyond or below the natural hairline, the memo said.

For example, it can be used to remove a widow's peak or other excess hair on the forehead, "as long as it provides a neat, professional and natural appearance," the memo said.

The Corps is also changing what Marines can have on top of their heads in limited circumstances.

Marines can wear several colors of commercial-brand liners beneath helmets, and they "may be worn as an outer garment for short periods when the helmet is removed,

per the Commander's discretion," the memo said.

Nametapes on uniforms are now authorized to include special characters that are helpful in pronunciations, such as apostrophes, accent marks, tildes and hyphens.

The special characters will be used only as space allows, however, as the overall length of nametapes is unchanged, the memo said.

Several changes to maternity uniforms have been adopted.

They include adjustable side tabs on the tunic and short- and long-sleeved shirts that will make it easier to get the best fit during the course of a pregnancy. Pregnant Marines are also authorized a supplemental cash allowance to buy two maternity undershirts.

# N. Korea may have tested 'new type' of missile

By DAVID CHOI  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — South Korea answered its northern neighbor's latest intercontinental ballistic missile test Thursday with a volley of its own as a show of force, according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

North Korea launched a single ICBM off its eastern coast at 2:34 p.m. Thursday, its first such test in nearly five years, the Joint Chiefs said in a message to reporters. It reached an altitude of 3,850 miles and traveled more than 671 miles.

At 4:25 p.m., South Korea fired several ground-to-sea missiles and dropped two bombs into the Sea of Japan/East Sea as a response to the North's ICBM test, according to a later message from the military.

The demonstrations, which included a Hyunmoo II short-range ballistic missile and two air-to-surface Joint Direct Attack Munition bombs, typically carried by aircraft, "showed our capabilities and will to re-

act," the message said.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in met with national security officials following reports of the ICBM launch. Moon "condemned the launch strongly," according to a statement from the presidential Blue House.

"President Moon has strictly urged North Korea to immediately stop its actions that create tensions and swiftly return to the way of diplomatic solutions through dialogue," the statement said.

Japan's Ministry of Defense also confirmed a ballistic missile launch from North Korea, according to a ministry news release Thursday.

Defense Minister Makoto Oniki said the missile, possibly of a "new type," flew for over 71 minutes before falling into the country's exclusive economic zone in the sea.

"The launch poses a serious threat to our country's security," Oniki said in the release. "The fact that it was shot within our country's [exclusive eco-

nomie zone] without prior notification, we strongly condemn it as it is an extremely problematic and dangerous act from the standpoint of ensuring safety of aircraft and ships."

The exclusive economic zone is a band about 200 nautical miles wide extending from a nation's coast, beyond its territorial waters, over which it has rights to the area's resources.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida described the launch as "unforgivable violence" during a televised news conference on Thursday.

Until Thursday, North Korea had conducted at least 10 rounds of missile tests so far this year. The communist regime is believed to have last tested a ballistic missile on March 16. South Korea's military deemed that launch to have "failed immediately."

That missile apparently exploded at an altitude below 12.5 miles, according to news reports citing military officials. Photos reviewed by NK News indicated debris from the explo-

sion fell on the North Korean capital of Pyongyang.

On Sunday, North Korea fired an artillery barrage into the sea in an apparent test of a multiple rocket launch system, according to the South Korean Defense Ministry.

The United States warned in early March that North Korea would likely be "conducting a test at full range in the future."

The U.S. believed the North's purported satellite program was a guise intended to test a "new intercontinental ballistic missile system," according to a March 10 statement by Pentagon press secretary John Kirby.

"The United States strongly condemns these launches, which are a brazen violation of multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions, needlessly raise tensions and risk destabilizing the security situation in the region," Kirby said.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki in a statement Thursday condemned North Korea's launch of a "long-range ballistic missile."

## Navy security officer pleads guilty in sex trafficking case

By CHAD GARLAND  
*Stars and Stripes*

A Navy security officer in Virginia tried to help further the career of an undercover detective he thought was a prostitute, posting an ad that garnered over a dozen responses, prosecutors said this week in court.

Lt. Cmdr. Charles M. Cranston Jr., of Chesapeake, Va., also told the vice detective that he had a studio and an OnlyFans page to help make money, authorities said at a hearing Tuesday in Henrico County Circuit Court, Norfolk's WTKR News 3 reported.

A longtime member of the Navy's law enforcement and security branch, Cranston pleaded guilty at the hearing to a charge of commercial sex trafficking to receive money.

The felony charge involves soliciting, recruiting or encouraging a person to engage in prostitution.

Cranston could face one to 10 years in prison for the felony conviction. A jury or court also has the discretion to impose a lesser sentence of up to 12 months in jail or a \$2,500 fine, or both.

Cranston was arrested at a Norfolk base on Nov. 18 on charges related to an incident near Richmond early that month, police said at the time. The Navy confirmed he was then serving with U.S. Fleet Forces Command.

Prosecutors at Tuesday's hearing said Cranston had responded to an ad targeting potential sex trafficking, which was posted by the Henrico County Police Division's vice unit on Nov. 2. Detectives worked with

the Naval Criminal Investigative Service during the investigation.

Using the alias "Tony," Cranston sent text messages agreeing to split the costs of the hotel room with the supposed prostitute and discussing what would take place there, authorities said.

Cranston had served in the Navy for 27 years at the time of his arrest, his LinkedIn profile showed, including a stint as the enlisted community manager for the master-at-arms rating, where he was responsible for helping manage the careers of sailors in the security specialty.

Cranston was a security officer with Fleet Forces Command's Anti-Terrorism Force Protection unit in Norfolk when he was arrested, Task and Purpose reported in November.

# Lawyers' group praises high court pick

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Legal experts and interest groups are weighing in on Ketanji Brown Jackson as the Senate Judiciary Committee began a fourth day of hearings on her historic nomination to become the first Black woman on the Supreme Court.

Jackson faced down a barrage of Republican questioning over two days about her sentencing of criminal defendants, her bid to join the Supreme Court veering from lofty constitutional questions to attacks on her motivations on the bench.

On Thursday, the last day of hearings, interest groups including the American Bar Association and civil rights organizations are testifying about Jackson's suitability for the court. Witnesses chosen by Republican senators were to speak. As is customary, the nominee was not in attendance at this stage of the hearings.

The lawyers' group, which evaluates judicial nominees, last week gave Jackson its highest rating, unanimously "well qualified."

Ann Claire Williams, chair of the ABA's committee that makes recommendations on federal judges, said everyone the committee interviewed gave Jackson the highest praise. Members spoke to more than 250 judges and lawyers about Jackson.

Illinois Democrat Dick Durbin, the Senate committee chairman, noted that some Republican senators argued that Jackson was out of the mainstream when it comes to sentencing. Durbin asked the ABA whether such a concern would have surfaced in their interviews with the judges and lawyers who worked with her.

"It never came up in any of these interviews," Williams said.

Joseph Drayton, another member of the ABA committee, said Jackson's reputation is "stellar."

On Wednesday, her final day of Senate questioning, Jackson declared she would rule "without any agendas" and she rejected Republican efforts to paint her as soft on crime in her decade on the federal bench.

The GOP criticism of Jackson was met by effusive praise for her from Democrats, and by reflections on the historic nature of her nomination. The most riveting came from New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, who used his time not to ask questions but to tearfully speak and draw tears from Jackson as well.

Booker, who is Black, said that he sees "my ancestors and yours" when he looks at her. "I know what it's taken for you to sit here in this seat," he said. "You have earned this spot."

Jackson, whose family was seated behind her, was silent as Booker talked, but tears rolled down her face.

Jackson was in tears a second time after similar praise from Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Calif., and she responded that she hopes to be an inspiration because "I love this country, because I love the law."

Though her approval seems all but sure — Democrats are aiming for a vote before Easter — Republicans kept trying to chip away at her record.

## In 1st pandemic year, big metro areas lost residents

Associated Press

After returning to metro San Francisco following a college football career, Anthony Giusti felt like his hometown was passing him by. The high cost of living, driven by a constantly transforming tech industry, ensured that even with two jobs he would never save enough money to buy a house.

So he started looking elsewhere, settling on Houston just last year.

Giusti was one of tens of thousands of residents who vacated some of the nation's biggest, most densely-populated and costly metropolitan areas in favor of Sunbelt destinations during the first full year of the pandemic, from mid-2020 to mid-2021, according to new data released Thursday by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The pandemic intensified population trends of migration to the South and West, as well as

a slowdown in growth in the biggest cities in the U.S.

The exodus from the biggest U.S. metropolitan areas was led by New York, which lost almost 328,000 residents. It was driven by people leaving for elsewhere, even though the metro area gained new residents from abroad and births outpaced deaths.

Metropolitan Los Angeles lost almost 176,000 residents, the San Francisco area saw a loss of more than 116,000 residents and greater Chicago lost more than 91,000 people from 2020 to 2021. The San Jose, Boston, Miami and Washington areas also lost tens of thousands of residents primarily from people moving away.

On the flip side, the Dallas area grew by more than 97,000 residents, Phoenix jumped by more than 78,000 people and greater Houston added 69,000 residents, including Giusti.

## Car owners in California could get \$800 for gas

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Californians shouldering the nation's highest gas prices could soon get a tax break, free rides on public transit and up to \$800 on debit cards to help pay for fuel under a proposal revealed Wednesday by Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Gas prices have soared in recent weeks, the result of pandemic-induced inflation and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. State governments across the country have been debating what to do about it, with the most popular choices being slashing fuel taxes or offering rebates to taxpayers. Last week, the governors of Maryland and Georgia signed laws temporarily suspending their state's gas taxes, while Georgia on Wednesday also offered \$1.1 billion in refunds to taxpayers in a separate action.

California's average gas

prices hit a new state record Wednesday at \$5.88 per gallon, more than \$2 higher than it was a year ago, according to AAA. California has the second-highest gas tax in the country at 51 cents per gallon. But the state's Democratic leaders have been wary of suspending the gas tax because they fear oil companies would not pass along the savings to drivers.

Instead, they want to send money directly to taxpayers.

The governor's office says the average California driver spends about \$300 per year on gas taxes. Newsom's idea is to give car owners \$400 debit cards for up to two vehicles, for a total of \$800. The money would go to everyone who has a car registered with the state — including the uber-rich, people living in the country illegally, and even drivers who own vehicles that don't use gasoline.



## Plotter: Kidnapping Whitmer could ignite new US civil war

Associated Press

A man who pleaded guilty in a plot to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said her abduction could have been the “ignition” for a U.S. civil war involving antigovernment groups, possibly before the 2020 election.

Ty Garbin described a scheme to get the Democratic governor during testimony Wednesday against four former allies who are charged with conspiracy. He told jurors they wanted to attack before the election to prevent Joe Biden from winning the presidency.

“We wanted to cause as much a disruption as possible to prevent Joe Biden from getting into office. It didn’t have to be,” Garbin said of a pre-election blitz. “It was just preferred.”

The group was arrested in October 2020, a stunning bust near the end of a national campaign that polarized the country. Investigators said the men were extremists who were trying to come up with \$4,000 for an explosive to blow up a bridge in northern Michigan during the kidnapping.

They were angry about Whitmer’s statewide COVID-19 restrictions and generally disgusted with politicians, according to trial testimony. Garbin said a kidnapping would be the “ignition” for civil war “and hopefully other states or other groups would follow suit.”

The trial has linked, at times indirectly, the kidnapping plot to a series of events, especially right-wing protests at the Michigan Capitol and elsewhere in response to pandemic orders. Challenges to the results of the 2020 presidential election followed, culminating in the U.S. Capitol riot on Jan. 6, 2021.

Garbin explained the Whitmer plan to jurors, taking them through days of training, secret messages and a late night trip to her weekend home. He talked about how he built a “shoot house” with wood, tarp and scrap materials so the men could practice an eventual assault.

The goal was “to kidnap the governor,” Garbin said.

“There was no question in your mind that everybody knew?” Assistant U.S. Attorney Nils Kessler asked.

“No question,” Garbin said.

The jury already had heard from FBI agents and an informant who secretly recorded hours of incriminating, profanity-filled conversations. But Garbin’s testimony was striking because it came from someone who pleaded guilty and said he was a willing participant in the plan to snatch Whitmer. Another man who pleaded guilty, Kaleb Franks, will also testify against Adam Fox, Barry Croft Jr., Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta.

Defense lawyers have claimed the men were entrapped by the government. Garbin, however, told jurors that he never heard anyone talk about being swayed by informants.

He said he invited the group to his property in Luther, Mich., to train for a violent assault on Whitmer’s second home. He put together a crude structure so the men could practice going in and out of tight spaces.

In September 2020, Garbin, Fox, Croft and others traveled to Elk Rapids for night surveillance of Whitmer’s property. Garbin said his job was to find it and flash a light to others at a boat launch.

He said his ultimate assignment would be to “perform the actual kidnapping.”

Garbin said Fox and Croft were leaders of the cabal. Fox attorney Christopher Gibbons wondered how Garbin could be inspired by a guy who lived in the basement of a Grand Rapids-area vacuum shop, with the living space divided by hanging blankets.

The airplane mechanic began cooperating with prosecutors soon after the group was arrested. Garbin was rewarded with a relatively light six-year prison sentence, a term that could be reduced after the trial.

## Americans applying for jobless aid is lowest since 1969

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits last week fell to its lowest level in 52 years as the U.S. job market continues to show strength in the midst of rising costs and ongoing virus pandemic.

Jobless claims fell by 28,000 to 187,000 for the week ending March 19, the lowest since September of 1969, the Labor Department reported Thursday.

The four-week average for claims, which compensates for weekly volatility, fell to 211,750 from the previous week’s 223,250.

In total, 1,350,000 Americans — a more than 50-year low — were collecting jobless aid the week that ended March 12.

Earlier this month, the government reported that employers added a robust 678,000 jobs in February, the largest monthly total since July. The unemployment

rate dropped to 3.8%, from 4% in January, extending a sharp decline in joblessness to its lowest level since before the pandemic erupted two years ago.

U.S. businesses posted a near-record level of open jobs in January — 11.3 million — a trend that has helped pad workers’ pay and added to inflationary pressures.

The Federal Reserve launched a high-risk effort last week to tame the worst inflation since the early 1980s, raising its benchmark short-term interest rate and signaling up to six additional rate hikes this year.

The Fed’s quarter-point hike in its key rate, which it had pinned near zero since the pandemic recession struck two years ago, marks the start of its effort to curb the high inflation that followed the recovery from the recession. The rate hikes will eventually mean higher loan rates for many consumers and businesses.

## Police: 7 children recovering in Va. after getting sleeping pills

Associated Press

HOPEWELL, Va. — A house full of unsupervised children in Virginia were given sleeping pills by another child, causing them to be hospitalized Wednesday evening, police said.

WTVR-TV reports that Hopewell Police were called to a home on South 16th Street around 5:30 p.m. where they found four children, ages 1 to 4, unresponsive. Three more children found in another part of the home were awake but lethargic.

Investigators said the pill bottle found didn’t have a label on it. After questioning a 7-year-old and

consulting with doctors, however, they were able to determine the medication was sleeping pills, the station reported.

Lt. Cheyenne Casale of the Hopewell Police Department said the kids were left alone for a short time and one of the kids who had prescription medication “got into it and shared with the other children here.” All seven kids were hospitalized and the two youngest were later taken to another hospital in serious condition.

The adult who was supervising the children left to go to a store and called 911 upon returning and finding the children.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Dentist charged with murder in overdose death**

**MD** GAITHERSBURG — A Maryland dentist has been charged with murder after a former patient with whom he had been in a relationship died of a drug overdose.

Montgomery County Police say James Ryan was arrested Tuesday and charged with second-degree murder in the death of Susan Harris. She died in January after overdosing on drugs including ketamine and diazepam, which is sometimes sold under the brand name Valium, police said.

Police say Ryan, 48, an oral surgeon whose practice was based in Germantown, Md., first met Harris, 25, when she was a patient in 2020. According to police, Ryan later offered Harris a job and the two began dating. She eventually moved in with him.

Montgomery County Police Chief Marcus Jones said investigators found text messages in which Harris requested illicit drugs from Ryan, and he gave her instructions on how to increase their potency. The second-degree murder charges does not mean that prosecutors assert Ryan intended to kill Harris, but that he acted with “extreme indifference” to her life by supplying her with deadly drugs, The Washington Post reported.

**Mountain lion tranquilized after entering building**

**CA** IRVINE — A mountain lion was tranquilized Tuesday after it wandered into an industrial park and then entered a building in Southern California, a wildlife

official said.

The cougar was at the property in Irvine when it was spooked by something and ran through an open door into the building, said Rebecca Barboza, a biologist with the California Fish and Wildlife Department. People inside the building were able to scramble out, but the big cat had no way of leaving and was tranquilized, Barboza said.

The animal was transported to a veterinary clinic to be checked out and tagged for future tracking, she said.

The mountain lion will be released in a habitat with plenty of space, a water source, and near deer, the Orange County Register reported.

**Suspect hospitalized after fleeing, hiding in swamp**

**ND** JAMESTOWN — Authorities say a driver who fled from a North Dakota State Patrol trooper is hospitalized in Fargo with severe hypothermia after hiding in a swamp to avoid arrest.

According to the patrol, the trooper attempted to stop the man on Interstate 94 near Jamestown about 7:30 p.m. Monday for traveling 98 mph in a 75 mph zone, but he failed to pull over.

The 22-year-old driver left the interstate with the trooper in pursuit and traveled down a gravel township road where the vehicle got stuck in the swamp, then he fled on foot, officials said. Two passengers, a 21-year-old woman and 20-year-old man, were arrested.

The driver waded or swam across the swamp until additional troopers and deputies from the Stutsman County Sheriff's Office entered the water and located the suspect about 1½

hours later.

The man was severely hypothermic and was carried out of slough to an ATV that took him to a waiting ambulance, the patrol said. Initially, he was taken to Jamestown Regional Medical Center and then was transferred to a hospital in Fargo.

Charges are pending, according to officials.

**Dance group stuck in Ireland due to COVID-19**

**ID** COEUR D'ALENE — The Red Hot Mamas musical-comedy group from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, gave a well-received performance at the March 17 St. Patrick's Festival Parade in Limerick, Ireland, but some members had to stay in the country longer than expected after testing positive for COVID-19.

Trip leader Pam Ames says about half the group of 15 had to quarantine in Ireland this past week, although six participants who tested negative did fly home.

The Spokesman-Review reported that all members were vaccinated and followed travel requirements from the U.S., Ireland and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**Recreational fishers now can't take home starfish**

**OR** PORTLAND — Oregon residents who fish recreationally are now prohibited from taking home sea stars, otherwise known as starfish.

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission administrative rule went into effect last week, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported.

Sea stars have struggled for

survival along the Pacific Coast since a die-off in 2013 because of “sea star wasting syndrome.” The disease causes sea stars to develop lesions, then their limbs break off, and their bodies disintegrate.

Commercial sea star harvesting in Oregon was banned in 2014. Recreationalists were previously allowed to harvest up to 10 marine invertebrates, including shellfish and sea stars.

Recreational fishers can sometimes catch sea stars accidentally. In a news release, commissioners say intentional or accidental sea star harvesting doesn't happen often and likely doesn't significantly threaten their populations.

**Police: Fight over spilled drink led to fatal shooting**

**VA** NORFOLK — An argument over a spilled drink led to a shooting that killed two people, including a reporter, and injured three others outside a downtown Norfolk restaurant and bar over the weekend, according to the city's police chief.

Chief Larry Boone told the Downtown Norfolk Civic League on Monday night that the argument began inside Chicho's Pizza Backstage early Saturday, but ended with a shooting outside, news outlets reported. Sierra Jenkins, 25, a reporter for The Virginian-Pilot and Daily Press, and Devon Harris, 25, of Portsmouth, were caught in the line of fire and killed, police said. Three others were injured.

Investigators do not have solid leads on a suspect, but Boone said he is “cautiously optimistic” they will make an arrest based on where the shooting occurred.

— From wire reports

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# Sweet 16 reunion is sign of the times

*Associated Press*

There will be quite a reunion when Kansas and Providence join Iowa State and Miami at the Sweet 16 in Chicago this week, and it perfectly demonstrates the transient nature of college basketball these days.

The top-seeded Jayhawks, who face the Friars in the first Midwest Region semifinal Friday night, have on their bench sharpshooter Jalen Coleman-Lands, who was part of the mass exodus from the Cyclones after last season.

Iowa State coach T.J. Otzelberger countered by landing Tristan Enaruna, who played for the Jayhawks last season. Enaruna will line up in the other regional semifinal Friday night against Hurricanes guard Charlie Moore, whose career odyssey began at Cal and included a pit stop with the Jayhawks before spending the past two seasons at DePaul.

"I'm happy for T.J. and Iowa State and more so for Tristan — he gets a chance to play in the Sweet 16," Kansas coach Bill Self said. "And I'm really happy for Charlie to get to play in the Sweet 16."

Just about every team left in the NCAA Tournament has at least one key player who transferred from a four-year school. And while that was once a relative rarity because transfers would then have to sit out an entire year, rules changes the past few years have made it easier than ever for players to continue their careers elsewhere.

Or in the case of Moore, bounce through three other Division I schools before landing in the Sweet 16 with the 'Canes.

"I worked hard to get to this moment. I

feel like I'm a good enough player to be here," he said. "I never wondered about anything. I never really tried to worry about anything. I just tried to take it one moment at a time. And I feel like I did that."

The No. 11-seeded Cyclones have seven four-year transfers on their roster, which Otzelberger had to rebuild after taking the job last spring, and four came from power conferences. But it has paid off in a big way for Otzelberger, who has taken a two-win team from last season to the second week-end of the NCAA Tournament.

Penn State transfer Izaiah Brockington has been the catalyst for Iowa State, averaging more than 17 points a game, but Enaruna has given Otzelberger key minutes off the bench in NCAA tourney wins over LSU and Wisconsin.

"A lot of times when guys are transferring, especially as older players, they talk about wanting to have more opportunity, more shots, be a focal point, potentially a go-to guy," Otzelberger said. "My question right back at them is: How hard are you willing to work for it? What do you do extra? What's your leadership ability? What do you do when things are hard?"

"What I'll say with a tremendous sense of pride," Otzelberger continued, "is guys like Izaiah Brockington and (Minnesota transfer) Gabe Kalscheur, who have led us throughout the course of the season, those are guys that immediately talked about how hard they will work, how important it is to them to win games and play for pride for Iowa State. That meant a lot to me, and those guys have shown that throughout the course

of our season."

While stars have aligned to bring Coleman-Lands within a game of facing Iowa State for a spot in the Final Four, and Enaruna and Moore a win from facing the Jayhawks for a spot in New Orleans, there are numerous players at each of the regional sites that have ties to other teams still alive in the NCAA Tournament.

Another ex-Iowa State player, Rasir Bolton, is averaging 11.3 points for No. 1 overall seed Gonzaga, which plays Arkansas on Thursday night. The fourth-seeded Razorbacks lean heavily on Chris Lykes, a grad transfer from Miami.

The winner of that game could face Texas Tech — which plays Duke on Thursday night — where first-year coach Mark Adams has eight Division I transfers on the roster. One of them is Daniel Batcho, who redshirted last year at Arizona.

The Wildcats, another No. 1 seed which plays Houston on Thursday night, feature Oumar Ballo, a 7-footer from Mali who played for the Zags last season. The Cougars counter with Kyler Edwards, their No. 2 scorer who spent three seasons with the Red Raiders, and Reggie Chaney, who played two years for the Razorbacks.

Many transferred after coaching changes, one of the biggest reasons the NCAA has taken steps to make such moves easier. Others simply sought a new situation, better opportunities or a change of scenery.

All of them wanted a shot at playing in the Final Four. Given the number of Division I transfers still in the Sweet 16, at least a few will get their wish this weekend.

## Ndefo nearly missed Saint Peter's tournament run

*Associated Press*

JERSEY CITY, N.J. — One of the biggest changes in college sports in years has been the transfer portal.

It has allowed players to move from one program to another without sitting out a year, and given some schools a player or two to allow them to compete for a national title.

Saint Peter's, the surprise story of this year's NCAA Tournament, is in the Sweet 16 this week against No. 3 seed Purdue in Philadelphia because the portal came up short for Peacocks' forward and defensive star KC Ndefo.

Ndefo put his name in the portal after last season and did his due diligence to find a new program. He listened to other players.

Visited Texas Tech. Did Zooms with other schools and thought a lot.

Two days before the start of the school year Ndefo decided to return to tiny Saint Peter's in Jersey City, N.J.

"I didn't think he was coming back," Peacocks coach Shaheen Holloway said Tuesday. "We prepared for him not to come back. I brought a couple of freshman big guys. I was getting those guys ready the whole summer when he came back two days before school started. We had to adjust everything we did for three months."

Ndefo said his summer was comprised of a lot of high and lows, with other coaches and players wooing him.

"In the end, I knew what was best for me

and who had my best at heart," Ndefo said. "So, you know, coming back to this program was definitely something I definitely wanted to do."

Ndefo had to wait a month to return. The 6-foot-7 forward was not vaccinated and he had to sit out while getting his shots and waiting to be given the OK to play.

"That's why we kind of started slowly, because I was not anticipating him coming back," said Holloway, who had built his team's defense with Ndefo being the lynchpin. The senior has been the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference's defensive player of the year for the past three seasons.

This past year, he averaged 10.7 points, 6.2 rebounds, 2.7 blocks and 1.3 steals.



# QB Mayfield waits to see who wants him

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Baker Mayfield was once the No. 1 overall draft pick. He's not anyone's choice at the moment.

He's a quarterback without a team.

Cleveland's starter the past four seasons, Mayfield lost his job last week when the Browns pulled off a trade that shook the NFL by acquiring Deshaun Watson, a three-time Pro Bowler in Houston accused of sexual assault by 22 women.

With Watson due to arrive any day to take over as Cleveland's franchise QB, Mayfield, who requested a trade last week after feeling betrayed by the Browns, is leaving.

When and where he's going is still to be determined.

The quarterback market has dried up this week, with several trades and free-agent signings eliminating possible landing spots for Mayfield, who is looking to resurrect his career after a dreadful 2021 season.

It's an astonishing fall for Mayfield, the top pick in 2018

who led the Browns to the playoffs in 2020 and seemed to have finally solved the franchise's two-decade-long search for a franchise quarterback.

He was the face of Cleveland, toast of the town. The Progressive insurance commercials with him and his wife, Emily, living inside FirstEnergy Stadium were a hit.

Even just a week ago, Mayfield still seemed in position to play a fifth season in Cleveland before Watson was persuaded to waive his no-trade clause when the Browns gave him a record \$230 million fully guaranteed contract.

Mayfield went from under center to out the door — in an instant.

After the Watson trade was announced, Mayfield needed a new football home, and Indianapolis appeared to be a possibility for him. But the Colts weren't interested and traded for Atlanta veteran Matt Ryan. The Falcons then signed free agent Marcus Mariota, closing the door on another potential

suitor for Mayfield.

The New Orleans Saints decided to re-sign Jameis Winston, wiping out another option for Mayfield.

Seattle remains a potential destination for Mayfield. But the Seahawks, who are starting anew after recently dealing Russell Wilson to Denver, want to try Drew Lock first and perhaps draft a young QB to back him up.

It's all left Mayfield out.

He is due to make \$18.8 million next season, and his contract makes it nearly impossible for the Browns to find a trade partner. There isn't a team willing to pay that hefty price for a backup quarterback, never mind one coming off shoulder surgery, a lousy season and with an image problem.

There's the possibility Cleveland might have to pay a big chunk of Mayfield's salary or throw in a draft pick just to be rid of him.

At this point, a quick separation would be ideal for both

sides.

Unfortunately, this could drag on for a while.

A positive for Mayfield, as has been emphasized multiple times over the past week, is that the quarterback roulette wheel spins often and he'll get another chance somewhere — eventually. Things happen. Depth charts at quarterback are frequently changing due to injuries, trades and performance.

He'll get another chance to start somewhere. But before that, Mayfield may have to swallow hard and be someone's backup.

There was also a major disconnection with coach Kevin Stefanski. Mayfield publicly questioned Stefanski's play-calling, and even if he had valid reasons for the criticism, it was a bad look for him and the team. It also underscored a troubled relationship between quarterback and coach.

Mayfield's image may need as much of a makeover as his mechanics.

# Thompson, Sabres outlast Penguins in shootout

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Tage Thompson had two goals in regulation and scored in the shootout, Alex Tuch also had a shootout goal, and the Buffalo Sabres beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 4-3 on Wednesday night for their third consecutive win.

Zemgus Girgensons also scored in regulation for the Sabres, who have won five of six in their best stretch of the season. Craig Anderson made 23 saves and stopped both attempts in the shootout.

Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin each had a goal and an assist for the Penguins, who had won three in a row. Kris Letang had Pittsburgh's other goal, Bryan Rust added two as-

sists and Casey DeSmith stopped 29 shots.

Playing on the second night of a back-to-back, the Penguins opened a two-game trip by dropping to a league-best 21-7-5 on the road.

**Canucks 3, Avalanche 1:** Brock Boeser and J.T. Miller scored 1:52 apart early in the third period, Jaroslav Halak stopped 32 shots and visiting Vancouver beat NHL-leading Colorado.

Bo Horvat added an empty-net goal as the Canucks finished 1-2 against the Avalanche this season. They avoided being swept in the season series by Colorado for the first time since 1996-97.

Nazem Kadri had a power-play goal for the Avs, and Dar-

cy Kuemper made 24 saves.

Miller assisted on Horvat's empty-netter and has 31 points (10 goals, 21 assists) over his last 17 games.

**Maple Leafs 3, Devils 2:** Pierre Engvall scored a short-handed goal with 4:42 left to lead host Toronto past New Jersey.

Engvall moved in on a 2-on-1 rush with Ilya Mikheyev off serving a double minor for high-sticking, delayed and then fired his 11th goal of the season past Nico Daws.

Mikheyev also scored a short-handed goal and Mitch Marner had the other score for the Maple Leafs, who got 20 saves from Petr Mrazek.

Nico Hischier had a goal and an assist, and Damon Severson

also scored for the Devils. Daws stopped 28 shots.

**Blackhawks 4, Ducks 2:** Dylan Strome scored the go-ahead goal with 3:50 remaining and Patrick Kane had another big night against Anaheim as Chicago won on the road.

Strome redirected Riley Stillman's shot from near the blue-line past goalie John Gibson to help the Blackhawks snap a three-game losing streak.

Kane had a goal and two assists, giving him a point in nine consecutive games against the Ducks (seven goals, 11 assists). On March 8 in Chicago, he posted a career-high six points in an 8-3 win over Anaheim.

Kane also has 16 points in Chicago's last seven games overall, but only two goals.

# Ayton has career-high 35, leads Suns past T-wolves

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Deandre Ayton scored a career-high 35 points and had 14 rebounds, Devin Booker had 22 of his 28 points in the second half and the Phoenix Suns surged past the trash-talking Minnesota Timberwolves 125-116 on Wednesday night.

"That's a playoff environment," said Ayton, who clutched the game ball for his career game at a podium afterward for his interview session.

Landry Shamet scored 10 of his 19 points in the fourth quarter to help fuel the rally and bring the NBA-leading Suns within one win — or a Memphis loss — of wrapping up homecourt advantage for the entire playoffs.

Phoenix has a nine-game lead with nine games left. It has won six straight, 18 of 22 and is 59-14 overall and 29-6 on the road.

**Warriors 118, Heat 104:** Jordan Poole scored 30 points and short-handed Golden State scored the first 19 points of the second half to win at Miami.

Damion Lee, Jonathan Kuminga and Andrew Wiggins each scored 22 points for the Warriors. They were already without Stephen Curry because of a sprained left foot and Andre Iguodala with low back tightness, plus gave Draymond Green, Otto Porter Jr. and Klay Thompson had the night off for injury management.

**Grizzlies 132, Nets 120:** Desmond Bane scored 23 points, including nine straight as host Memphis rebuilt its lead in the fourth quarter to beat Kyrie Irving and Brooklyn.

Irving scored 43 points and Kevin Durant had 35 points and 11 rebounds. Still banned from playing home games because of a New York City vaccine mandate, Irving was on the court for the first time since scoring 60 points at Orlando eight days earlier. But that arrangement for Irving, who is unvaccinated against COVID-19, is coming to an end. New York City Mayor Eric Adams is set to lift the mandate for athletes and performers.

**76ers 126, Lakers 121:** Joel Embiid had 30 points and 10 rebounds, James Harden added 24 points and Philadelphia won at LeBron James-less Los Angeles.

Tyrese Maxey added 21 points. The 76ers have won five of seven overall.

**Celtics 125, Jazz 97:** Jayson Tatum scored 11 of his 26 points during Boston's nearly perfect first quarter to help host Bos-

ton roll past Utah.

Jaylen Brown also had 26 points, and Marcus Smart had a career-high 13 assists. The Celtics won their fifth straight to improve their chances for one of the Eastern Conference's top four seeds.

**Mavericks 110, Rockets 91:** Jalen Brunson scored 28 points, Spencer Dinwiddie added 26 with Luka Doncic resting a sore right ankle and host Dallas overwhelmed Houston in the second half.

The Mavs pulled even with Utah at 45-28 for the fourth seed and homecourt advantage in the first round of the Western Conference playoffs.

The Jazz, who lost 125-97 at Boston, hold the tiebreaker over Dallas. They play again Sunday in Dallas.

**Knicks 121, Hornets 105:** RJ Barrett scored 30 points and visiting New York made 20 three-pointers to snap Charlotte's five-game winning streak.

Obi Toppin had 18 points and 11 rebounds, and Alec Bunks added 17 points for the Knicks. They have won three of five. Playing without Julius Randle, who sat out with right quadriceps tendon soreness, New York shot 20-for-45 from beyond the arc.

**Kings 110, Pacers 109:** Damian Jones' tip-in with less than a second left lifted Sacramento to a win at Indiana.

Trey Lyles missed a three-pointer, and Jones tipped in the rebound with 0.2 seconds remaining.

**Pistons 122, Hawks 101:** Jeremi Grant scored 21 points and slumping Detroit routed visiting Atlanta in its biggest margin of victory of the season.

Cade Cunningham added 17 points and eight assists for the Pistons.

**Spurs 133, Trail Blazers 96:** Dejounte Murray had 28 points before sitting for the final quarter, and San Antonio rolled to a win at Portland.

Keldon Johnson added 26 points for the Spurs.

Ben McLemore had 23 points off the bench for Portland.

**Thunder 119, Magic 102:** Theo Maledon scored 17 of his season-high 25 points in the fourth quarter, and host Oklahoma City beat Orlando to snap a 10-game skid.

Tre Mann and Isaiah Roby each scored 21 for the Thunder in a matchup between two of the NBA's worst teams.

## Brooklyn guard Irving gets OK to play at home

Associated Press

NEW YORK — New York City's mayor exempted athletes and performers from the city's vaccine mandate following weeks of pressure from the sports world after the rule kept Brooklyn Nets star Kyrie Irving from playing in home games and was expected to block several baseball players from taking the field in their upcoming season.

Mayor Eric Adams, speaking at Citi Field where the Mets play, said Thursday that he had signed the order. The exemption was effective immediately.

"I'm going to make some tough choices. People are not going to agree with some of them," Adams said. "I must move this city forward."

Adams contended that making the athletes and performers exempt was important for the city's economic recovery, saying "players attract people to the stadium."

The city's sweeping vaccine mandate for workers will still apply to people with other types of jobs, including private workers and government employees. Critics of the mayor's decision, including several public employee unions whose members were fired for refusing to get vaccinated, blasted the mayor for seeming to lift the rule only for wealthy and famous athletes.

The Municipal Labor Committee, an umbrella group of unions that together represent about 350,000 city workers, said the city should offer a way for fired workers to get their jobs back.

"There can't be one system for the elite and another for the essential workers of our city. We stand ready to work out the details with the mayor, as we have been throughout this process," the group's chair Harry Nespoli said.

The city's largest police union, which has sued the city over the mandate, said its officers "don't deserve to be treated like second-class citizens."

"We have been suing the city for months over its arbitrary and capricious vaccine mandate — this is exactly what we are talking about. If the mandate isn't necessary for famous people, then it's not necessary for the cops who are protecting our city in the middle of a crime crisis," said its president, Pat Lynch.

The city last month fired more than 1,400 workers who failed to comply with the vaccine mandate.