

Report: F-35A flying fewer hours than F-15E

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The costliest, most advanced U.S. fighter jet in history is flying less than a plane developed during the Reagan administration.

There's little dispute that the F-35 Lightning II, which is flown with modifications by the Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy, can be a devastatingly effective weapon when it's available. But five years after joining the fleet on a regular basis, the Air Force F-35A is flying fewer hours per month than the F-15E Strike Eagle, which was first introduced in 1986, a recent report by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office found.

At its five-year mark, the F-15E was available at double the rate of the stealthy, cutting-edge F-35A.

The lack of availability is why some analysts say the F-35 may

end up filling a niche in national defense instead of becoming the day-to-day workhorse first envisioned, despite a program cost of \$1.7 trillion to buy, operate and sustain a planned 2,500 planes, according to 2022 government figures.

Ballooning F-35 costs have the Air Force, Marines and Navy reexamining their planned purchases, said Bryan Clark, director of the Hudson Institute's Center for Defense Concepts and Technology.

The \$1.7 trillion tab could challenge the Defense Department's ability to fund other wants, such as the Next Generation Air Dominance fighter and the B-21 Raider, a sixth-generation bomber, Clark said.

The F-35 is beset by engines that wear out faster than expected, a shortage of replacement parts and maintenance delays,

among other problems, the CBO report found.

"The services are all looking for alternatives that allow them to reduce their flight hour costs and then husband their F-35s for ... high-end missions that are less frequent than the day-to-day flying," Clark said.

The CBO report noted that the F-35's availability, or mission capable rate, has fallen sharply as the fighter ages, with the plane requiring more frequent maintenance and part replacement.

The jet also fared poorly on availability when compared with the F-22 Raptor, according to the report, which was released in February.

However, some analysts say the comparisons between the F-35 and older aircraft don't take several factors into consideration.

There are just 450 fifth-gener-

ation F-35s in use across the services, said Heather Penney of the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, a think tank based in Arlington, Va. The lack of additional F-35s means the first to join the fleet are being flown harder and aren't being replaced with newer versions, Penney said.

"If you don't have a chance to divest the very, very early (F-35) models because you don't buy enough or you don't buy them fast enough, you're going to see that reflected in availability rates," said Penney, a senior resident fellow.

Part of the reason the F-35's availability compares poorly with other planes in their early years is a shortage of thousands of maintainers in the Air Force, she said. The F-15 and F-22, for example, benefited from greater staffing, she said.

Reviews of troops who defied vaccine orders ongoing

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The military is still reviewing cases of troops who refused a coronavirus vaccine without asking for an exemption, defense officials told lawmakers on Tuesday.

Service branches continue to evaluate how to deal with troops who defied orders, defense officials told a House Armed Service Committee subpanel a month after Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin rescinded the vaccine mandate at the direction of Congress.

"This is a new process for us and something we're trying to figure out and we've been working on it," said Gilbert Cisneros, the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. "It's very important that our service

members go and follow orders when they are lawful and there are thousands who did not and so those services are going through a process to review those cases to make a determination of what needs to be done."

About 8,100 service members were separated after failing to request or receive a religious exemption or other accommodation from the vaccine mandate and then refusing to get vaccinated after being ordered to do so, he said. More than 2 million service members, about 96% of the military, have received the vaccine.

Cisneros did not say how many cases are being evaluated, but Gabe Camarillo, the undersecretary of the Army, said there are "a number" of pending cases of individual soldiers who chose not to

comply with a lawful order.

"Each of these cases has to be evaluated on its own individual merits because they're highly fact-specific," Camarillo said. "There may be in any instance numerous violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice or other areas in which there might be circumstances in which to look at disciplinary procedures."

Erik Raven, the undersecretary of the Navy, said the service will conduct an individualized review and is determined to "look at each of these cases on the merits of the facts of each case." The service has a 97% coronavirus immunization rate.

Republican lawmakers led congressional efforts last year to rescind the vaccine mandate, and on Tuesday bemoaned the forced

departure of thousands of service members. They argued the separations damaged morale and exacerbated the military's recruiting problems, particularly in the Army.

"We live in an increasingly dangerous world where the communist Chinese government is the No. 1 threat to our national security," said Rep. Mark Alford, R-Mo. "We cannot afford the loss of any more soldiers."

But military officials defended the mandate and said the Pentagon will continue to encourage service members and civilian employees to get the vaccine and subsequent boosters. They credited the vaccine for saving lives, noting 93 of the 96 service members who died from the coronavirus were unvaccinated.

Ukrainian forces may pull out of key eastern city

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian military might decide to pull troops back from the key stronghold of Bakhmut, an adviser to Ukraine's president said Wednesday as Russia pursued a bloody, monthslong offensive to capture the city.

"Our military is obviously going to weigh all of the options. So far, they've held the city, but if need be, they will strategically pull back," Alexander Rodnyansky, an economic adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, told CNN. "We're not going to sacrifice all of our people just for nothing."

The battle for Bakhmut, in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk province, has become a symbol of Ukrainian resistance as defenders hold out against relentless shelling and Russian troops suffer heavy casualties in the campaign to take the city.

Rodnyansky noted that Russia was using the best troops of the Wagner Group to try to encircle the city. The private military company is led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a rogue millionaire with longtime links to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Prigozhin said Wednesday that he so far had seen no signs of a Ukrainian withdrawal from the city. He maintained that Kyiv has in fact been reinforcing its positions there.

"The Ukrainian army is deploying additional troops and is doing what it can to retain control of the city," Prigozhin said. "Tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers are offering fierce resistance, and the fighting is getting increasingly bloody by day."

Recent drone footage shows the scale of devastation in the city, while Zelenskyy has described it as "destroyed."

Since invading Ukraine a year ago, Russia has bombarded various cities and towns that it wanted to occupy. It also targeted Ukraine's power supply ahead of winter in an apparent attempt to weaken local morale.

While Western analysts have warned that warmer weather might give Moscow an opportunity to launch a renewed offensive, Ukrainian officials nonetheless celebrated Wednesday what is regarded nationally as the first day of spring.

Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba announced that his country had survived Putin's "winter terror."

Former officials give testimony on 'Chinese threat'

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

A former deputy national security adviser in the Trump administration told lawmakers Tuesday that he could envision a scenario in which China conducts a preemptive strike against the United States ahead of an invasion of Taiwan.

"It's possible," Matthew Pottinger, now chairman of the FDD China Program at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said during a House Select Committee hearing dubbed "The Chinese Communist Party's Threat to America."

"We know that the [Chinese army] is training for the likelihood that the U.S. would be part of the fight," said Pottinger, a former Marine and journalist.

"And that raises the escalatory pressure on China to try to eliminate U.S. capabilities right there in the Western Pacific to buy them time," he said.

Lawmakers at the hearing — the first held by the newly minted House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party — brought up numerous flashpoints between the two nations.

But the subject invariably returned to Taiwan and how the U.S. might be drawn into outright conflict with China if Beijing decides to take the island by force.

Chinese leaders consider the island, a self-governing democracy off China's southern coast, to be a breakaway province that must, at some point, be brought under the control of the Chinese Communist Party.

Retired Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, who served as U.S. national security adviser from 2017 to 2018, told the committee that its work was "urgent and important because the United States has fallen behind in the consequential competition with the Chinese Communist Party.

"For too long, leaders across the private sector, in academia, industry and finance, as well as in the public sector across multiple administrations and Congresses, clung to the assumption that China, having been welcomed into the international system, would play by the rules," said McMaster, now a senior fellow for the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

Air Force removes squadron chief after command climate investigation

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The commander of an Air Force airborne air control squadron on Okinawa has been relieved after a "thorough" investigation into the unit's command climate, an Air Force spokesman said.

Lt. Col. Alexander Demma was removed as leader of the 961st Airborne Air Control Squadron at Kadena Air Base on Feb. 2 due to a "loss of confidence in his ability to lead the organization," 18th Wing spokesman Lt. Col. Raymond Geoffroy wrote in an email to Stars and Stripes on Feb. 22.

Geoffroy declined to provide further information about Demma's removal, citing privacy considerations. Demma was reassigned to administrative duties within the

wing, Geoffroy said.

"The Air Force places significant trust in its leaders and holds them accountable when they fall short of expectations and standards," the spokesman wrote.

The 961st consists of approximately 160 airmen operating a pair of E-3G Sentry aircraft valued at \$330 million each.

Demma took control of the squadron in June 2021 after serving as its director of operations, his Air Force biography states. He was replaced Feb. 2 by Lt. Col. Shawn McNabb.

The Sentry, known for its 30-foot "rotodome" rotating radar perched atop the rear fuselage, participates in a host of command-and-control missions, such as long-range surveillance, detection and identification, according to the unit website.

Staggering snowfall in Calif. mountains

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The latest winter storm to blast California waned early Wednesday, while forecasters warned a new, powerful weather system will affect most of the lower 48 states this week.

“The system is going to be moving generally east-northeast and fairly fast, so it’s going to cross the country in a few days,” said meteorologist David Roth. Six to 12 inches of snow could eventually fall in upstate New York, Vermont and New Hampshire, Roth said.

Elsewhere, record high temperatures are possible in the Gulf Coast into the Ohio Valley and a threat of tornadoes from the southern Plains to the mid-South, according to the National Weather Service.

Even as the winter storm tapered off in California, major highways were subject to closures and chain restrictions, and authorities warned of high avalanche danger at all elevations of the backcountry. In Southern California, snow and ice forced closure of Interstate 5 in Tejon Pass through mountains north of Los Angeles.

In the San Bernardino Mountains east of Los Angeles, ski resorts reported at least 2 feet of new snow early Wednesday, while the Snow Valley resort reported a seven-day total of 10 feet.

All roads to the resorts and mountain communities have been closed to the general public since last week, and a local emer-

gency was declared Monday.

Two highways were opened for traffic heading down the mountains, and on Tuesday the California Highway Patrol began escorts for residents heading back up to their homes.

Northwest of Lake Tahoe, on the California-Nevada border in the Sierra Nevada, an avalanche struck a three-story apartment building Tuesday evening, according to the local sheriff’s office. No injuries were reported.

Yosemite National Park, closed since Saturday because of heavy, blinding snow, postponed its planned Thursday reopening indefinitely.

The heavy snow was expected to end Wednesday afternoon after an additional 1 to 2 feet falls in the region, according to the weather service.

The University of California, Berkeley Central Sierra Snow Laboratory near Donner Pass reported that nearly 41.7 feet has fallen since October, more than in any snow year since 1970 and second only to the record of 66.7 feet in 1952.

Mammoth Lakes, traditionally one of the snowiest places in California, had nearly 4 feet of snow over the past three days. Snow drifts were taller than houses, and crews worked around the clock to keep roads and sidewalks clear.

The Sierra snowpack provides about a third of the state’s water supply and the wa-

ter content of the snowpack Tuesday — in a state grappling with years of drought — was 186% of normal to date, according to the state Department of Water Resources’ on-line data.

The storm came a week after bad weather that stretched from the Pacific Coast to the northern Plains and is now blamed for two deaths in Portland, Ore.

The next, larger weather system expected to spread across much of the country Thursday, and areas such as the lower Mississippi Valley and Tennessee Valley could see heavy rain, thunderstorms and some flash flooding. The high could top 100 degrees across far south Texas, and windy, dry conditions would make for a critical risk of wildfire in parts of the Southwest for the next few days, according to the weather service.

Recent storms have delayed travel, shuttered schools and overwhelmed crews trying to dig out of the snow and repair downed power lines. More than 60,000 customers were without power Wednesday morning in Michigan, which is still recovering from ice storms, and about 105,000 in California, according to PowerOutage.us.

In Arizona, snow began falling Wednesday morning as the California storm moved eastward. It could dump 18 inches to 2 feet of snow in northern areas of Arizona by Thursday morning, the weather service said.

Chicago mayor ousted; Vallas, Johnson in runoff

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Paul Vallas and Brandon Johnson will meet in a runoff to be the next mayor of Chicago after voters on Tuesday denied incumbent Lori Lightfoot a second term, issuing a rebuke to a leader who made history as head of the nation’s third-largest city.

Vallas, a former schools CEO backed by the police union, and Johnson, a Cook County commissioner endorsed by the Chicago Teachers Union, advanced to the April 4 runoff after none of the nine candidates was able to secure over 50% of the vote to win outright.

Lightfoot, the first Black woman and first openly gay person to lead the city, won her first term in 2019 after promising to end decades of corruption and backroom dealing at City Hall. But opponents blamed Lightfoot for an increase in crime that oc-

curred in cities across the United States during the pandemic and criticized her as being a divisive, overly contentious leader.

She is the first elected Chicago mayor to lose a reelection bid since 1983, when Jane Byrne, the city’s first female mayor, lost her Democratic primary.

Speaking to supporters Tuesday night, Lightfoot called being Chicago’s mayor “the honor of a lifetime.”

“Regardless of tonight’s outcome, we fought the right fights and we put this city on a better path,” Lightfoot said. She told her fellow mayors around the country not to fear being bold.

At his victory party, Vallas noted that Lightfoot had called to congratulate him and asked the crowd to give her a round of applause. In a nod to his campaign promise to combat crime, he said that, if elected, he would work to address public safety issues.

“We will have a safe Chicago. We will make Chicago the safest city in America,” Vallas said.

Johnson on Tuesday night noted the improbability that he would make the runoff, considering his low name recognition at the start of the race.

“A few months ago, they said they didn’t know who I was. Well, if you didn’t know, now you know,” Johnson said. He thanked the unions that supported him and gave a special shout-out to his wife, telling the crowd, “Chicago, a Black woman will still be in charge.”

Lightfoot’s loss is unusual for mayors in large cities, who have tended to win reelection with relative ease.

But it’s also a sign of the turmoil in U.S. cities following the COVID-19 pandemic, with its economic fallout and spikes in violent crime in many places.

FBI: COVID-19 'most likely' from lab fluke

The Washington Post

FBI director Christopher A. Wray said Tuesday that COVID-19 "most likely" originated from a lab incident in Wuhan, China, his first public comments on the agency's position on the origins of the coronavirus. They come as Republican leaders have reignited probes into the possible source of the pandemic, with GOP House leaders holding a roundtable Tuesday to review the government's response and scheduling a hearing for next week to delve into the virus's origins.

"The FBI has for quite some time now assessed that the ori-

gins of the pandemic are most likely a potential lab incident in Wuhan," Wray said Tuesday in an interview with Fox News. "The Chinese government, seems to me, has been doing its best to try and thwart and obfuscate the work here, the work that we're doing, and that's unfortunate for everybody."

Wray's statement follows a Department of Energy analysis for a new government-wide intelligence assessment, first reported by the Wall Street Journal, that a lab accident in Wuhan was most likely responsible for the deadly pandemic.

Energy Department officials,

who said they had "low confidence" in the new conclusion after changing their previous stance, maintain that there is still no definite conclusion on the virus's origins, and that the virus wasn't developed as a bio-weapon. Among the nine entities investigating the pandemic's origin, most still favor the theory that the virus naturally spread from animals to humans, with only the FBI concluding that the cause of the pandemic was a lab accident, a view the agency held with "moderate" confidence.

But the Energy Department's report galvanized con-

gressional Republicans, many of whom have vowed to install greater oversight on the issue and argued that Chinese officials may have covered up the incident.

Tuesday's roundtable kicked off a lengthy series of meetings and hearings led by House Republicans, aiming to probe the virus's origins and decisions by U.S. leaders, with another hearing next week.

"At the end of this process, our goal is to produce a product, hopefully bipartisan, based on knowledge and lessons learned," said Rep. Brad Wenstrup, R-Ohio, the panel's chair.

Company to slash insulin costs, increase price cap

Associated Press

Eli Lilly will cut prices for some older insulins later this year and immediately expand a cap on costs insured patients pay to fill prescriptions.

The moves announced Wednesday promise critical relief to some people with diabetes who can face annual costs of more than \$1,000 for insulin they need in order to live. Lilly's changes also come as lawmakers and patient advocates pressure drug-makers to do something about soaring prices.

Lilly said it will cut the list price for its most commonly prescribed insulin, Humalog, and for another insulin, Humulin, by 70% in the fourth quarter, which starts in September. The drugmaker didn't detail what the new prices would be.

List prices are what a drug-maker sets for a product and what people who have no insurance or plans with high deductibles are sometimes stuck paying.

Patient advocates have long called for insulin price cuts to help uninsured people who would not be affected by price caps tied to insurance coverage.

Lilly's planned cuts "could actually provide some substantial price relief," said Stacie Dusetzina, a health policy professor at Vanderbilt University who studies drug costs.

She noted the moves likely won't affect Lilly much financially because the insulins are older and some already face competition.

"It makes it easier for Lilly to go ahead and make these changes," she said.

Lilly also said Wednesday that it will cut the price of its authorized generic version of Humalog to \$25 a vial starting in May.

Lilly CEO David Ricks said in a statement that it will take time for insurers and the pharmacy system to implement its price cuts, so the drugmaker will immediately cap monthly out-of-pocket costs at \$35 for those not covered by Medicare's prescription drug program. The cap applies to people with commercial coverage and at most retail pharmacies.

Lilly said people without insurance can find savings cards to receive insulin for the same amount at its website, InsulinAffordability.com.

US sues chemical firm over cancer risk to minority area

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Federal officials sued a Louisiana chemical maker on Tuesday, alleging it presents an unacceptable cancer risk to the nearby majority-Black community and demanding cuts in toxic emissions.

Denka Performance Elastomer LLC makes synthetic rubber, emitting the carcinogen chloroprene and other chemicals in such high concentrations that it poses an unacceptable cancer risk, according to the federal complaint. Children are particularly vulnerable. There is an elementary school a half-mile from the plant.

The former DuPont plant has reduced its emissions over time, but the Justice Department, suing on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency, said the plant still represents "an imminent and substantial endangerment to public health and welfare," including elevated cancer risks.

Denka, a Japanese company that bought the rubber-making plant in 2015, did not immedi-

ately respond to messages seeking comment. A company spokesperson said in September that advocates described a crisis that "simply does not exist."

Denka's facility makes neoprene, a flexible, synthetic rubber used to produce common goods such as wetsuits, laptop sleeves, orthopedic braces and automotive belts and hoses. Chloroprene is a liquid raw material used to produce neoprene and is emitted into the air from various areas at the facility.

Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta said every community, no matter its demographics, should be able to breathe clean air and drink clean water. "Our suit aims to stop Denka's dangerous pollution," she said in a statement.

The lawsuit demands Denka eliminate dangerous emissions of chloroprene. Air monitoring consistently shows long-term chloroprene concentrations in the air near Denka's LaPlace plant as high as 15 times the levels recommended for a 70-year exposure to the chemical, the complaint says.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Worker killed when balcony collapses

NJ SEA ISLE CITY — A balcony on a high rise condominium on the New Jersey shore collapsed onto a lower balcony, killing a construction worker, authorities said.

Officials in Sea Isle City said the eighth-floor balcony at the Spinnaker condominium collapsed onto the seventh-floor balcony shortly before 2:30 p.m. Friday. One worker was trapped and two others sustained minor injuries at the nine-story complex, which was built in the 1970s, officials said.

Jose Pereira, 43, of Philadelphia, a contractor working on the outside of the building, died after being pinned under a concrete slab, officials said. Rescuers had to stabilize the balcony and cut through reinforced concrete on the outside wall to reach him, after which he was pronounced dead shortly before 10 p.m. Friday, police said.

A big error: Road sign spelled 'Jakie' Robinson

NY NEW YORK — New York City's Department of Transportation swung and missed with a road sign for the Jackie Robinson Parkway that spelled the baseball Hall of Famer's first name as "Jakie."

The sign spotted Sunday in Queens featured a picture of Robinson, Major League Baseball's first African American player in the modern era, over the words "Jakie Robinson Parkway."

Department of Transportation spokesperson Scott Gastel said the botched sign was replaced Monday. Robinson broke baseball's color barrier with the

Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947.

Suspect in shooting has apparent schizophrenia

CO DENVER — Lawyers for a man charged with killing 10 people at a Colorado supermarket in 2021 confirmed he has schizophrenia, with one expert finding he was "approaching catatonia" before being moved to the state mental hospital for treatment.

The defense information, contained in a February court filing, provides the clearest picture to date of 23-year-old Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa's mental health. District Attorney Michael Dougherty had mentioned last month that Alissa had been showing symptoms of schizophrenia, a mental disorder that causes people to have trouble understanding reality, but would not elaborate.

In their Feb. 16 brief, Alissa's lawyers said four psychologists have concluded that Alissa has schizophrenia, with an expert selected by prosecutors concluding that Alissa was "approaching catatonia" while he was still in jail. Catatonia can result in people being unable to move or speak at all, they said.

That evaluation was done before Alissa was first found mentally incompetent to stand trial in December 2021 and moved to the state mental hospital for treatment. His prosecution has been on hold since then.

Murder suspect found in closet after fleeing court

OR HILLSBORO — A man who was in an Oregon courthouse for his murder trial fled Monday and was later found hiding in a stranger's

apartment. The Washington County Sheriff's Office said Edi Villalobos, 28, was brought from the county jail to the county courthouse in connection with his trial involving the stabbing of two people in 2021 in which one person was killed, KOIN-TV reported.

After a break in the jury selection process around 11 a.m. Monday, when deputies by law removed his restraints, the sheriff's office said Villalobos ran out of the courthouse.

Deputies arrested Villalobos after someone in an apartment building reported that a person was trying to get into a nearby apartment. Deputies entered the apartment and found him hiding in a closet underneath a blanket, according to the sheriff's office. He was taken back into custody and returned to the jail without incident.

Ex-veteran FBI agent sentenced for bribery

CA LOS ANGELES — A former FBI agent in California was sentenced Monday to six years in federal prison for accepting at least \$150,000 in gifts and cash bribes to provide confidential information to a man with organized crime ties.

Babak Broumand, 56, of Lafayette, was sentenced in federal court in Los Angeles. After an 11-day trial, he was convicted last year of conspiracy, bribery of a public official and monetary transactions in property derived from unlawful activity, the U.S. Department of Justice said in a statement.

Broumand, who joined the FBI in 1999, worked until 2018 in the bureau's San Francisco office, where he was responsible for national security investigations,

prosecutors said.

Prosecutors said from 2015 to 2018, Broumand accepted cash and gifts that included escorts, hotel stays and private jet flights in return for searching law enforcement databases to help a self-proclaimed lawyer and his criminal associates learn if they were under investigation and avoid prosecution.

Dam owner guilty in field turf pollution of river

WA SEATTLE — A company that operates a century-old hydroelectric dam near Mount Rainier National Park and its chief operating officer each pleaded guilty to a single criminal count Monday in connection with a spill of synthetic field turf and the tiny rubber particles used to make it into the Puyallup River in 2020.

The company, Electron Hydro LLC, also will pay \$1 million that mostly will go to projects to restore salmon habitat.

The Puyallup Tribe of Indians, which has treaty rights to fish in the river, blasted the plea deal, saying it "doesn't come close to accountability" and noting that its biologists have continued to find chunks of field turf and rubber beads in the river.

Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson initially brought three dozen misdemeanor charges against Electron and Chief Operating Officer Thom Fischer, saying they discharged pollutants and intentionally violated a permit when they used old field turf as a liner during a construction project. The dam, built southeast of Tacoma in 1904, provides electricity to 20,000 customers.

— From wire reports



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Willard's Terps nearly perfect at home

Associated Press

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — After coaching Maryland to one last sterling performance at home last weekend, Kevin Willard reflected on the spirited crowd that cheered his team.

“To be honest with you, I just sit back every once in a while and just watch,” Willard said. “It’s a fun place to play and a fun place to watch a game.”

That’s been especially true this season. After arriving from Seton Hall to take over the Terrapins, Willard has Maryland on track to reach the NCAA Tournament, and a big part of the team’s improvement has come at home, where the Terps went 16-1 without a conference loss.

Not only has Maryland been tough to beat in College Park, but the team has drawn big crowds and brought some excitement back to this fan base — no small feat for a program that’s less than a decade removed from leaving the ACC and joining the Big Ten.

“I think the fan base really got behind this group,” Willard said. “I think they appreciated how hard they work, how hard they play, and the students have really turned out.”

Willard took over a team that finished under .500 last season after parting ways with coach Mark Turgeon in December. Now he’s reached 20 wins and has Maryland ranked in this week’s AP Top 25.

It’s not a surprise that Maryland can compete in this league — the Terps tied for the Big Ten title in 2020 — but it may still be a while before matchups against Indiana and Purdue whet the appetite in College Park the way those clashes against Duke and North Carolina used to. That’s why it was noteworthy when fans stormed the court after a Feb. 16 victory over then-No. 3 Purdue.

And it was impressive when Maryland’s home arena was packed Sunday for a matchup against Northwestern. Sure, it was the final home game of the

season, and the Wildcats have a good team this year — but they’re hardly a longtime rival of the Terps.

Maryland won that game 75-59. Both the Terps and Wildcats are part of a huge Big Ten logjam behind Purdue. Entering Tuesday’s action, there were four teams tied for second in conference play at 11-7, followed by three at 10-8 and another at 9-8.

“I just think there’s so many good teams and so many great atmospheres,” Northwestern coach Chris Collins said. “Everywhere you go, when you play on the road, it’s incredibly difficult to win.”

Maryland still needs to show it can succeed in some of those other atmospheres. The Terps close the regular season at Ohio State and Penn State this week. They’ve won only one conference road game this season.

“I think a key component to it is focusing on each other,” guard Don Carey said. “I think if we do that, the energy will

bring itself and the enthusiasm will bring itself.”

Whatever happens the rest of the way, Willard has already done a lot to rejuvenate the Terrapins. Winning games in Year One — and doing it at home — is a great way to endear yourself to the fans of your new team.

Maryland came into the season without many expectations under a new coach, and that lack of pressure might help explain the team’s performance. The Terps, especially at home, have looked loose and happy on the court. That reflects well on Willard.

“Every year you kind of learn a little bit more about how my attitude affects their attitude — my stress puts on them,” Willard said. “I love coaching basketball, I love doing what I do, and I just want to make sure that my kids have the same attitude and the same feeling I do. It’s college basketball. When you get to play in front of 17,000 people, it should be fun.”

Marquette takes first outright Big East championship

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Tyler Kolek had 21 points and 10 assists, and No. 6 Marquette clinched its first outright Big East championship by beating Butler 72-56 on Tuesday night.

The victory was the fifth in a row and 10th in 11 games for the surprising Golden Eagles (24-6, 16-3), picked ninth by the league’s coaches in the preseason poll.

Marquette, which had already secured a share of its first Big East title since 2013, had not won an outright regular-season crown since doing so in Conference USA in 2003.

Olivier-Maxence Prosper added 14 points and Oso Ighodaro had 12 for the Golden Eagles, who will be the top seed in the

Big East Tournament at Madison Square Garden — an event Marquette has never won.

Jayden Taylor scored 13 and Jalen Thomas had 10 for Butler (14-16, 6-13), which finished 4-6 in Big East home games.

No. 3 Kansas 67, Texas Tech 63: Jalen Wilson scored 21 points in his Allen Fieldhouse farewell, fellow senior Kevin McCullar Jr. added 14 points and nine rebounds, and the Jayhawks clinched a share of the Big 12 regular-season championship.

Dajuan Harris had 16 points for Kansas (25-5, 13-4), which would capture the outright crown if ninth-ranked Texas loses to No. 22 TCU on Wednesday night. Otherwise, the Jayhawks — now with an NCAA-

leading 64 conference championships — would need to beat the Longhorns in a head-to-head showdown Saturday in Austin.

No. 12 Tennessee 75, Arkansas 57: Olivier Nkamhoua scored 16 points and the host Volunteers earned their second consecutive win.

Despite the victory, Tennessee (22-8, 11-6 Southeastern Conference) may have sustained a significant loss. Three minutes into the game, sophomore point guard Zakai Zeigler, who brings energy on offense and defense, went down with an injury to his left knee. The extent of the injury wasn’t immediately known, but he did not return.

No. 13 Virginia 64, Clemson 57: Jayden Gardner had 12

points and nine rebounds, Armaan Franklin and Isaac McKneely each scored 12, and the host Cavaliers stopped a two-game skid.

Iowa 90, No. 15 Indiana 68: Kris Murray scored 26 points, Tony Perkins flirted with the first triple-double in program history and the visiting Hawkeyes defeated the Hoosiers.

Boise State 66, No. 18 San Diego State 60: Max Rice scored 26 points and reeled off 12 straight points in a 14-0 run to close out the game and the host Broncos remained perfect at home in conference play.

No. 24 Texas A&M 69, Mississippi 61: Tyrece Radford scored 13 points as the visiting Aggies erased an early 12-point deficit to beat the Rebels.

Morant, Grizzlies top Lakers with James out

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Ja Morant scored 28 of his 39 points in the third quarter and added 10 assists and 10 rebounds, and the Memphis Grizzlies beat Los Angeles 121-109 on Tuesday night in the Lakers' first game since LeBron James injured his right foot.

Morant made 10 of 12 shots in the highest-scoring quarter ever by a Grizzlies player.

"I was just feeling it," Morant said. "I got going and was able to keep it rolling and put us in a good position to win the game."

Xavier Tillman finished with 18 points and 11 rebounds for Memphis, while Jaren Jackson Jr. and Desmond Bane scored 16 points apiece.

"Obviously, Ja had a special third quarter," Memphis coach Taylor Jenkins said. "He was just in attack mode."

The Lakers matched their season high with 26 turnovers, leading to 41 Memphis points — a Grizzlies franchise record. Memphis also dominated the paint, outscoring Los Angeles 86-48 and added 33 fast-break points.

"A lot of that was cause and ef-

fect with our turnovers," Los Angeles coach Darvin Ham said, adding: "They just forced their will on us in the paint."

Anthony Davis led the Lakers with 28 points and 19 rebounds, while Lonnie Walker IV scored 21 points. Austin Reaves had 17, while matching his season high with four three-pointers.

"The turnovers are what killed us," Davis said.

Pacers 124, Mavericks 122: Tyrese Haliburton scored 32 points and won a duel of birthday boys with Luka Doncic, leading visiting Indiana past Dallas.

Doncic had 39 points and nine rebounds on his 24th birthday, but fell to 1-4 in games with Kyrie Irving since the superstars were paired in a deal with Brooklyn before the trade deadline.

The 23-year-old Haliburton, born on Feb. 29, 2000, was 9-for-18 from the field and 12-for-15 on free throws while adding seven rebounds and six assists.

Bucks 118, Nets 104: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 33 points and 15 rebounds and visiting Milwaukee beat Brooklyn for its 15th straight victory.

Jrue Holiday had 14 points and eight assists for the Bucks, who went 10-0 in February and have passed Boston for the best record in the NBA. They got Antetokounmpo back after he missed their home victory over Phoenix on Sunday with a bruised right quadriceps.

Nuggets 133, Rockets 112: Nikola Jokic had his 100th career triple-double and Jamal Murray scored 32 points in visiting Denver's victory over Houston.

Jokic had 14 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists for his NBA-leading 24th triple-double this season and 15th in the last 20 games.

Spurs 102, Jazz 94: Keldon Johnson scored 25 points and visiting San Antonio beat Utah to snap a 16-game losing streak.

Doug McDermott added 19 points for the Spurs, Jeremy Sochan had 13 and Devonte Graham 12. San Antonio improved to 15-47, winning for the first time this season after trailing to start the fourth quarter.

Wizards 119, Hawks 116: Visiting Washington spoiled Quin Snyder's Atlanta coaching debut, getting 37 points from Bradley Beal and 28 from Kyle

Kuzma in a win over the Hawks.

Snyder spent eight seasons as Utah's coach before resigning last June after the Jazz were eliminated in the opening round of the playoffs. The 56-year-old Snyder said he left coaching to spend more time with his family, but the chance to lead the talented but enigmatic Hawks lured him back to the sideline sooner than expected.

Warriors 123, Trail Blazers 105: Jordan Poole had 29 points, six assists and five rebounds, Klay Thompson scored 23 points and host Golden State rallied past Damian Lillard and Portland.

Timberwolves 108, Clippers 101: Jaden McDaniels scored 20 points, Anthony Edwards added 18 and visiting Minnesota beat Los Angeles to snap a three-game losing streak.

Kings 123, Thunder 117: Harrison Barnes scored 29 points and visiting Sacramento beat Oklahoma City for its fourth consecutive victory.

Raptors 104, Bulls 98: Pascal Siakam scored 20 points, Gary Trent Jr. had 19 and host Toronto beat Chicago for its eighth victory in 10 games.

Georgia star DT Carter charged in fatal accident

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Georgia defensive tackle Jalen Carter, projected as one of the top players in next month's NFL Draft, has been charged with reckless driving and racing in conjunction with the crash that killed offensive lineman Devin Willock and a recruiting staff member.

The Athens-Clarke County Police Department has issued an arrest warrant, obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press, that alleges Carter was racing his 2021 Jeep Trackhawk against the 2021 Ford Expedition driven by the recruiting staffer, 24-year-old Chandler LeCroy, which led to the Jan. 15 wreck.

Carter had been due in Indianapolis on Wednesday for the NFL scouting combine and is expected to address the arrest warrant when he returns to Athens, according

to Lt. Shaun Barnett of the Athens-Clarke County Police Department.

"It is my understanding that Mr. Carter is making arrangements to turn himself in," Barnett said in an e-mail to the AP.

The crash occurred just a few hours after the Bulldogs celebrated their second straight national championship with a parade and ceremony, killing LeCroy and Willock.

Georgia coach Kirby Smart expressed his concern about the charges in a statement issued Wednesday.

"The charges announced today are deeply concerning, especially as we are still struggling to cope with the devastating loss of two beloved members of our community," Smart said.

"We will continue to cooperate fully with the authorities while supporting these fam-

ilies and assessing what we can learn from this horrible tragedy."

According to the arrest warrant, the investigation by Athens police found that LeCroy and Carter were operating their vehicles "in a manner consistent with racing" after leaving downtown Athens around 2:30 a.m.

The warrant says evidence shows the vehicles switched lanes, drove in the center turn lane, drove in opposite lanes, overtook other motorists and drove at high rates of speed "in an apparent attempt to outdistance each other."

Police determined LeCroy's Expedition was traveling at about 104 mph shortly before the crash. The warrant says LeCroy's blood-alcohol concentration was .197 at the time of the crash. The legal limit in Georgia is .08.

Rangers acquire Kane, others load up

Associated Press

Patrick Kane is Broadway-bound, and the New York Rangers are far from the only top contender making big moves with still three sleeps left before the NHL trade deadline.

The Rangers acquired Kane from Chicago in a three-team trade Tuesday night, adding the three-time Stanley Cup champion to their core that reached the Eastern Conference finals last year and a couple of recent additions, including prolific scoring winger Vladimir Tarasenko.

"I think Patrick recognized it was a good fit for him and it's a good fit for us," general manager Chris Drury said. "We're certainly excited that he wanted to be traded and that it was to the New York Rangers."

Adding Kane — hours after Metropolitan Division-leading Carolina made a trade and days after NHL-best Boston got bigger and tougher — moves New York into the thick of the championship race.

"This decision puts me in the best spot to immediately win an-

other Stanley Cup," Kane said after waiving his no-movement clause to go from the Blackhawks to the Rangers. "I look forward to this next step in my career."

Some of the other top teams around the league did not wait for the Kane trade to happen to get their deals done. Carolina is buying low on an underachieving young scorer, Toronto is making wholesale changes to prepare for the playoffs and two perennial contenders are looking toward the future.

The Hurricanes got Jesse Puljujarvi from the Edmonton Oilers, who were also active in adding Mattias Ekholm from Nashville, and the Maple Leafs completed three separate deals with an eye on navigating a difficult road through the Eastern Conference. Toronto acquired big defenseman Luke Schenn from Vancouver, sent Rasmus Sandin to Washington for a first-round pick and veteran Erik Gustafsson and traded forward Pierre Engvall to the New York Islanders.

General manager Kyle Dubas

said it was no secret the Maple Leafs "wanted to become more competitive" and that's evident now that they've brought in six new players in the past two weeks. Engvall, traded for a 2024 third-round pick, is one of two additions for the Islanders, who are chasing one of two wildcard spots in the East and were eager to augment their forward depth.

Out West, Minnesota paid that same price in a deal with Washington for well-traveled forward Marcus Johansson, who has now been traded five times in under six years, including the second time the Wild have added him. Minnesota also got injured winger Gustav Nyquist from Columbus for a 2023 fifth-round pick, which the Wild got from the Bruins for facilitating the trade with the Capitals last week.

"These two players, I think, are what we were missing, what we needed." Minnesota GM Bill Guerin said. "They're highly skilled guys, excellent skaters. I think they're going to provide us with that natural ability out there."

Keeping true to GM Brian MacLellan's plan to reset quickly to try to win again as soon as next year, the Capitals sent Boston's first-round pick that they got last week to Toronto with Gustafsson for Sandin, who turns 23 next week and is signed through next season at the bargain price of \$1.4 million. Washington also re-signed defenseman Nick Jensen to a \$12.15 million, three-year extension.

Nashville, which like Washington has been a playoff mainstay, continued selling by trading Ekholm to Edmonton for defenseman Tyson Barrie, forward prospect Reid Schaefer, a first-round pick this year and a fourth-rounder in 2024. Ekholm gives the Oilers, who are giving up more than three goals a game, some balance on the blue line behind the top two scorers in the league: MVP favorite Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl.

The Hurricanes aim to unlock Puljujarvi's offensive abilities after the 2016 No. 4 pick has put up just 117 points in 337 NHL regular-season and playoff games.

Kopitar nets 4, Kempe scores in OT as Kings beat Jets

Associated Press

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Anze Kopitar scored four goals in regulation and Adrian Kempe had the only score in the shootout as the Los Angeles Kings rallied to beat the Winnipeg Jets 6-5 on Tuesday night.

Kopitar, the Kings' captain, had a natural hat trick in the second period. It was the 35-year-old's sixth career hat trick and second time he has scored four times in an NHL game.

Gabriel Vilardi also scored and Drew Doughty had a pair of assists for the Kings.

Josh Morrissey had his first four-point game, finishing with two goals and two assists for Winnipeg, which is mired in its

first four-game skid of the season.

Coyotes 4, Blackhawks 1: Nick Schmaltz had a goal and an assist, Karel Vejmelka stopped 23 shots and host Arizona beat Patrick Kane-less Chicago.

The Blackhawks came out flat after their star player was traded to the New York Rangers.

The Coyotes took advantage with first-period goals by Travis Boyd and Barrett Hayton

Blue Jackets 5, Sabres 3: Eric Robinson had the first three-goal game of his career, and Columbus weathered a late comeback bid to beat Buffalo.

Boone Jenner and Kent Johnson also scored for Columbus.

Senators 6, Red Wings 1: Tim

Stutzle scored on a penalty shot in the first period and had two assists, and Austin Watson scored twice as host Ottawa completed a two-game sweep of Detroit.

Claude Giroux, Alex DeBrincat and Brady Tkachuk also scored for Ottawa.

Bruins 4, Flames 3 (OT): Charlie McAvoy scored at 4:55 of overtime, helping visiting Boston beat Calgary and extend its winning streak to eight games.

Dmitry Orlov had two goals and an assist for Eastern Conference-leading Boston.

Kraken 5, Blues 3: Morgan Geekie scored twice and visiting Seattle snapped a three-game losing streak with a win over St. Louis.

Penguins 3, Predators 1: Jason Zucker scored with 1:39 left to give visiting Pittsburgh a victory over Nashville.

Sidney Crosby also scored, and Tristan Jarry made 24 saves for Pittsburgh.

Wild 2, Islanders 1 (SO): Frederick Gaudreau scored in the shootout to lift host Minnesota over New York.

Panthers 4, Lightning 1: Anton Lundell and Eetu Luostarinen scored 1:41 apart late in the first period, and visiting Florida ended Tampa Bay's home points streak at 16 games.

Canadiens 3, Sharks 1: Jesse Ylonen scored the go-ahead goal with 10 minutes left and visiting Montreal beat San Jose.