

DOD reviews medical disqualifications

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

A recruiting pilot program that uses medical data collected on service members through the Pentagon's new health information system could change enlistment policies on up to 38 health conditions that now disqualify people from military service, defense officials said.

The pilot program includes 38 health conditions that require the military to waive it as disqualifying for service, with the most notable being a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, said Lin St. Clair, deputy director of the Defense Department's accession policy directorate. Nearly 900 recruits have enlisted in the last nine months with the diagnosis.

Many of those affected are typically still able to join the military but doing so without the medical waiver would create a more efficient enlistment process for those impacted, officials said.

Other conditions included in the pilot program, such as specific eye conditions, have time frames of three, five or seven years in which a recruit must not take medication or show symptoms of the condition.

"We want to make sure that those time standards that we're using don't have an adverse impact on the individual once they get the basic training and into their units," St.

Clair said.

In March, the Defense Department employed a new health information system called Genesis at all 67 military processing stations. Genesis improves the department's ability to track the recruits as they move through the service because it holds all medical records in one digital location.

Using the records, the Pentagon can monitor service members who enlisted under the pilot program to see whether they completed their initial enlistment contract, which is typically about four years.

Because of that, it will be at least another year before officials will have data to review about the recruits admitted through the pilot program, St. Clair said.

"We continuously review accession medical standards. This is more data for us to then take a look at those standards and see if they shouldn't be disqualified," he said.

The review comes as the Defense Department looks to recover from a difficult year in recruiting in 2022. The Army missed its recruitment goal by about 15,000 soldiers, according to the service. The Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps met their goals, but service officials have expressed concern about doing so in the new fiscal year, which began Oct. 1.

Military entrance stations conducted 215,000 medical exams in fiscal 2022, which

ended Sept. 30, according to the Defense Department. Nearly 30% of applicants are disqualified during the exam. That drops to just 16% denied once medical waivers are applied.

While recruits typically could receive a waiver for the conditions in the pilot program, enlisting without the waiver could speed up the process.

St. Clair said any obstacle to enlistment, such as locating medical paperwork and scheduling consultations with specialists, which are necessary for the military to waive a disqualifying condition, can cause a potential recruit to give up or lose interest. These things can also take more time since the coronavirus pandemic has stretched medical offices thin and wait times can be longer than they were before the pandemic.

The Rand Corp. published a report in 2021 that looked at whether military recruits who did receive a waiver for ADHD, anxiety or depression had different outcomes than those without a diagnosis. The think tank found recruits seeking waivers did not have a higher likelihood of dropping out than other recruits.

However, if they did leave the service, it was more often related to health reasons than other recruits, said Beth Asch, a senior economist who specializes in defense manpower issues and who authored the report.

Cruise film may give Navy next Hollywood showcase

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Fresh off the success of last summer's blockbuster "Top Gun: Maverick," Tom Cruise appears to be working with the Navy again for an upcoming flick.

The actor was in Italy late last month filming scenes for "Mission: Impossible — Dead Reckoning Part Two" on a U.S. aircraft carrier in the Adriatic Sea, USNI News reported Monday.

The USS George H.W. Bush has been on duty in the Mediterranean Sea since relieving USS Harry S. Truman in August. USNI News said the Bush was in the Adriatic but did not identify it as the carrier involved.

Neither Naval Air Forces nor "Mission Impossible" series producer Paramount Pic-

tures said Wednesday whether filming had taken place on the Bush and what Navy assets may have been used.

But Cruise reportedly was filming flight scenes last week after arriving in Bari, along Italy's southeastern coast, the entertainment magazine Variety reported March 2, citing an Apulia Film Commission spokesman. Apulia, also known as Puglia, is in southern Italy.

On Feb. 26, Cruise was taken by private helicopter to the carrier, which at the time was near the coast, according to Variety.

It wasn't clear how long Cruise and others associated with the movie were on the carrier, but the film commission spokesman indicated that filming would be over by the end of last week, Variety said.

For "Top Gun: Maverick," the Navy allowed the production to use planes, including F/A-18 Super Hornets, aircraft carriers and military bases, in filming.

Paramount paid as much as \$11,374 per hour to use the fighter jets, which were flown by Navy pilots, according to a May 26, 2022, Bloomberg News report.

"Mission: Impossible — Dead Reckoning Part Two" is the eighth film in the series and is expected to be released in 2024, Variety said.

The George H.W. Bush Carrier Strike Group arrived in the Mediterranean on Aug. 25. It was sent to the eastern Mediterranean in early February to help with recovery efforts in the aftermath of deadly earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.

Philippines now publicizing Chinese actions

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippine coast guard has launched a strategy of publicizing aggressive actions by China in the disputed South China Sea, which has countered Chinese propaganda and sparked international condemnation that has put Beijing under the spotlight, a Philippine official said Wednesday.

Manila's coast guard has intensified patrols in the disputed waters and taken extra efforts to document and publicize assertive Chinese behavior in the strategic waterway, including a Feb. 6 incident in which a Chinese coast guard ship aimed a military-grade laser that briefly blinded some crew members on a Philippine patrol boat off a dis-

puted reef.

The coast guard protested and released a video of the incident, which sparked alarm in the Philippines, the United States and some other Western countries. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. summoned China's ambassador to Manila and later said the Philippine military has shifted its focus from fighting Muslim and communist insurgents and other internal threats to external defense amid long-seething South China Sea territorial disputes.

"I'd like to emphasize that the best way to address Chinese 'gray zone' activities in the West Philippine Sea is to expose it," coast guard Commodore Jay Tarriela said, referring to China's use of ostensibly civilian fishing and research vessels to

perform military tasks to avoid a military response from rival claimant states.

Tarriela used the Philippine name for the stretch of the South China Sea close to its western coast. He spoke at a Manila forum about China's "gray zone" operations in the disputed sea.

The Philippine coast guard's role as a mouthpiece against Chinese aggression "allows like-minded states to express condemnation and reproach which puts Beijing in a spotlight," he said. "Chinese actions in the shadows are now checked, which also forced them to come out in the open or to publicly lie."

Tarriela said Manila's outrage over the laser-pointing incident prompted China, including its ambassador to Manila, to ex-

plain its position when asked about the incident at news conferences.

Chinese officials said the Philippine patrol vessel trespassed into Chinese territory and that the Chinese coast guard acted "professionally and with restraint" and used a harmless laser to track the Philippine boat's movement.

The U.S. State Department reacted to the incident by saying that China's "dangerous operational behavior directly threatens regional peace and stability" and "undermines the rules-based international order." It renewed a warning that it would defend the Philippines, a treaty ally, if Filipino forces, aircraft and ships come under attack in the South China Sea.

Japanese mayor commends US sailors for saving man

BY JEREMY STILLWAGNER
Stars and Stripes

Two Navy sailors added another commendation to the accolades they received for saving a Japanese man from a burning car last year near their base in north-eastern Japan.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Ryan Sorrem, of Wyoming, Minn., and Petty Officer 1st Class Andre Griffith, of Sunrise, Fla., received certificates of commendation on March 1 from Oirase Mayor Takashi Narita. Sorrem was present at the ceremony; Griffith has moved on to a new duty station.

"You conducted rescuing efforts with fast and unerring judgment heedless of danger," reads the certificate Narita presented, a town official told Stars and Stripes by phone Tuesday. Some government officials in Japan customarily speak to the media on condition of anonymity.

Of 26 people the mayor com-

mended in the past year for good deeds, four went to individuals for their actions on April 17 — Sorrem, Griffith and two Japanese men, the official said.

Sorrem and Griffith recalled the event for Stars and Stripes in June.

Sorrem, a gunner's mate with the base security forces, heard a crash as he walked to a vending machine that evening in Oirase, eight miles from Naval Air Facility Misawa. He found a car had struck a light pole; the driver, dazed, was inside with his foot pressing on the accelerator. Smoke filled the car as a fire grew from the engine compartment.

Griffith arrived and worked with Sorrem to pull the driver from the car. The Japanese men called an ambulance and attempted to put out the fire. The sailors moved the driver away from the car and administered first aid until paramedics arrived.

Marine is first woman to serve in key expeditionary force role

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP COURTNEY, Okinawa — The Marine Corps' first-to-fight force in the Pacific made history Tuesday when a woman became its senior enlisted Marine.

Sgt. Maj. Joy Kitashima replaced Sgt. Maj. Eric Cook as sergeant major of III Marine Expeditionary Force during a relief-and-appointment ceremony at Courtney's parade grounds.

Kitashima, a native of Bloomington, Ind., is the first female Marine to fill the role in a Marine expeditionary force.

This is Kitashima's fourth tour on Okinawa. Speaking to several hundred Marines standing at attention on the field and in the audience, she said she was excited to be home.

"You're the very reason I'm excited to be back in III MEF," she said. "I will give everything I have, 100%, for as long as I serve

in this capacity."

The III MEF sergeant major is the chief enlisted adviser to force commander Lt. Gen. James Bierman.

III MEF, based at Courtney, consists of 27,000 Marines and sailors at camps and air stations on Okinawa, on main-island Japan and in Hawaii.

It's a "force in readiness" capable of responding to a crisis or taking up major combat operations, according to the III MEF website.

"There is nobody more ready to partner [with] to lead this MEF than you," Bierman said of Kitashima.

Cook called his replacement the right leader for the job. A career mortarman, he took over as III MEF sergeant major in November 2021 after serving as sergeant major for the 3rd Marine Division. He heads to Marine Corps Forces Pacific at Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii, to become that unit's top enlisted leader.

Wagner Group chief claims more progress in Bakhmut

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The owner of Russia’s Wagner Group military contractor claimed Wednesday that his troops have extended their gains in the Ukrainian stronghold of Bakhmut, but it remained unclear how long the grinding fight that has exacted heavy losses might continue.

Meanwhile, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited Kyiv for talks with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on extending an agreement that allows Ukraine to export grain from its Black Sea ports and permits Russia to export food and fertilizers.

The battle for the city the Ukrainians have dubbed “fortress Bakhmut” has become emblematic of the way each side has tried to wear down the other. Russian forces must go through Bakhmut in order to push deeper into the areas in Donetsk province they don’t yet control, though Western officials have said capturing the city won’t change the course of the war.

Bakhmut has been the focus of much of the fighting in recent months, as each side hopes it can inflict severe damage on the other there — while buying time to prepare offensives elsewhere. It’s not clear which side has paid a higher price in the battle, which has lasted six months and reduced the city with a prewar

population of more than 70,000 to a smoldering wasteland.

Wagner owner Yevgeny Prigozhin, whose troops have spearheaded the fight in Bakhmut, said they have taken full control of all districts east of the Bakhmutka River that crosses the city. The city’s center lies west of the river.

Neither Russian nor Ukrainian officials commented on Prigozhin’s claim.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank that closely monitors the fighting, said Russian forces were likely in control in the areas cited by Prigozhin following a Ukrainian withdrawal.

Russian troops have enveloped the city from three sides, leaving only a narrow corridor leading west.

The only highway west has been targeted by Russian artillery fire, forcing Ukrainian forces defending the city to rely increasingly on country roads, which are hard to use before the muddy ground dries.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed Monday not to retreat from Bakhmut after chairing a meeting with his top generals.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said Tuesday that its seizure would allow Russia to press its offensive farther into the Donetsk region.

Pentagon can’t pass audit due to lack of guidance

By DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A lack of oversight guidance within the Pentagon is a major reason why it’s still the only large government department that has yet to pass an independent audit, though it spends billions trying to modernize its fiscal systems, a watchdog report said Tuesday.

The Pentagon has been unsuccessful in overhauling its financial systems and imposing the necessary guidance to make them fully effective, according to the report conducted by the Government Accountability Office.

The Defense Department has one of the federal government’s largest budgets annually, which makes the department a frequent target of criticism — especially because it has yet to pass its annual independent audit that accounts for how it spends its money.

“DOD spends billions of dollars each year on its business and financial systems. However, DOD’s business systems modernization and financial management efforts have been on GAO’s High Risk List since 1995,” the 88-page GAO report states. “These high risk areas remain obstacles to DOD’s efforts to achieve [a clean] audit.”

The GAO’s High Risk List identifies federal programs and operations that are particularly susceptible to fraud, abuse, mismanagement and waste. The list, which is updated at the start of every new Congress, also identifies areas that need reform.

The report issued Tuesday found that the department — without proper guidance for monitoring its fiscal systems — will likely keep spending large amounts of money on lackluster oversight which produces records that cannot pass an audit.

The watchdog agency made nine recommendations for the Pentagon, such as making sure data is complete and accurate, documenting detailed “system compliance” and ensuring strategic planning for staffers who maintain fiscal systems. Specifically, the report identified a particular lack of guidance for initial approval and yearly certification of the Pentagon’s management systems.

“The lack of detailed guidance puts DOD at risk of making decisions based on a ‘check the box’ exercise that does little to make meaningful improvements,” the GAO study noted.

Carlson amplifies Jan. 6 riot lies with GOP-provided video

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Handed some 41,000 hours of Jan. 6 security footage, Fox News’ Tucker Carlson has launched an impassioned new effort to explain away the deadly Capitol attack, linking the Republican Party ever more closely to pro-Trump conspiracy theories about the 2021 riot.

The conservative commentator aired a first installment to millions of viewers on his prime-time show Monday, working to bend perceptions of the violent, grueling siege that played out for the world to see into a narrative favorable to Donald Trump. A small additional bit was shown Tuesday amid calls from critics to stop.

The undertaking by Fox News comes as Trump is again running for president, and

executives at the highest levels of the cable news giant have admitted in unrelated court proceedings that it spread the former president’s false claims about the 2020 election despite dismissing Trump’s assertions privately.

Carlson emphasized imagery of the invaders, some in combat gear and wielding flagpoles, merely milling about the gilded halls, taking pictures of the surroundings during pauses in the hourslong attack.

“These were not insurrectionists. They were sightseers,” Carlson said. The footage he aired focused on one of the highest-profile rioters, Jacob Chansley, the “QAnon Shaman,” garbed in his horned hat and bare chested, as he poked around the building, officers standing by or opening doors.

Women say Texas abortion ban risked lives

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Five women who said they were denied abortions even when pregnancy endangered their lives are suing Texas over its abortion ban, the latest legal fight against state restrictions since the U.S. Supreme Court struck down *Roe v. Wade*.

The lawsuit filed Monday in state court said the Texas law, one of the strictest in the country, is creating confusion among doctors, who are turning away some pregnant women experiencing health complications because they fear repercussions.

“Nobody should have to wait until they are at death’s door to receive health care,” said Nancy Northup, CEO of the Center for Reproductive

Rights, which is providing legal representation for the women.

Similar legal challenges to abortion restrictions have arisen in states across the country since the Supreme Court overturned the landmark 1973 decision establishing a constitutional right to abortion.

As clinics have shuttered in Republican-dominant states with strict abortion bans, some patients have had to cross state lines.

According to the Texas suit brought by the five women and two doctors, one woman, Amanda Zurawski, was forced to wait until she developed blood poisoning before being provided an abortion. The four others had to travel out of state to receive medical care

for pregnancy-related complications after doctors recommended an abortion because of the deteriorating condition of the woman, the baby or a twin — care that could not be legally provided in Texas.

“My doctor could not intervene as long as her heart was beating or until I was sick enough for the ethics board of the hospital to consider my life at risk and permit the standard health care I needed at that point,” Zurawski said Tuesday at a news conference, recalling her pregnancy after 18 months of fertility treatment with a baby she named Willow.

In an email Tuesday, a spokesman for Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said he is “committed to doing every-

thing in his power to protect mothers, families and unborn children, and he will continue to defend and enforce the laws duly enacted by the Texas Legislature.”

Doctors in the state now face felony criminal charges if they perform an abortion in all but limited cases in which the life of the patient is in danger.

John Seago, president of the anti-abortion group Texas Right to Life, said the lawsuit dealt with very specific medical situations, two of which were cases that the existing law would have protected as a medical emergency. In those cases, he said he would consider the lack of intervention medical malpractice.

“These doctors should not have waited,” Seago said.

Oklahoma voters reject legalization of marijuana

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Oklahoma voters on Tuesday rejected the legalization of recreational marijuana, following a late blitz of opposition from faith leaders, law enforcement and prosecutors.

Oklahoma would have become the 22nd state to legalize adult use of cannabis and join conservative states like Montana and Missouri that have approved similar proposals in recent years. Many conservative states also rejected the idea, including Arkansas, North Dakota and South Dakota last year.

Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt and many of the state’s GOP legislators, including nearly every Republican senator, opposed the idea of legalization. Former Republican Gov. Frank Keating, an ex-FBI agent, and Terri White, the former head of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, led the “no”

campaign.

“We’re pleased the voters have spoken,” said Pat McFeron, a Republican political strategist who ran the opposition campaign. “We think this sends a clear signal that voters are not happy with the recreational nature of our medicinal system.”

Oklahoma voters already approved medical marijuana in 2018 by 14 percentage points and the state has one of the most liberal programs in the country, with more than 2,800 licensed dispensaries and roughly 10% of the state’s adult population having a medical license to buy and consume cannabis.

On Tuesday’s legalization question, the “no” side was outspent more than 20-to-1, with supporters of the initiative spending more than \$4.9 million, compared to about \$219,000 against, campaign finance reports show.

US investigates Tesla for steering wheels falling off

Associated Press

DETROIT — U.S. auto safety regulators have opened an investigation into Tesla’s Model Y SUV after getting two complaints that the steering wheels can come off while being driven.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said the probe covers an estimated 120,000 vehicles from the 2023 model year.

The agency said in both cases that the Model Ys were delivered to customers with a missing bolt that holds the wheel to the steering column. A friction fit held the steering wheels on, but they separated when force was exerted while the SUVs were being driven.

The agency says in documents posted on its website Wednesday that both incidents happened while the SUVs had low mileage on them.

In one complaint filed with NHTSA, an owner said he was

driving with his family on Route 1 in Woodbridge, N.J., when the steering wheel suddenly came off on Jan. 29, five days after the vehicle was purchased. The owner wrote that there were no cars behind him, and he was able to pull toward the road divider. There were no injuries.

The complaint has a link to a Twitter posting from the owner that included a video of the detached wheel and pictures of the white Tesla being towed.

A Tesla service center initially gave the owner a cost estimate of \$103.96 to repair the problem. The service center apologized in what appear to be text messages posted on Twitter.

When the owner wrote that he had lost faith in Tesla and asked for a refund, the service center removed the charge and wrote that Tesla doesn’t have a return policy, but he could reach out to the sales and delivery team.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

No one hurt when 2 United flights touch

MA BOSTON — Two flights scheduled to depart from Boston Logan International Airport on Monday morning made contact with each other near the gate area, federal aviation and airport officials said.

United Airlines Flight 515 was being pushed back from the gate by a tow tug when its right wing struck the tail of United Airlines Flight 267 parked at a neighboring gate around 8:30 a.m., according to preliminary information released by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Both jets are Boeing 737s. No injuries were reported.

Both jets were taken out of service, United said in an emailed statement.

Both flights were rescheduled for later in the day.

The investigation is ongoing.

Nuclear plant begins splitting atoms

GA ATLANTA — A nuclear power plant in Georgia has begun splitting atoms in one of its two new reactors, Georgia Power said Monday, a key step toward reaching commercial operation at the first new nuclear reactors built from scratch in decades in the United States.

The unit of Atlanta-based Southern Co. said operators reached self-sustaining nuclear fission inside the reactor at Plant Vogtle, southeast of Augusta. That makes the intense heat that will be used to produce steam and spin turbines to generate electricity.

A third and a fourth reactor were approved for construction

at Vogtle by the Georgia Public Service Commission in 2009, and the third reactor was supposed to start generating power in 2016. The company now says Unit 3 could begin commercial operation in May or June. Unit 4 is projected to begin commercial operation sometime between this November and March 2024.

South Carolina offers \$1.3B to SUV maker

SC COLUMBIA — South Carolina’s governor said Monday he is going to ask lawmakers to approve nearly \$1.3 billion to bring to the state a new electric vehicle plant by a Volkswagen Group-backed group trying to revive a brand that was a 1960s forerunner to today’s SUVs.

Scout Motors Inc. and South Carolina officials announced plans to start building new Scout vehicles, powered this time by electricity, for the first time since 1980. They hope to hire 4,000 workers for its \$2 billion plant.

Scout is banking on nostalgia combined with an expected boom in electric vehicles. International Harvester made gas-powered Scout vehicles in the 1960s and 1970s. Their shape and features continue to influence modern SUVs, and Scouts have had a niche fanbase of collectors ever since.

GOP panel ready to block vaccination mandates

WI MADISON — Wisconsin Republicans are preparing to again block a new policy from Democratic Gov. Tony Evers that requires students to get vaccinated twice against meningitis and tighten-

ing student chickenpox vaccination mandates.

The Legislature’s GOP-controlled rules committee held a public hearing on the policy Tuesday. A committee vote to block the policy could follow within days.

The committee’s co-chair, Republican Sen. Steve Nass, called the new provisions “arbitrary and capricious” in a message to constituents. The rules committee blocked the policy in the last legislative session as well.

“Unfortunately, Governor Evers, the (state Department of Health Services) and legislative Democrats vigorously oppose the right of parents and adults to make free decisions regarding immunizations,” Nass said in his message.

Bill expands power to detain for mental illness

CA SACRAMENTO — More people in California could be detained against their will because of a mental illness under a new bill backed Wednesday by mayors of some of the nation’s largest cities, who say they are struggling to care for the bulk of the country’s homeless population.

Federal data shows nearly one-third of the country’s homeless population lives in California, crowding the densely populated coastal cities of the nation’s most populous state. California lawmakers have given local governments billions of dollars in recent years to address this, but often with mixed results that recently prompted a public scolding from Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Local leaders say their hands are tied in many cases because the people who need the most

help refuse to take it.

A state law allows courts to order people into treatment, but only if they are “a danger to themselves or others.” This new proposal would expand that definition to include people who, because of a mental illness or an addiction to illegal drugs, are not capable of caring for themselves or protecting their own safety.

Measure to ban abortion clinics goes to governor

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Lawmakers advanced a measure to limit where people can get abortions in Utah, banning abortion clinics and effectively requiring they only be provided in hospitals with few exceptions. After passing through the state Senate on Thursday, it now heads to the desk of Gov. Spencer Cox, an anti-abortion Republican who expressed support last month.

The measure is one of several that members of Utah’s Republican-supermajority statehouse have passed this year while abortion restrictions approved in years past are on hold due to a state court injunction. It has faced fierce opposition from business, civil liberties and abortion rights groups including Planned Parenthood Association of Utah, which operates three of the four abortion clinics in the state.

“I fear that leaving families and individuals to travel hundreds of miles to receive health care for their needs will create more downstream consequences that none of us want to put individuals through,” filmmaker Amy Redford said at a Planned Parenthood press conference at the Capitol.

— From wire reports



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Gonzaga routs Saint Mary's for WCC title

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Gonzaga's players heard the criticisms this wasn't the same Bulldogs team that has been among the nation's elite in recent years, and they even struggled themselves to live up to the program's enormous expectations.

"There were numerous days where I was not fun to be around," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said.

The Bulldogs kept working at it, and on Tuesday night, No. 9 Gonzaga sent a message to the rest of the country with a dominant-from-the-start 77-51 victory over No. 16 Saint Mary's in the championship game of the West Coast Conference Tournament.

The Zags (28-5) continued their domination of the WCC with their fourth consecutive tournament championship and 10th in 11

years, with Saint Mary's in 2019 being the only exception. Gonzaga has won 21 tournament titles overall.

Drew Timme scored 18 points and became Gonzaga's all-time leading scorer, earning tournament Most Outstanding Player.

"I took for granted winning," Timme said. "I won so much in my career, it's a shock not to win. I think early in the year, it just kind of made me appreciate what it takes to win night in and night out. I think sometimes we kind of assume we were just going to win because we're Gonzaga. Sometimes it's hard not to fall into the mindset we just need to get to March. It was a grind this season. I think that grind has made us as a group appreciate each and every night winning and what it takes to win and be a good team."

Saint Mary's (26-7) was seeded first in the tournament after the teams split the regular-season series, and Timme said it was strange wearing a blue jersey rather than the customary white one. The Gaels were the last team to beat Gonzaga, which takes a nine-game winning streak into the NCAA Tournament that includes beating Saint Mary's to end the regular season.

Both teams will find out their seedings and destinations Sunday.

Gonzaga made 58% of its shots, while holding Saint Mary's to 33% shooting. The Bulldogs led by as many as 37 points and never trailed.

Timme was efficient in making 8 of 10 shots to lead four Bulldogs into double figures. Malachi Smith scored 14 points, Nolan

Hickman had 12 points and Julian Strawther had 10. Anton Watson had 10 rebounds.

Timme's short jumper with 10:18 left put him in first place alone as the leading scorer in Saint Mary's history. He entered just five points short of breaking the mark, and his 18 points for the game gave him 2,210 for his career. Frank Burgess held the previous record of 2,196 from 1958-61.

Gonzaga took control early, using a nine-point run to go up 14-4 and maintained a double-digit lead most of the way from there.

"I told our guys we played 32 games and played pretty well in 32 of them," Saint Mary's coach Randy Bennett said. "This one, we're off. You can credit them. They played well. We didn't show up."

Charleston rides Larson to CAA title over UNC Wilmington

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Ryan Larson scored 23 points and his effort at both ends of the floor late helped send Charleston past upset-minded UNC Wilmington 63-58 on Tuesday night in the Colonial Athletic Association Tournament championship and clinch an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament.

It's Charleston's first trip to the NCAA Tournament since 2018 and sixth overall.

Larson, a 6-foot-1 senior, scored 15 points after halftime, making 4 of 7 from three-point range after missing his first two threes before the break. He came up with all four of his steals after halftime, too.

Larson had pair of steals — one of which led to a breakaway layup — and banked in a three-pointer with the Cougars (31-3) in the midst of a late 12-0 run they used to secure the win.

"I'm just so proud of this team," said Larson, who transferred from Wofford where he played from 2018-22. "Everyone doubted us all year and we kept proving them wrong; kept winning games. Total team effort today."

Ante Brzovic scored 16 points for Charleston, which currently has the highest win total in Division I-play this season.

UNC Wilmington led 27-24 at intermission before Charleston outscored the Seawolves

18-7 in the first 5:53 of the second half for a 42-34 lead. The Seawolves countered with a 15-0 run with Trazarien White scoring eight and Amari Kelly six, and UNCW led 49-42 with 9:52 left. Charleston took the lead for good on Larson's breakaway layup off the steal for a 55-53 lead with 3:33 left, and the Seawolves went into an almost four-minute scoring drought.

Oral Roberts 92, North Dakota State 58: Max Abmas scored 26 points and distributed 11 assists as Oral Roberts overwhelmed North Dakota State in the Summit League Tournament championship game in Sioux Falls, S.D., clinching an automatic berth into the NCAA Tournament.

Reserve Patrick Mwamba scored 17 of his 20 points in the first half and Isaac McBride, Connor Vanover and reserve Deshang Weaver each scored 10 points for Oral Roberts.

Oral Roberts (30-4) finished 18-0 in league play and won twice in the league's postseason tournament. It's the program's seventh NCAA Tournament berth.

The Golden Eagles failed to make the NCAA Tournament last year following its 2021 run to the Sweet 16, which ended with a 72-70 loss to Arkansas.

Northern Kentucky 63, Cleveland State 61: Marques Warrick scored 18 points and Sam Vinson added 16 to lead Northern Ken-

tucky to a victory over Cleveland State and win the Horizon League Tournament championship in Indianapolis.

The Norse (22-12), one-point losers to Wright State in last year's title game, advance to the NCAA Tournament for the fourth time since 2017.

Warrick made four consecutive free throws in the final half-minute to give the Norse a seven-point lead. The Vikings (21-13) scored twice in the final 10 seconds, but a final three-pointer came with just 0.2 left.

Merrimack 67, Fairleigh Dickinson 66: Ziggy Reid scored 23 points, Jordan Minor had 19 points, seven rebounds and five assists and Merrimack closed on an 8-0 run to beat Fairleigh Dickinson to capture the Northeast Conference Tournament championship in North Andover, Mass.

Merrimack (18-16), which is ineligible for the NCAA Tournament due to a four-year transition to Division I, closed its season on an 11-game winning streak. Fairleigh Dickinson (19-15) had already secured the conference's automatic bid in the Big Dance, but was seeking its seventh NEC Tournament title.

Javon Bennett added 11 points and Jordan Derkack had eight points and 12 rebounds for top-seeded Merrimack. Minor, the NEC co-player of the year, was 8-for-17 from the field and he also had three blocks.

Davis' 30 points lead Lakers past Grizzlies

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Anthony Davis had 30 points and 22 rebounds, Dennis Schröder added 17 points and nine assists and the Los Angeles Lakers moved into ninth place in the Western Conference with a 112-103 victory over the Memphis Grizzlies on Tuesday night.

Rui Hachimura and Austin Reaves scored 17 points apiece in the sixth win in eight games for the Lakers, who are surging since the trade deadline despite missing LeBron James and D'Angelo Russell to injury.

"It's good, but we're not satisfied," Davis said about the Lakers' highest spot in the standings since their 2-10 start to the season. "We don't want to stop there. We want to get greedy."

Davis turned in a superstar performance against the Grizzlies, hitting 11 of his 17 shots and repeatedly making big plays

down the stretch while wearing a bandage on his nose from a first-half cut. He also blocked two shots, and Los Angeles held Memphis to 46 points in the second half of another strong defensive effort.

"Guys out there are confident, and when you play basketball like that, it leads to victories," Davis said.

Hornets 112, Knicks 105: Kelly Oubre Jr. scored 27 points, Terry Rozier added 25 and visiting Charlotte snapped New York's nine-game winning streak.

Gordon Hayward had 23 points, nine rebounds and eight assists, and made the tiebreaking basket with 1:50 remaining as the Hornets won for the first time in four games since point guard LaMelo Ball's broken ankle that required surgery.

Bucks 134, Magic 123: Brook Lopez scored 26 points,

Khris Middleton and Jevon Carter each added 24 points and visiting Milwaukee beat Orlando for its 18th victory in 19 games.

Bobby Portis Jr. had 16 points and 11 rebounds and Jae Crowder added 15 points for the Bucks, who shot 59% and ran their winning streak against the Magic to 14 games.

Mavericks 120, Jazz 116: Kyrie Irving hit a clutch three-pointer and scored 17 of his 33 points in the fourth quarter, and Luka Dončić added 29 points as host Dallas beat short-handed Utah.

Utah trailed 118-115 with 3.7 seconds to play when Talen Horton-Tucker was fouled and sent to the line for two shots. After sinking the first, his intentional miss slammed directly off the backboard and didn't hit the rim, giving Dallas possession.

76ers 117, Timberwolves 94: Joel Embiid scored 39

points, Tyrese Maxey added 27 and visiting Philadelphia beat Minnesota despite playing without star James Harden, who was held out with left foot soreness.

De'Anthony Melton scored 11 for the 76ers, who wrapped up a five-game trip with a 4-1 record.

Nets 118, Rockets 96: Mikal Bridges scored 30 points, Spencer Dinwiddie added 23 and visiting Brooklyn had a big third quarter to beat Houston for its third consecutive victory.

Wizards 119, Pistons 117: Daniel Gafford converted a put-back of Bradley Beal's airball at the buzzer, and visiting Washington handed Detroit its ninth consecutive loss.

Thunder 137, Warriors 128: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 33 points, Josh Giddey had the seventh triple-double of his career and third of the season, and host Oklahoma City beat Golden State.

Crosby lifts Penguins past Blue Jackets in OT

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Pittsburgh Penguins don't panic when things get sideways. Call it one of the fringe benefits of having the NHL's oldest team.

They've been through so much that not much phases them. Even a four-goal deficit at home against Columbus on Tuesday night when it was hard to tell at times which club began the night with the league's worst record and which club was trying to reach the playoffs for a 17th straight season.

Clarity arrived courtesy of a three-goal flurry in the third period. Victory arrived in overtime.

Sidney Crosby capped a frantic rally with a blast from the right circle that beat Blue Jackets backup goaltender Michael Hutchinson 2:45 into the extra period as the Penguins scrambled to a 5-4 win.

"We'll take those two points, but we know it wasn't the most ideal game for us," said Penguins forward Jason Zucker, who had two goals to boost his season total to 21.

It was the ideal finish.

Pittsburgh beat the Blue Jackets for the 13th straight time at PPG Paints Arena thanks to a three-goal outburst early in the

third that drew the Penguins even, setting the stage for the 20th overtime goal of Crosby's career that sent Pittsburgh to its fifth win in its last six games.

"We knew (the start) wasn't good enough," Zucker said. "We're a veteran group. We know what we need to be doing. We got after it a little bit in the second and definitely in the third."

Hurricanes 4, Canadiens 3 (SO): Jesperi Kotkaniemi scored the deciding goal in the sixth round of the shootout to lift visiting Carolina to its third straight win.

Brent Burns and Teuvo Teräsvainen also scored in the tiebreaker for the Hurricanes, and Rem Pitlick and Nick Suzuki tallied for the Canadiens.

Panthers 2, Golden Knights 1: Sergei Bobrovsky made 31 saves as host Florida ended Vegas' three-game winning streak.

Ryan Lomberg and Aleksander Barkov each scored a goal for the Panthers, who have now won two in a row as they kept pace in the Eastern Conference playoff race.

Flames 1, Wild 0 (SO): Tyler Toffoli scored in the fourth round of the shootout to lift visiting Calgary.

Freddy Gaudreau tallied for Minnesota

and Nazem Kadri scored for Calgary in the third round, Matt Boldy then missed a backhand for Minnesota to set the state for Toffoli to win it.

Avalanche 6, Sharks 0: Cale Makar and Valeri Nichushkin each had a goal and three assists to help host Colorado snap a three-game slide.

Maple Leafs 4, Devils 3: Auston Matthews scored on a power play with 2:53 remaining to lift visiting Toronto.

Islanders 3, Sabres 2: Josh Bailey and Hudson Fasching each had a goal and an assist in the third period to lead host New York.

Lightning 5, Flyers 2: Alex Killorn and Nikita Kucherov each had two goals and an assist, and host Tampa Bay snapped a five-game losing streak.

Kraken 5, Ducks 2: Jared McCann scored his fifth goal in the past five games, Daniel Sprong scored for the first time since Jan. 17 and host Seattle won its fifth straight.

Coyotes 6, Blues 2: Travis Boyd had two goals and an assist in the third period, Karel Vejmelka stopped 40 shots and host Arizona beat St. Louis.

QB Jackson gets nonexclusive tag

Associated Press

The Baltimore Ravens put the nonexclusive franchise tag on Lamar Jackson on Tuesday, preventing him from becoming an unrestricted free agent this month but allowing him to negotiate with other teams.

The deadline for teams to apply the franchise tag was Tuesday. The Ravens were always expected to use it if they didn't reach a long-term deal with Jackson first. The main question was whether they'd use the nonexclusive tag or the exclusive one.

Baltimore could have prevented Jackson from negotiating with anyone else by using the exclusive tag, but that could have cost significantly more. Instead, Jackson would make \$32.4 million if he plays this season on the nonexclusive tag.

Before that happens, Jackson and the Ravens can keep negotiating, and other teams can join in the bidding as well. Baltimore

would have a chance to match any agreement between Jackson and another team, and if the Ravens chose not to match, they'd receive two first-round draft picks in return.

"There have been many instances across the league and in Baltimore when a player has been designated with the franchise tag and signed a long-term deal that same year," general manager Eric DeCosta said in a statement. "We will continue to negotiate in good faith with Lamar, and we are hopeful that we can strike a long-term deal that is fair to both Lamar and the Ravens. Our ultimate goal is to build a championship team with Lamar Jackson leading the way for many years to come."

The Dallas Cowboys used the exclusive franchise tag on quarterback Dak Prescott in 2020. A year later, they reached a long-term deal with him. Kirk Cousins is another quarterback who played on the franchise tag fair-

ly recently. He did it his final two seasons in Washington before joining the Minnesota Vikings in 2018.

So now the saga between Jackson and the Ravens enters its next phase. Josh Allen, the other star quarterback drafted in 2018 with Jackson, signed a long-term deal with Buffalo two offseasons ago. Jackson, on the other hand, entered last season — the final year of his rookie deal — still without an extension. His contract status didn't seem too disruptive last offseason — he participated in mandatory minicamp and training camp — but there's no telling how the next few months will go.

There is obviously some risk involved with using the nonexclusive tag, especially for a player of Jackson's caliber, but it could resolve this deadlock sooner. If Jackson is able to find a deal he likes from another team, the Ravens could either

match it or take the draft picks and allow him to leave.

Jackson, who doesn't have an agent, is one player who should pique the rest of the league's interest, even at the cost of two first-round picks, and his availability to any degree could shake up NFL free agency, which opens later this month.

Jackson was the 2019 NFL MVP, and his dynamic passing and running make him one of the game's most unusual stars. At age 25, he is already one of six quarterbacks in NFL history with 10,000 yards passing and 4,000 rushing. His 12 games with at least 100 yards rushing are an NFL record for a QB.

Jackson has been hurt at the end of the past two seasons, and the Ravens haven't reached the AFC championship game with him, but his impact on their offense is massive. If he remains with Baltimore, he'll have a new coordinator after the Ravens hired Georgia's Todd Monken.

Giants give Jones 4-year, \$160M deal, tag Barkley

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — After days of intense, down-to-the wire negotiations, the New York Giants agreed to a four-year contract with quarterback Daniel Jones on Tuesday and put a franchise tag on running back Saquon Barkley.

The Giants confirmed the deal with Jones Tuesday night. The agreement with his agents was reached with the franchise tag deadline minutes away.

With Jones under contract, the Giants used their franchise tag on running back Saquon Barkley.

"We had productive conversations with Daniel and his representatives over the course of the past week or so," general manager Joe Schoen said. "We are all pleased that we were able to come to an agreement prior to

today's deadline. This gives us a greater ability to continue to build our roster."

The long-term contract allows the Giants to sharply reduce Jones' cap number in this and subsequent seasons.

"I said after the season I love this place," said Jones, who turns 26 in May. "I've really enjoyed my time here and I want to be here. I have great respect for this organization, the (owners), my coaches and teammates. I am happy we were able to come to an agreement."

Barkley's tag is nonexclusive, which means he's able to negotiate with other teams in addition to the Giants. New York would have the right to match any team's offer and would receive two first-round draft picks if it decided not to match.

The No. 2 overall pick in the

2018 draft and the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year that season would earn just over \$10 million playing on the franchise tag.

The deals came after Jones delivered a career season, leading the team to the playoffs for the first time since 2016.

The Giants had refused to pick up the fifth-year option on Jones' rookie contract before the start of last season. He was set to become an unrestricted free agent on March 15.

The No. 6 pick overall in the 2019 draft, Jones led New York to a 9-7-1 record. Working with new coach Brian Daboll, Jones threw for 3,205 yards, 15 touchdowns and five interceptions. He also added another dimension to the offense by running for a quarterback franchise-record 708 yards and seven

touchdowns.

The Giants had their first winning season since 2016 and beat Minnesota in the wild-card round of the NFC playoffs. The Philadelphia Eagles thrashed them in the divisional round.

Signing Jones allowed the Giants to tag Barkley, who also was an unrestricted free agent. Barkley had his best and healthiest season since 2018, rushing for 1,312 yards and 10 touchdowns. He also caught 57 passes for 338 yards.

The Giants had started the offseason with roughly \$46 million in cap space. Safety and leading tackler Julian Love, offensive linemen Jon Feliciano and Nick Gates, receivers Darius Slayton and Richie James and long snapper Casey Kreiter are also set to become unrestricted free agents.