

## Navy eyes 9 new ships in 2024 budget

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Navy wants to buy nine warships for its fleet and decommission 11 vessels in its proposed \$202.5 billion budget for 2024, the service announced Monday.

The budget request calls for the purchase of two Virginia-class attack submarines, two Arleigh Burke-class destroyers, two Constellation-class frigates, one John Lewis-class oiler and one submarine tender.

It also includes a second Columbia-class, ballistic-missile submarine—a “central component of our recapitalization of our nuclear triad,” said Erik Raven, the undersecretary of the Navy. The triad refers to the three legs of the Defense Department’s nuclear forces: land, air and sea.

The Navy is not requesting any funding for amphibious ships. Of the 11 ships that the service is seeking to cut, there are three Whidbey Island-class dock landing ships, three Ticonderoga-class cruisers and two Independence-class littoral combat ships — the 9-year-old USS Jackson and 8-year-old USS Montgomery. Both ships were expected to have a 25-year service life.

Congress last year allowed the Navy to cut only four of nine littoral combat ships targeted for early retirement. The Navy this year is again asking lawmakers to approve the decommissioning of four ships that the service also wanted retired last year: the guided-missile cruiser USS Vicksburg and dock landing ships USS Germantown, USS Gunston Hall and USS Tortuga.

Raven said the dock landing ships posed a challenge for readiness.

“We want to make sure that the capabilities that we field are the right capabilities,” he said. “We’re proposing those divestments because we think the return on investment on further investments on those particular ships ... is not there. Additionally, we have sailors and Marines who are serving on these ships, and we think getting them matched up with the right platforms is the way to go.”

The Navy’s deployable battle force will number 293 ships in fiscal 2024, which begins Oct. 1, compared with 296 now. The service is expected to reach an active-duty end strength of 347,000 sailors and 57,200 Reserve members, an increase of 5,264 sailors and 983 reservists, respectively, from the previous year.

The Navy’s budget request represents a nearly \$10 billion, or 5% increase, from last year’s enacted budget. It contains \$67.3 billion for operations and maintenance, \$63.7 billion for procurement, \$42.9 billion for personnel, \$23.3 billion for research and development and \$5.3 billion for military construction and family housing.

About \$17 billion of the procurement request is for 88 aircraft, including fighters, helicopters, unmanned aircraft and training aircraft.

The construction spending plan is a nearly 20% increase compared to last year’s budget and will include the construction of three child development centers, said Rear Adm. John Gumbleton, the deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for budget.

The Navy also wants to boost investment in the Pentagon’s Pacific Deterrence Initiative by nearly 50%, committing \$3.2 billion to a “free and open Indo-Pacific” in the face of China’s growing military power.

A significant portion of the funds will be spent on construction projects to build up naval bases in Guam, Hawaii and other locations, Gumbleton said.

## USMC seeks \$53B budget to prep for future conflicts

BY DOUG G. WARE  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Marine Corps is requesting a budget of more than \$50 billion to help speed up plans to modernize and reshape the service to better respond to future conflicts against military powers, such as China.

The Navy’s budget request, which includes the Marine Corps, asks for a funding increase of \$11 billion for fiscal 2024, which begins in October.

The budget plan, which must be approved by Congress, accelerates the Marine Corps’ Force Design 2030 program by increasing funding by \$705 million next year. Force Design 2030 is a plan for the service to modernize and adapt for future marine warfare environments.

Roughly \$53 billion of the Navy’s \$255 billion budget request would go to the Marine Corps. The plan provides funding for about

206,000 active-duty Marines and Reserve members — a few hundred more than projected for the Marines for 2023 — as well as three new Marine Littoral Regiments and five traditional infantry regiments.

Almost two-thirds of the Marine Corps budget would fund personnel, operations and maintenance, according to the budget proposal. About 25% would fund procuring weapons, vehicles and equipment and about 10% is for construction projects and research and development.

The Marine Corps funding plan is \$1.3 billion more than its enacted budget from 2023.

“This is a strategy-driven budget,” Undersecretary of the Navy Erik Raven told reporters. “The budget reflects the nation’s priorities ... and solidifies [Navy] Secretary [Carlos] Del Toro’s enduring priorities of maintaining maritime dominance, empowering warfighters and strengthening strategic partnerships.”

tegic partnerships.”

In its National Defense Strategy last fall, the Pentagon called China the top “pacing challenge” for the United States and underscored the importance of maintaining stability and limiting Beijing’s influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Chinese aggression in recent years, including an accelerated warship-building program, has persuaded Pentagon leaders that the Marine Corps must be more sophisticated and its forces more adaptable.

Notably, the budget request does not include additional amphibious warships, which is something Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger has requested. San Antonio-class amphibious transport ships are used to move Marines and equipment.

Del Toro said months ago that there would be a pause in building amphibious warships so the Navy could study how many it needs and for what purpose.

# Army's budget focuses on recruiting

BY DOUG G. WARE

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Army's budget request for fiscal 2024 seeks \$185 billion that includes funding increases to attract and retain soldiers, stabilize the Indo-Pacific region and procure new weapons, service officials said Monday.

The service's budget proposal, which is a slight increase from 2023, accounts for less than 25% of the Defense Department's overall budget of \$842 billion for the next fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1. Army officials said the discretionary funding request for next year is centered mostly on modernization, personnel and improving readiness.

"As [China] races to modernize its military, this budget will sharpen our edge by making critical investments across all timeframes, theaters, and domains," defense officials said in a statement. "This budget makes the department's largest-ever investments in readiness and procurement —

and our largest investment in research and development."

Many of the Army's year-to-year budget items in the proposal do not increase from 2023 funding, but the service is requesting more than \$15 billion in additional spending for personnel matters to make greater investments in troops, families and civilian staffers amid ongoing struggles with recruiting.

"People are our No. 1 priority," Undersecretary of the Army Gabe Camarillo told reporters at the Pentagon. "There are significant uncertainties regarding the recruiting market."

Last year, the Army aimed for 60,000 new recruits but attracted only about 45,000. This year, its recruiting goal is 65,000. Officials said Monday that the new budget request includes almost \$390 million to fund marketing and advertising portfolios in a bid to attract enlistees.

Last week, the Army announced a re-branding campaign that included a re-

freshed logo and the resurrection of its famous slogan — "Be All You Can Be."

Also part of the 2024 budget request is \$13 million to expand the Army's Future Soldier Prep Course, a program designed to educate young American students about military life and help them prepare for and pass the military's academic and physical eligibility requirements. Instituted in 2022, officials said the program has been highly successful so far. Fewer than 25% of all young Americans between the ages of 17 and 24 can meet military eligibility requirements, according to the most recent Pentagon data.

About \$290 million will fund enhancing operations within the Army's recruiting command and the budget request aims to fund a force of 452,000 active-duty soldiers in fiscal 2024.

Camarillo said the Army expects "it will take several years" to overcome its current recruiting challenges — something that Army Secretary Christine Wormuth has also acknowledged.

## Air Force seeks nearly 100 new aircraft in proposal

BY ROSE L. THAYER

*Stars and Stripes*

Air Force leaders said Monday that they plan to buy 96 aircraft, including 72 fighter jets, and boost their research into future technologies by nearly 10% as part of the service's more than \$185 billion budget proposal for fiscal 2024.

The spending plan for the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1 is about \$5.4 billion more than the budget for 2023. Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall said the plan is a "beautiful balance" between operational demands now and modernizing to stay ahead of the future threats that are primarily coming from China's ability to rapidly update its military's technology. It's just part of the more than \$215 billion budget request from the

Department of the Air Force, which includes \$30 billion for Space Force.

The Air Force funding plan is part of the Defense Department budget proposal of \$842 billion, which is up 3.2% from fiscal 2023, which ends Sept. 30. The \$26 billion increase from last year's spending would include a 5.2% salary bump for troops — the highest in 20 years.

The Air Force's proposed budget speeds up planned purchases of aircraft, including 48 F-35A fighter jets and 24 F-15EX jets. The service also plans to retire 310 aircraft, including 32 F-22 Raptors, 57 F-16 Eagles, 48 MQ-9 Reapers, which are unmanned aircraft, and 42 A-10 Thunderbolt II, also known as the Warthog.

## Space Force looks to add 800 troops, boost its security role

BY ROSE L. THAYER

*Stars and Stripes*

Space Force wants to recruit 800 new guardians and take on more responsibility in national security with a nearly \$4 billion proposed increase in funding in its 2024 budget request, officials announced Monday.

The newest service branch, which was activated three years ago, is proposing a budget of \$30 billion for fiscal 2024, which starts Oct. 1. In addition to more troops, the funding boost would pay for five additional launches and a nearly twofold increase in money for low and medium orbit missile-tracking satellites.

Space Force's budget is nested within the Department of the Air Force's total fund-

ing proposal of more than \$215 billion for fiscal 2024.

The overall Defense Department budget request is \$842 billion, which is up 3.2% from fiscal 2023. The \$26 billion increase from this year's funding includes a 5.2% salary bump for troops — the highest in 20 years. That increase would include Space Force civilians as well, according to the service's budget presentation Monday.

The Space Force has a vital role to play in the National Defense Strategy, which has a primary focus to sustain and strengthen deterrence against China, said Kristyn Jones, acting undersecretary of the Air Force.

"Defending the nation requires constant vigilance in all domains," she said.

# Australia to buy nuke-powered subs from US

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — President Joe Biden and the leaders of Australia and the United Kingdom on Monday announced that Australia will purchase nuclear-powered attack submarines from the U.S. to modernize its fleet amid growing concern about China's influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Biden flew to San Diego to appear with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak as they hailed an 18-month-old nuclear partnership given the acronym AUKUS — for Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The partnership, announced in 2021, enables Australia to access nuclear-powered submarines, which are stealthier and more capable than conventionally powered vessels, as a counterweight to China's military buildup.

"The latest joint statement issued by the U.S., U.K., and Australia shows that the three countries have gone further down the wrong and dangerous path for their own geopolitical self-interest, completely ignoring the concerns of the international community," China Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told reporters at a Tuesday briefing.

Wang said the agreement arises from the "typical Cold War mentality which will only motivate an arms race, damage the international nuclear nonproliferation regime, and harm regional stability and peace."

Biden, appearing sensitive to tensions with China and its criticism of the deal, stressed that the submarines are "nuclear powered, not nuclear armed."

"These boats will not have any nuclear weapons of any kind of them," he said at an outdoor cere-

mony at Naval Base Point Loma in San Diego, where he was flanked by Albanese and Sunak. Two submarines, the USS Missouri and the USS Charlotte, were tied up at the next pier in the Pacific Ocean behind the leaders.

Wang repeated China's claims that AUKUS poses a "serious risk of nuclear proliferation and violating the object and purpose of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons."

Albanese said the agreement "represents the biggest single investment in Australia's defense capability in all of our history." It's also the first time in 65 years that the U.S. has shared its nuclear propulsion technology, "and we thank you for it," he said.

Sunak called AUKUS "the most significant multilateral defense partnership in generations." He said the U.K. also will share its 60 years of experience

running its own submarine fleet with Australian engineers "so they can build their own fleet."

On Tuesday, Australia's defense minister, Richard Marles, said AUKUS was necessary to counter the biggest conventional military buildup in the region since World War II. Australian officials said the deal will cost up to \$245 billion over the next three decades and create 20,000 jobs.

Australia is buying three, and possibly up to five, Virginia-class boats as part of AUKUS. A future generation of submarines will be built in the U.K. and in Australia with U.S. technology and support.

The U.S. will also increase its port visits in Australia to provide it with more familiarity with the nuclear-powered technology before it has such subs of its own. The USS Asheville was docked in Perth, Australia, on Monday, Biden said.

## Northeastern US braces for powerful winter storm

Associated Press

The start of a winter storm with heavy, wet snow caused a plane to slide off the runway and led to hundreds of school closings, canceled flights and thousands of power outages in parts of the Northeast on Tuesday.

The storm's path included parts of New England, upstate New York, northeastern Pennsylvania and northern New Jersey. Snow totals by the time it winds up Wednesday were expected to range from a few inches to a few feet, depending on the area.

"This is shaping up to be a unique winter storm for our small state in that there will be big differences in snowfall amounts depending on where you are located," said Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont, who ordered all executive branch state office buildings closed. "Some towns may receive a significant snowfall total, while others may receive a fraction of

that amount or maybe even just rain."

A Delta Air Lines plane veered off the runway as it taxied for takeoff from a Syracuse, N.Y., airport Tuesday morning. The aircraft slid into a grassy area along the runway, forcing 61 passengers off the plane and a return back to the terminal, according to airport officials.

More than 400 flights traveling to, from or within the U.S. were canceled Tuesday, with Boston and New York City area airports seeing the highest number of scrubbed flights, according to the website FlightAware.

Wet, heavy snow snapped tree branches and downed power lines across New York's capital region with power outages hitting homes and businesses in the Albany area. Snow was falling especially heavy in New York's Catskills, according to the National Weather Service in Albany.

## Levee rupture grows as new storm threatens Calif. coast

Associated Press

WATSONVILLE, Calif. — Crews rushed to repair a levee break on a storm-swollen river in California's central coast as yet another atmospheric river arrived Monday with the potential to wallop the state's swamped farmland and agricultural communities.

The Pajaro River's first levee rupture grew to at least 400 feet since it failed late Friday, officials said. More than 8,500 people were forced to evacuate, and about 50 people had to be rescued as the water rose that night.

Still, some stayed behind in Pajaro, an unincorporated community that's known for its strawberry crops and is now mostly flooded. The largely Latino farmworker community there is already struggling to find food with so many roads and businesses closed in the storm's aftermath.

"Some people have nowhere to go and maybe that's why there's still people around," resident Jorbelit Rincon said Monday. "Pretty much they don't know where to go and don't have money to provide for themselves."

A second breach opened up another 100 feet of the levee closer to the Pacific coast, providing a "relief valve" for the floodwaters to recede near the mouth of the river, officials said Monday during a news conference.

Built in the late 1940s to provide flood protection, the levee has been a known risk for decades and had several breaches in the 1990s. Emergency repairs to a section of the berm were undertaken in January. A \$400 million rebuild is set to begin in the next few years.

Authorities had not received reports of any deaths or missing persons related to the storm as of Monday afternoon.

# N. Korea fires missiles off east coast

By DAVID CHOI  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles off its eastern coast Tuesday morning, according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The missiles were launched at 7:41 a.m. and 7:51 a.m. from Jangyon in the southwestern coastal province of South Hwanghae, the Joint Chiefs said in a message to news agencies. They flew roughly 385 miles before landing in the East Sea, or Sea of Japan, according to a Joint Chiefs' update.

South Korea considers missile launches "provocations that harm the peace and stability" of the region, the update stated.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the launches posed no immediate threat to "U.S. personnel or territory, or to our al-

lies," according to a Tuesday statement.

The missiles "highlight the destabilizing impact" of North Korea's unlawful weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs, the command said.

A U.N. Security Council resolution on Oct. 16, 2006, prohibits North Korea from "all activities related to its ballistic missile program."

The launches are North Korea's sixth and seventh so far this year in five separate days of testing. The communist regime last fired a short-range ballistic missile on Thursday. The North also said it fired a pair of cruise missiles Sunday from a submarine, according to a report Monday by the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

Tuesday's launches come a day after the start of the large-scale Freedom Shield exercise by U.S. and South Korean forces. The

11-day joint exercise involves training in the latest elements of defensive warfare, according to U.S. and South Korean military officials. North Korea previously warned the United States and South Korea against the exercise, which it views as a rehearsal for an invasion. The regime has also accused the allies of raising regional tensions.

The ongoing drills "seriously encroach upon the security interests" of North Korea and threatened "strong counteractions" against the allies, Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry said in a statement last month.

The U.S. and South Korean forces will "train normally," however, regardless of "provocations" from the North, a Joint Chiefs spokesman said Tuesday in Seoul. Some government spokespeople in South Korea customarily speak to the media on the condition of anonymity.

# Russian missile hits Ukrainian apartment

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — A Russian missile struck an apartment building in the center of Kramatorsk on Tuesday, killing at least one person and wounding nine others in one of Ukraine's major city strongholds in its eastern Donetsk region as it fights against Moscow's invasion, officials said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy posted a video showing gaping holes in the fa-

cade of the low-rise building that bore the brunt of the strike.

The Ukrainian general prosecutor's office and regional Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko also reported on the attack, posting photos of the building with mounds of rubble in front of it.

The impact damaged nine apartment blocks, a kindergarten, a local bank branch and two cars, Kyrylenko said.

"Russian troops are striking residential buildings, schools

and hospitals, leaving cities on fire and in ruins," Kyrylenko said on Ukrainian television. Kramatorsk houses the local Ukrainian army headquarters. Ukrainian authorities said it has been regularly targeted by Russian shelling and other attacks in the past.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, speaking Tuesday during a meeting with workers at a helicopter factory in southern Siberia, once again cast the

conflict in Ukraine as an existential one for Russia, charging that unlike the West — which, he said, is seeking to advance its geopolitical clout — it's fighting for its existence as a state.

Russia had welcomed a Chinese peace proposal to end the fighting, but Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday that Kyiv's refusal to have talks leaves Moscow with only military options.

# China plans to reopen to tourists, resume all visas

*Associated Press*

HONG KONG—China will reopen its borders to tourists and resume issuing all visas Wednesday as it tries to revive tourism and its economy following a three-year halt during the COVID-19 pandemic.

China is one of the last major countries to reopen its borders to tourists. The announcement Tuesday came after it declared a "decisive victory" over COVID-19 in February.

All types of visas will resume from Wednesday. Visa-free entry will also resume at destinations such as Hainan island as well as for cruise ships entering Shanghai that had no visa requirement before COVID-19.

Foreigners holding visas issued before March 28, 2020, that are still valid will be allowed to enter China. Visa-free entry will resume for foreigners entering Guangdong in southern China from Hong Kong and Macao. The notice didn't specify whether vaccination certificates or negative COVID-19 tests would be required, but Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told reporters Tuesday that China had "optimized measures for remote testing of people coming to China from relevant countries," allowing pre-boarding antigen testing instead of nucleic acid testing.

"All these have been well implemented, and the epidemic risk is generally controlla-

ble," Wang said at a daily briefing.

The move would "further facilitate the exchange of Chinese and foreign personnel," according to the notice posted on the websites of numerous Chinese missions and embassies.

The relaxation of visa rules follows China's approval of outbound group tours for Chinese citizens, the results of which have been positive, and the overall improvement in pandemic conditions, Wang said.

"China will continue to make better arrangements for the safe, healthy and orderly movement of Chinese and foreign personnel on the basis of scientific assessments and in light of the situation," he said.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Police: Man stalked couple, killed them**

**WA** REDMOND — A longhaul truck driver from Texas who became obsessed with a software engineer in Washington state after meeting her through a social media chatroom app killed her, her husband and himself after stalking them for months, police said.

Zohreh Sadeghi, 33, and her husband, Mohammad Milad Naseri, 35, were shot to death in their suburban Seattle home by Ramin Khodakaramrezaei, 38, according to Redmond Police Chief Darrell Lowe. He said officers spent a week trying to serve a protection order on Khodakaramrezaei but had not been able to find him before the killings.

In a written statement, the police department said the suspect began communicating with Sadeghi after listening to her podcasts. Lowe clarified that the two became acquainted because he heard her in an audio chatroom on the app Clubhouse, where he said she facilitated a discussion for Farsi speakers seeking work in the tech industry.

**3 officers injured in fight with man at coffee shop**

**AZ** MESA — Three Mesa police officers were injured while fighting a man who refused to leave a coffee shop, authorities said.

Officers were called to the scene and said Tegan Williams, 21, refused to leave when asked by police, who used a stun gun on him before a six-minute fight ensued.

As Williams was being arrested, he allegedly squeezed an officer's hand with such force to break bones and require surgery to repair.

Police said another officer was kicked while apparently unconscious while a third officer needed X-rays on his injured hand.

**City approves noncitizen voting for local elections**

**VT** BURLINGTON — Vermont's largest city has voted to allow noncitizens who are in the country legally to vote in local elections.

The proposed charter change for Burlington now must be considered by the Legislature and the Republican governor.

Burlington would be the third city in the state to make the change. Noncitizen residents are currently allowed to vote in municipal elections in Vermont's capital city of Montpelier, and Winooski, the most diverse community in the state.

The Republican National Committee had filed lawsuits against the two cities asking judges to declare noncitizen voting unconstitutional and lost those challenges. Federal law prohibits noncitizens from voting in federal elections, including races for president, vice president, Senate or House of Representatives.

**Former student at college charged in threats case**

**WI** MADISON — A former University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate student threatened students, staff members and professors at the university, telling some of them via email before he trav-

eled to the U.S. that he planned to kill their children, according to court documents.

Arvin Raj Mathur, 32, was in Michigan's St. Clair County Jail following his arrest after traveling from Copenhagen, Denmark, where he has been enrolled at a university, court records and online jail records showed.

Mathur is accused of threatening nine people, most of them graduate students, staff or professors at the Madison campus. Among those emails were one to an anthropology professor saying that two of the other people he had threatened should "sue me right away," authorities said.

"Otherwise, I will murder their children. Call the police and a lawyer, otherwise, I will kill their children and hide their flesh inside of their burger meat," he added in the email, court records showed.

**School district considers 4-day week for students**

**AR** LINCOLN — An Arkansas school district is scheduled to discuss moving to a four-day school week.

Lincoln Schools Superintendent Mary Ann Spears said the proposal is designed to, among other things, help attract and retain teachers for its 1,065 students.

"We have teachers that drive in from Lowell and Bentonville and spend an hour on the road each way getting to us," Spears said. "That's part of the piece of this. If we can do something a little bit differently and structure ourselves differently, hopefully we can recruit and re-

tain more teachers."

The district is proposing to have school Tuesday through Friday and add about an hour and 20 minutes to each day, with the extra time placed on both ends of a school day. The district is required to have 1,800 minutes of instruction per week, and these minutes would be spread out over four days instead of five, Spears said.

**Family suit: Son suffered concussion during hazing**

**AL** PELL CITY — Parents are suing an east Alabama school district after they said their son received a concussion when older baseball teammates hazed him by beating him with pillows.

Local news outlets reported the lawsuit was filed against the Pell City school district, the Pell City Police Department, Superintendent James Martin, the high school principal, baseball coach and others.

The parents said their son attended a "midnight madness" event with baseball players in January. They said their son and others were beaten with pillows concealing unknown objects, injuring multiple boys.

The lawsuit said the head coach, without calling parents to tell them about the injuries or ask for permission, gave the boy medicine and told him to go to sleep until the morning.

Martin told the St. Clair Times that he and school board members are reviewing whether the district will keep sponsoring sports team sleepovers.

Lawyer J.D. Gilbert told WBRC-TV the family feels no one has been held accountable.

— From wire reports



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# Confident Kolek leads way for Marquette

Associated Press

Tyler Kolek adopted the acuity and audacity that defines his game with every bruise he took playing against his older brother while growing up in Rhode Island.

Kolek was two years younger than his brother, Brandon, but wanted to prove he was every bit as good. The two brothers stopped playing one-on-one by the time they reached high school since each matchup inevitably ended with a scuffle.

"We were both really competitive," recalled Brandon Kolek, who just finished his final season at Division II school Franklin Pierce. "I'd be bigger than him so I would post him up, and he would get mad that I'm doing that and he can't stop it. So a couple of punches are thrown, a couple of elbows are thrown and it would just turn to an all-out fight after that."

Kolek's fearlessness has been a hallmark of Marquette's stunningly successful season.

The approach also helped Kolek develop from a mid-major prospect into the Big East player of the year who led Mar-

quette to its first Big East outright regular-season title and tournament championship since joining the conference for the 2005-06 season. Now he wants to help Marquette get beyond the opening round of the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2013.

Marquette (28-6) is the No. 2 seed in the East Region and faces Vermont (23-10) on Friday.

"I've just got to be a chip-on-my-shoulder kind of guy," Kolek said. "That's where I feel like it comes from. Just being that underdog, that under-recruited guy, you've got to have some gumption to you."

Kolek definitely has that. It was apparent well before the season.

When he was asked at Big East media day what he thought about the league's coaches picking Marquette to finish ninth out of 11 teams, Kolek offered a two-word response. The second word was an abbreviated version of "them." The first word was an expletive.

"I thought that was hilarious," his brother said. "It just

goes to show who he is. He doesn't really care about what anybody says. He's going to do what he's got to do, no matter what."

Kolek has the game to back up his bravado.

Marquette boasts one of the nation's most efficient offenses because its starting lineup features two outstanding passers in Kolek and 6-foot-9 forward Oso Ighodaro. Kolek ranks among the top five Division I players in assists per game (7.7) and assist-turnover ratio (3.22).

Kolek inherited those passing skills from his father, Kevin Kolek, who dished out six assists per game from 1984-88 while helping UMass Dartmouth earn three straight Division III NCAA Tournament appearances.

"He knows what the defense is going to do, and he can just read what's going to happen two, three steps ahead," teammate David Joplin said.

Kolek had already proved himself as a distributor last year by collecting 5.9 assists per game. The questions sur-

rounded his shooting, which led to a rare crisis in confidence.

After Kolek played one season at George Mason, the firing of Dave Paulsen caused him to enter the transfer portal. Marquette coach Shaka Smart said he called Kolek to make his pitch the day he got the job.

Kolek shot just 32% overall and 28.1% from three-point range his first year at Marquette after shooting 39.9% overall and 35.8% from beyond the arc at George Mason. For once in his life, that swagger was missing.

"I was miserable last year, honestly," Kolek said. "I kind of let basketball determine my whole mood on and off the court. As you grow and learn as a person, you understand you're more than just the game. You're a human being, too."

Kolek's father had faith Tyler's shot would return because he knew his son's work ethic.

Sure enough, Kolek is shooting 48.3% from the floor and 39.4% from three-point range, helping his scoring average improve from 6.7 last season to 13.3 this year.

## More than a few women's teams have international flair

Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. — When star guard Paige Bueckers went down with a season-ending knee injury last August, UConn went searching far and wide for a late addition to its roster.

The Huskies found one overseas in Inês Bettencourt, a point guard from Portugal's mid-Atlantic Azores Islands. An assistant coach had noticed her playing at the Division B U18 European Championships.

A couple of months later, the Huskies announced the signing of a player they hope will be their next dominant forward: Jana El Alfy, who is 6-foot-4 and from Egypt. She enrolled in January and joined the team, but will not play until next season.

The Big East champions are headed to the NCAA Tournament as a No. 2 seed with six international players on the roster after having just 10 others since Geno Auriemma

began coaching the team in 1985.

"There was very little video of them back then," Auriemma said. "Today, we have video and those kids have video of everything; they see everything. They watch every one of our games and we have a chance to see them during the summer more because there's more international competitions."

"It's not the answer to everything," he added. "But in certain situations it is, for us, the exact right way to go."

It's also a trend across women's college basketball.

The NCAA, citing numbers provided by FIBA, said there were 731 international women playing Division I college basketball in 2022, up nearly 350% from 212 in 2012.

Pac-12 Tournament champion Washington State, a No. 5 seed, has nine internation-

al players on its roster, including all five starters.

Johanna Teder, a senior guard from Estonia, said she thinks there is something in the makeup of players willing to go halfway around the world to pursue their dreams that has contributed to her team's success.

"It's a big decision," she said. "Us internationals, we're more experienced and like independent, if that makes sense. So, maturity plays a big role."

South Florida won the American Athletic Conference regular-season title and is a No. 8 seed in the NCAA tourney, with eight international players.

The NBA, which has been running its residential NBA Academy for male international players for years, began sponsoring camps for elite international girls in 2018 and has held camps in India, Mexico, Senegal and the United States.

# Thompson, Curry lead Warriors to win

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The Golden State Warriors were tired of losing to the division-rival Suns this season and set their mind on defending against Phoenix just as they did against the talented Bucks last game.

Klay Thompson scored 33 of his 38 points in the first half, Stephen Curry added 23 points, seven rebounds and five assists, and the Warriors beat the Suns 123-112 on Monday night.

“There’s always a little bit of extra motivation when you got smacked a couple times against a certain team, but it’s more so about our own focus,” Curry said.

Thompson made eight three-pointers and shot 14-for-23 overall.

“We knew how big a game it was and Klay knew how big it was and came out and set the tone,” coach Steve Kerr said.

Jordan Poole had 20 points and six assists off the bench for the defending champions. Kevon Looney helped the Warriors win their eighth straight home game and 12th of 13 with nine points, 10 rebounds and five assists. Golden State is 29-7 at home but 7-26 on the road.

Devin Booker scored 32 points and Deandre Ayton had 27 points and 12 rebounds for

the Suns, who roared back after halftime to make it interesting.

Josh Okogie’s three with 4:59 left in the third pulled Phoenix within 85-81 and his putback a minute later made it 87-84 before Curry and Co. came on again.

Things got heated in the closing minutes when JaMychal Green and ex-Warriors guard Damion Lee received a double technical with 1:12 left. Curry’s mom, Sonya, hopped out of her seat and became emotional, yelling and making sure son-in-law Lee was OK.

“That was like old-school AAU back in the day where parents get involved,” Curry said. “Family over everything at times.”

**Bucks 133, Kings 124:** Giannis Antetokounmpo had 46 points and 12 rebounds as visiting Milwaukee beat Sacramento.

Khris Middleton scored 31 points and Brook Lopez added 23 for the Bucks, who are on the verge of becoming the first team to clinch a playoff berth this season. They went in needing a win and a Miami loss, but the Heat beat Utah.

Domantas Sabonis had 23 points, 17 rebounds and 15 assists for his 10th triple-double of the season for Sacramento.

De’Aaron Fox scored 35 points to lead the Kings, and Kevin Huerter had 17 of his 28 in the fourth quarter.

**Grizzlies 104, Mavericks 88:** Desmond Bane scored 23 points and visiting Memphis won a second consecutive game against Dallas with all three of the teams’ All-Stars out.

Luka Doncic and Kyrie Irving sat for Dallas with injuries, and Ja Morant remained away from the Grizzlies because of his issues off the court.

Rookie David Roddy scored 19 points on 8-for-11 shooting for Memphis.

Rookie Jaden Hardy scored 28 points for the Mavericks, who dropped under .500 for the first time since December. Josh Green was the only other Dallas player in double figures with 23.

**Rockets 111, Celtics 109:** Jalen Green scored 28 points and rookie Jabari Smith Jr. added 24 as host Houston held off Boston.

The Rockets, who are tied with Detroit for the NBA’s fewest wins with 16, snapped a three-game skid despite allowing the Celtics’ Jaylen Brown to score a season-high 43 points.

Jayson Tatum scored 22 points but missed a potential tying layup at the buzzer for the Celtics.

**Heat 119, Jazz 115:** Jimmy Butler scored 24 points, Tyler Herro and Gabe Vincent each scored 18 and host Miami held off Utah.

Lauri Markkanen scored 38 points for Utah, which got 23 from Simone Fontecchio and 14 from Ochai Agbaji.

Talen Horton-Tucker put Utah on top with a short jumper with 1:16 left, and Herro gave Miami the lead right back on a three-pointer with 55.3 seconds remaining.

**Timberwolves 136, Hawks 115:** Anthony Edwards scored 32 points in his hometown, Kyle Anderson had his third career triple-double and visiting Minnesota beat Atlanta.

Trae Young finished with 41 points for the Hawks, who dropped to 3-5 under new coach Quin Snyder and have lost four of six. Atlanta went 4-for-22 beyond the arc.

**Pistons 117, Pacers 97:** James Wiseman had 18 points and 14 rebounds as host Detroit ended an 11-game skid by beating Indiana.

The Pistons, who hadn’t won since beating San Antonio 138-131 in double overtime on Feb. 10, led by 31 points in the first half and held off an Indiana surge late in the second quarter and early in the third.

## Garoppolo heads list of QBs on move in free agency

Associated Press

Jimmy Garoppolo is finally out of San Francisco, ready to start the next phase of his career wearing the Raiders’ silver and black. Sam Darnold is heading out West, where he’ll replace Garoppolo and join Trey Lance and Brock Purdy with the 49ers. Mike White, Case Keenum and Jarrett Stidham have new teams, too.

Deshaun Watson is staying in Cleveland, but with a restructured deal with the Browns.

As for Aaron Rodgers, who is not a free agent but whose name has widely been circulated in trade rumors, his future remains

unclear because, well, he’s Aaron Rodgers.

Quarterbacks took center stage on Monday as NFL free agency began with teams allowed to negotiate — and agree to deals — with unrestricted free agents. The deals can’t be announced until Wednesday and therefore were confirmed to The Associated Press by people speaking on condition of anonymity.

Garoppolo was the highest-profile QB to change teams.

He agreed to a three-year, \$67.5 million contract with Las Vegas, where he’ll replace Derek Carr, who signed with the New Orleans Saints earlier this offseason after

being cut by the Raiders. Garoppolo’s contract includes \$34 million in guaranteed money.

But the day wasn’t just about quarterbacks. Several other big-name players agreed to join new franchises.

The Broncos were among the big spenders on Monday, addressing their offensive line by agreeing on a five-year, \$87.5 million control with tackle Mike McGlinchey from the 49ers and a four-year, \$52 million deal with guard Ben Powers from the Baltimore Ravens. Denver later agreed with former Arizona Cardinals defensive end Zach Allen on a \$45.75 million, three-year deal.

# Tuch's 2 goals leads Sabres over Maple Leafs

Associated Press

TORONTO — Alex Tuch had two goals in his return from injury and the Buffalo Sabres rallied from two goals down to beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-3 on Monday night.

Jack Quinn and Dylan Cozens also scored for Buffalo, and Owen Power and JJ Peterka each had two assists for Buffalo. Craig Anderson had 25 saves as the Sabres won for just the second time in eight games (2-5-1).

“Stayed patient,” said Tuch, who missed eight games with a lower-body injury, but has six goals and three assists in his last six appearances dating back to Feb. 15. “We just stuck to it.”

Auston Matthews had a goal and two assists, and William Nylander and Calle Jarnkrok also

scored for Toronto. Mitch Marner had two assists and Matt Murray stopped 25 shots.

The Maple Leafs are all but assured of finishing second in the Atlantic Division, while the Sabres are trying to stay in contention for a wild card in the Eastern Conference.

“There’s enough to play for here, right?” Maple Leafs coach Sheldon Keefe said. “It’s still tight enough (in the standings) that if you let your foot off the gas, not only are you now losing home ice, but you’ve got other teams (chasing).”

After falling behind 2-0 early in the second period, the Sabres scored four consecutive goals over a 27-minute stretch.

“We’ve made defending a greater focal point,” Sabres

coach Don Granato said. “Our guys recognized tonight ways they could impact it more and more as the game went along.”

**Avalanche 8, Canadiens 4:** Artturi Lehkonen scored twice in his team’s four-goal first period to lead visiting Colorado to its third win in four games.

Valeri Nichushkin had a goal and two assists, Mikko Rantanen had a goal and an assist, and Nathan MacKinnon, J.T. Compher, Matt Nieto and Bowen Byram also scored for Colorado. Cale Makar had three assists, and Devon Toews and Logan O’Connor each had two. Alexandar Georgiev finished with 15 saves.

Josh Anderson had a goal and an assist, and Chris Wideman, Mike Matheson and Denis Gurianov also scored as the Canadiens

lost their seventh straight (0-5-2). Nick Suzuki had two assists.

**Stars 5, Kraken 2:** Jason Robertson scored his 39th goal of the season, the last of three power-play goals by visiting Dallas, and the Stars got their sixth win in seven games.

Jamie Benn had a goal and two assists and Miro Heiskanen had three assists as Dallas strengthened its lead atop the Central Division. The Stars moved three points in front of Minnesota with 15 games left in the regular season.

Evgenii Dadonov, Joe Pavelski and Wyatt Johnston also scored for Dallas, and the Stars swept both games as the teams played twice in three days in Seattle. Jake Oettinger made 26 saves for Dallas.

# US routs Canada; pitchers are perfect for Puerto Rico

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Mike Trout hit a three-run homer, Lance Lynn threw five impressive innings and the United States used a nine-run first to cruise past Canada 12-1 on Monday night in the World Baseball Classic.

The game was called after seven innings because of the tournament’s 10-run mercy rule.

The U.S. improved to 2-1 and bounced back from an 11-5 loss to Mexico on Sunday with its best offensive performance of the tournament. Canada fell to 1-1 before a crowd of 29,621 at Chase Field.

The Americans sent 12 batters to the plate in the first inning. Nolan Arenado had a two-run double to start the scoring and Trout finished it by belting a low fastball into the left-center seats.

Lynn got the win, giving up one run and two hits while saving the bullpen for the team’s final game of pool play against Colombia on Wednesday. United States manager Mark DeRosa had to use eight pitchers on Sunday in the loss to Mexico.

Canada scored its lone run on Jared Young’s homer. Left-hander Mitch Bratt took the loss, giving up six earned runs while getting only one out.

**Puerto Rico 10, Israel 0 (8 innings):** Puerto Rico bounced back from a 9-6 loss to Venezuela the previous day with a dominant

display in Miami, as four Puerto Rico pitchers combined to not allow a baserunner in 8 innings.

José De León tied a WBC record with 10 strikeouts in 5 2/3 innings, earning the win. The right-hander was lifted after he fanned Spencer Horwitz on his 64th pitch, one under the tournament limit for starting pitchers in the first round. He exited to a huge ovation from the prohibitive Puerto Rico crowd of 27,813.

Yacksel Ríos relieved De León and struck out his only batter to end the sixth. With his team up 9-0 in the seventh, manager Yadier Molina turned to Edwin Díaz, the New York Mets’ star closer, and he fanned one hitter in a 1-2-3 inning. Duane Underwood Jr. retired Israel in order on 10 pitches in the eighth.

Javier Báez doubled twice and Francisco Lindor tripled and singled for Puerto Rico, which finished with 11 hits and improved to 2-1. Lindor’s two-run triple keyed a three-run fifth, and Kiké Hernández’s run-scoring single in the eighth ended the game.

Despite the perfection, it will not count as a perfect game in official WBC records because the game didn’t go a full nine innings. That’s the standard established by the Elias Sports Bureau, the official statistician for Major League Baseball.

**Dominican Republic 6, Nicaragua 1:** San Diego Padres stars Juan Soto and Manny

Machado homered in Miami, and the Dominican Republic picked up its first win of WBC pool play.

Rafael Devers hit a two-out RBI double in the first against Nicaragua starter JC Ramirez, driving in Soto for a 1-0 lead. Eloy Jimenez’s single in the second scored Soto again and gave the Dominicans a 2-0 lead.

Winning pitcher Cristian Javier allowed only two hits and struck out four in four innings.

The Dominican Republic (1-1) doubled its lead in the fourth when Francisco Mejia singled off Fidencio Flores to score Willy Adames, then Julio Rodriguez singled to drive in Jeimer Candelario.

Soto blasted a shot to right field off Junior Tellez to make it 5-0 in the fifth, and Machado tagged Tellez in the next inning with a drive to right-center.

**Britain 7, Colombia 5:** Jaden Rudd hit a go-ahead, two-run double in the fifth inning, Harry Ford added a solo homer and Britain won a WBC game for the first time.

Graham Spraker got the win by pitching 2 2/3 innings of scoreless relief in Phoenix, and Ian Gibaut earned the save. Colombia’s Yapsan Gomez — who gave up Rudd’s double in the fifth — took the loss.

Dayan Frias had two hits and two RBIs for Colombia, which fell to 1-1 in the tournament. Britain improved to 1-2.