

## 9 killed as Army helos crash in Kentucky

By **DOUG G. WARE**  
*Stars and Stripes*

Nine Army soldiers were killed when two Black Hawk helicopters crashed late Wednesday during a nighttime training operation in southern Kentucky, military authorities said.

The crash occurred at about 10 p.m. in Cadiz, Ky., not far from Fort Campbell, where the helicopters were based. The HH60 Black Hawks went down during a nighttime medical training mission, a service spokesman said.

There were no survivors.

Fort Campbell is located about 50 miles northwest of downtown Nashville on the Kentucky-Tennessee border, and Cadiz is 25 miles northwest of the base in southwestern Kentucky. The helicopters belonged to the Army's 101st Airborne Division, which is headquartered at the base.

Officials at the base said it is typical to have nine people aboard two choppers for such a training mission. Five were aboard one of the helicopters and four were on the other when the crash occurred.

"I would like to express our deepest sympathies to the families of our fallen sol-

diers," Army Brig. Gen. John Lubas, deputy commander of the 101st Airborne Division, said Thursday during a news conference. "This is a truly tragic loss."

Lubas said an investigation into the crash is underway and declined to say what might have caused the helicopters to crash.

The deputy commander did say the medical evacuation helicopters were flying in a multi-ship formation with night-vision goggles when the crash occurred. He also said the helicopters went down in an open field not far from civilian homes, but no civilians were hurt.

"Last night, we lost nine service members in an accident during a routine training mission in Kentucky," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a statement. "My heart goes out to the families of these service members and to the members of the 101st Airborne Division who bravely and proudly serve our country each and every day.

"I'm saddened by this tragic loss, and I am working with Army leadership to make sure our troops and their families receive the care that they need in the wake of this accident."

"Today is a tough and tragic day for Ken-

tucky, Fort Campbell and for the 101st," Gov. Andy Beshear said Thursday at the base. "We are going to wrap our arms around these families [of the victims]. We are going to be there with them — not just for the days, but for the weeks and the months and the years to come."

Beshear said he spoke to Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, and Lee expressed similar condolences for the families of the victims.

"There are no state lines when it comes to taking care of these families," Beshear added.

The crash Wednesday was the second one involving a Black Hawk helicopter in a little more than a month. On Feb. 15, two veteran Tennessee Army National Guard pilots were killed when the UH-60 Black Hawk they were flying crashed during a training flight near Huntsville, Ala.

The two pilots, who were assigned to a helicopter battalion at Berry Field Air National Guard Base in Nashville, had collective experience of almost 30 years in the Army. That crash is still under investigation.

The Black Hawk has been in service with the Army since 1979 and is one of the service's most popular helicopters.

## Milley warns Congress over US munitions stockpile

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military "has a long ways to go" to beef up its munitions stockpiles and ensure the country is ready for any large-scale war, the top U.S. military officer told Congress on Wednesday.

Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the war in Ukraine has underscored the heavy use of munitions that is required during any major conflict.

He and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin faced repeated questioning from members of Congress this week about the impact the war is having on the Pentagon, as it supplies Ukraine with much of the ammunition it needs to fend off the Russian forces.

They, and senior Army leaders, said the conflict has pushed the U.S. to increase production rates and re-evaluate how much of a stockpile is really needed as tensions with China and Russia continue to rise.

"If there was a war on the Korean Peninsula or great power war between the United States and Russia or the United States and China, the consumption rates would be off the charts," Milley said in testimony to the House Armed Services Committee on Wednesday. "So I'm concerned. I know the secretary is ... we've got a ways to go to make sure our stockpiles are prepared for the real contingencies."

He said Austin directed the military to conduct a complete review of all its war plans and assess the munitions estimates, which can then form the basis for future budget requests.

The Pentagon is requesting \$30 billion in the 2024 fiscal year budget to invest in the industrial base and to "buy the maximum number of munitions that American industry can produce," Austin said during the same hearing.

In testimony earlier this week, Army Secretary Christine Wormuth told lawmakers that right now the Army is "comfortable that the amount of lethal assistance we've been providing is not eroding our readiness, but we keep a close eye on that."

A key concern is the 155 mm ammunition. The U.S. has sent Ukraine 160 howitzers and more than 1 million of the 155 mm howitzer rounds. The munitions have been put to heavy use with as many as 3,000 rounds fired a day, according to the Pentagon.

Wormuth, who visited the Scranton Army Ammunition Plant in Pennsylvania where the shell casings for the rounds are made, said the service asked for \$1.5 billion in the budget to be able to shore up that production. She said the U.S. would like to increase production from about 20,000 shells a month to 75,000 a month by 2025.

# DOD rejects claim of soldier who inspired law

By ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Master Sgt. Richard Stayskal, the soldier whose story moved Congress to change a more than 70-year-old law to allow service members to file medical malpractice claims against the Defense Department, had his own claim denied this month, he said Wednesday during a news conference in Washington.

“The denial of my claim by the Department of Defense, in my opinion, is a blatant act of betrayal. Not only to myself, but every service member out there,” Stayskal said. “I stand here today on behalf of an entire generation and on behalf of future generations to ensure what happened to me will never happen again and give every breath I have for them.”

The denial of Stayskal’s claim has angered some lawmakers,

and three of them vowed Wednesday to pass more legislation to force the Pentagon to create a system with better oversight. Of 155 claims to which the Army has responded since the law took effect in 2019, 144 have been denied, said Rep. Richard Hudson, R-N.C.

“What happened to Rich Stayskal with this misdiagnosis, the malpractice, it’s just unforgivable. It’s a tragedy,” said Hudson, who counts Stayskal as one of his constituents. “Let me just say this to DOD: You need to fix this. If you don’t fix this, Congress is going to fix it.”

Stayskal, a 41-year-old Green Beret now assigned to Fort Bragg, N.C., was diagnosed in 2017 with terminal lung cancer that grew for months as military doctors mistook his symptoms for pneumonia. It’s since spread to his neck, lymph nodes, spleen,

liver, spine, a hip joint and other areas of his body.

Since then, Stayskal and his attorney, Natalie Khawam, have fought to change a policy known as the Feres Doctrine. Based on a 1950 Supreme Court decision, the doctrine bars service members from suing the Defense Department for injuries suffered while in the military.

The Sgt. 1st Class Richard Stayskal Act did not overturn the Feres Doctrine, but it carved out space for troops to sue under the Federal Tort Claims Act. The Pentagon announced guidelines for the claims in June 2021.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated the claims will cost the federal government roughly \$500 million. The Army has 47 claims pending a decision, according to Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Hewitt, a service spokesman.

Hudson, alongside Sen. Mark-

wayne Mullin, R-Okla., and Rep. Mike Waltz, R-Fla., said they have the support of the leaders of the House and Senate armed services committees for both parties and plan to include a provision about the claims process in the fiscal 2024 National Defense Authorization Act, an annual bill that outlines defense priorities and spending. The claims process is not working in the way that Congress intended, they said.

Mullin, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, offered two options for better oversight on the claims process. All denied claims could be required to go through a third party for review, or the military services could review each other’s claims instead of their own.

“The fox is guarding the henhouse, and changes have to be made,” Mullin said.

## Russia arrests American reporter on spying charge

*Associated Press*

Russia’s security service arrested an American reporter for The Wall Street Journal on espionage charges, the first time a U.S. correspondent has been detained on spying accusations since the Cold War. The newspaper denied the allegations and demanded his release.

Evan Gershkovich was detained in Yekaterinburg while allegedly trying to obtain classified information, the Federal Security Service, known by the acronym FSB, said Thursday. The service, which is the top domestic security agency and main successor to the Soviet-era KGB, alleged that Gershkovich “was acting on instructions from the American side to collect information about the activities of one of the enterprises of the Russian military-in-

dustrial complex that constitutes a state secret.”

“The Wall Street Journal vehemently denies the allegations from the FSB and seeks the immediate release of our trusted and dedicated reporter, Evan Gershkovich,” the newspaper said.

Earlier this week, a Russian court convicted a father over social media posts critical of its war in Ukraine and sentenced him to two years in prison; his daughter, 13, was sent to an orphanage.

Gershkovich is the first American reporter to be arrested on espionage charges in Russia since September 1986, when Nicholas Daniloff, a Moscow correspondent for U.S. News and World Report, was arrested by the KGB. Daniloff was released without charge 20 days later.

## Russia reverses, says it will continue missile test notices

*Associated Press*

MOSCOW — Russia will continue to give the U.S. advance notice about its missile tests despite suspending the last remaining nuclear arms treaty between the two countries, a top Russian diplomat said Thursday.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov’s statement reversed one he made Wednesday, when he said Moscow had halted all information exchanges with Washington envisioned under the 2011 New START nuclear pact, including missile test warnings.

But Russia intends to stick by its pledge last month to keep notifying the U.S. about missile tests in line with a 1988 U.S.-Soviet agreement, Ryabkov said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin suspended the country’s

participation in the New START treaty last month, saying Russia could not allow U.S. inspections of its nuclear sites at a time when Washington and its NATO allies have openly declared Moscow’s defeat in Ukraine as their goal.

Moscow emphasized at the time that it wasn’t withdrawing from the pact altogether and would continue to respect the caps on nuclear weapons the treaty set.

Earlier this week, the U.S. announced that Moscow and Washington have stopped sharing biannual nuclear weapons data as envisioned by New START. U.S. officials said Washington had offered to continue providing the information after Putin suspended Russia’s participation, but Moscow told Washington it would not share its own data.

# Taiwan leader talks island safety

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Taiwan's president addressed members of New York's Taiwanese community in a U.S. stopover on her way to Central America, seeking to rally allies of the self-ruled island in the U.S. and elsewhere amid tensions with China.

Pro-China demonstrators waving the Chinese flag rallied against President Tsai Ing-wen in New York. One protester held a sign whose slogan declared the Taiwanese leader a "big traitor of China."

In a speech Wednesday night to fellow Taiwanese in New York, Tsai thanked the United States for its security assistance and urged Taiwanese unity. "The safer Taiwan is, the safer the world will be," she said, and she pledged Taiwan would work with its democratic partners to remain on the path of democracy.

Tsai arrived in New York on Wednesday and was expected to spend Thursday in

closed events in the city. While Taiwan is carefully calibrating Tsai's stops in the United States and forgoing official meetings with senior U.S. leaders in Washington in an effort to limit the scale of China's response, China is focusing on an expected meeting next week between Tsai and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy. It would be one of the highest-level in-person sessions for a Taiwanese leader on what that government calls "transits" through the United States.

On Thursday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning restated China's furious objections to any interactions between Tsai and U.S. officials.

"China firmly opposes any form of official interaction between the U.S. and Taiwan," Mao told reporters at a daily briefing in Beijing. "China will continue to closely follow the situation and resolutely safeguard our sovereignty and territorial integrity."

A senior Chinese diplomat in Washing-

ton, embassy charge d'affaires Xu Xueyuan, pointed to the anticipated meeting between Tsai and the U.S. House speaker as one that would have significant repercussions overall and a "serious, serious, serious" impact on U.S.-China relations.

Neither Taiwan nor McCarthy, R-Calif., has publicly confirmed any in-person get-together during Tsai's travel. Analysts have framed a session between the two outside Washington as possibly less provocative than a trip by McCarthy to Taiwan, which he has said he also intends to do.

Beijing responded to a visit by then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., last August by launching missiles, deploying warships across the median line of the Taiwan Strait and simulating a blockade of the island. China also temporarily suspended dialogue with the U.S. on climate and other major issues and restricted military-to-military communication with the Pentagon.

## Economic growth revised down to 2.6% rate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. economy maintained its resilience from October through December despite rising interest rates, growing at a 2.6% annual pace, the government said Thursday in a slight downgrade from its previous estimate. But consumer spending, which drives most of the economy's growth, was revised sharply down.

The government had previously estimated that the economy expanded at a 2.7% annual rate last quarter.

The rise in the gross domestic product —

the economy's total output of goods and services — for the October-December quarter was down from the 3.2% growth rate from July through September.

For all of 2022, the U.S. economy expanded 2.1%, down significantly from a robust 5.9% in 2021.

The report suggested that the economy was losing momentum at the end of 2022.

Consumer spending rose at a 1% annual rate last quarter, downgraded from a 1.4% increase in the government's previous estimate. It was the weakest quarterly gain in consumer spending since COVID-19

slammed the economy in the spring of 2020. Spending on physical goods, like appliances and furniture, which had initially surged as the economy rebounded from the pandemic recession, fell for a fourth straight quarter.

More than half of last quarter's growth came from businesses restocking their inventories, not an indication of underlying economic strength.

Most economists say they think growth is slowing sharply in the current January-March quarter, in part because the Federal Reserve has steadily raised interest rates in its drive to curb inflation.

## More people file for jobless claims; levels still low

Associated Press

U.S. applications for jobless benefits rose last week but remain at historically low levels despite efforts by the Federal Reserve to cool the economy and the job market in its fight against inflation.

Jobless claims in the U.S. for the week ending March 25 rose by 7,000 to 198,000 from the previous week, the Labor Department said Thursday.

The four-week moving average of claims, which evens out some of the week-to-week fluctuations, rose by 2,000 to 198,250, re-

maining below the 200,000 threshold for the 10th straight week. Applications for unemployment benefits are broadly seen as reflective of the number of layoffs in the U.S.

Last week, the Federal Reserve extended its yearlong fight against high inflation by raising its key interest rate by a quarter-point, despite concerns that higher borrowing rates could worsen the turmoil that has gripped the banking system. Fed Chair Jerome Powell stressed that the central bank remains focused on fighting high inflation, which could require additional rate hikes.

But Powell also signaled that the Fed might not need to impose a lengthy string of increases if more banks were to reduce their lending to conserve cash. This could slow the economy, hiring and inflation, Powell said, which could aid the central bank in its push to cool the economy, labor market and wages, thereby suppressing prices. So far, those things have not happened to the degree that the central bank had hoped.

Inflation remains more than double the Fed's 2% target, and the economy is growing and adding jobs at a healthy clip.



# Ky. Republicans override veto of transgender bill

Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky. — Republican lawmakers in Kentucky on Wednesday swept aside the Democratic governor's veto of a bill regulating some of the most personal aspects of life for transgender young people — from banning access to gender-affirming health care to restricting the bathrooms they can use.

The votes to override Gov. Andy Beshear's veto were lopsided in both legislative chambers — where the GOP wields supermajorities — and came on the next-to-last day of this year's legislative session. The Senate voted 29-8 to override Beshear's veto. A short time later, the House completed the override on a vote of 76-23.

As emotions surged, some people protesting the bill from the House gallery were removed and arrested after their prolonged chanting rang out in the chamber. The protesters, their hands bound, chanted "there's more of us not here" as they waited to be taken away from the Capitol.

Nineteen people were arrested and charged with third-degree criminal trespassing after the sergeant of arms requested assistance in restoring order, Kentucky State Police said. Officers gave each person

"the option to leave without any enforcement action or be placed under arrest," said Capt. Paul Blanton, a state police spokesperson.

"I think it's unfortunate that it reached that level and certainly they were given, as I've been told since then, multiple opportunities to either quiet their chants or to leave voluntarily," Republican House Speaker David Osborne said later.

The bill's opponents framed the issue as a civil-rights fight. Democratic Rep. Sarah Stalker said: "Kentucky will be on the wrong side of history" by enacting the measure.

The debate about the transgender bill will likely spill over into this year's gubernatorial campaign, with Beshear's veto drawing GOP condemnation as he seeks reelection to a second term. A legal fight also is brewing. The American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky reaffirmed that it intends to "take this fight to the courts" to try to preserve access to health care options for young transgender people.

"While we lost the battle in the legislature, our defeat is temporary. We will not lose in court," said Chris Hartman, executive director of the Fairness Campaign, an LGBTQ+ advocacy organization.

# Australia startup unveils meatball cultivated using mammoth cells

Associated Press

AMSTERDAM — Throw another mammoth on the barbie?

An Australian company on Tuesday lifted the glass cloche on a meatball made of lab-grown cultured meat using the genetic sequence from the long-extinct pachyderm, saying it was meant to fire up public debate about the high-tech treat.

The launch in an Amsterdam science museum came just days before April 1 so there was an elephant in the room: Is this for real?

"This is not an April Fools joke," said Tim Noakesmith, founder of Australian startup Vow. "This is a real innovation."

Cultivated meat — also called cultured or cell-based meat — is made from animal cells. Livestock doesn't need to be killed to produce it, which advocates say is better not just for the

animals but also for the environment.

Vow used publicly available genetic information from the mammoth, filled missing parts with genetic data from its closest living relative, the African elephant, and inserted it into a sheep cell, Noakesmith said. Given the right conditions in a lab, the cells multiplied until there were enough to roll up into the meatball.

The mammoth meatball is a one-off and has not been tasted, even by its creators, nor is it planned to be put into commercial production. Instead, it was presented as a source of protein that would get people talking about the future of meat.

"We wanted to get people excited about the future of food being different to potentially what we had before," Noakesmith told The Associated Press.

# Twitter removes tweets on 'trans day of vengeance'

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Twitter says it removed thousands of tweets showing a poster promoting a "trans day of vengeance" protest in support of transgender rights in Washington, D.C., on Saturday.

Ella Irwin, Twitter's head of Trust and Safety, said in a tweet Wednesday that the company automatically removed more than 5,000 tweets and retweets of a poster promoting the event.

"We do not support tweets that incite violence irrespective of who posts them. 'Vengeance' does not imply peaceful protest. Organizing or support for peaceful protests is ok," Irwin wrote in the tweet.

In removing the tweets, Twitter said it used automated processes to do it quickly at a large scale, without considering what context the tweets were shared in. Because of this, both tweets that were critical of and those that supported the protests were removed.

This appeared to anger many conservative Twitter users who said the rules were unfairly applied to them because they were posting the image of the protest flyer to speak out against it.

But trans activists were quick to point out that "trans day of vengeance" is a meme that has been around in the trans community for years and is not a call to violence — and said Twitter is misguided in its reasoning behind removing the tweets in support of the protest.

Evan Greer, director of the nonprofit liberal advocacy group Fight for the Future, said Twitter's actions are "the latest example of Big Tech companies employing double standards in content moderation."

"They are slow to moderate content targeting trans people, but quick to silence us when we speak out or push back. 'Trans Day of Vengeance' is not a specific day or a call for violence. It's a meme that's been around for years, a way of expressing anger and frustration about oppression and violence the trans community faces daily," Greer said. "Context is everything in content moderation, which is why content policies should be based in human rights and applied evenly, not changed rapidly based on public pressure or news cycles."

The poster in question is a largely text-based digital flyer. It reads "we want more than visibility" on top, followed by "trans day of vengeance" and "stop trans genocide" as well as the date and time of the planned protest.

**AMERICAN ROUNDUP**

**Court dismisses latest Pamela Smart petition**

**NH** CONCORD — New Hampshire’s highest court on Wednesday turned away the latest attempt to get a sentence reduction for Pamela Smart, who is serving life in prison for plotting with her teenage lover to have her husband killed in 1990.

Smart, 55, was 22 and working as a high school media coordinator when she began an affair with a 15-year-old student who later shot and killed her husband, Gregory Smart. Though she denied knowledge of the plot, she was convicted of conspiracy to commit murder and other crimes and sentenced to life without parole.

The state Supreme Court dismissed the petition for lack of jurisdiction on Wednesday, saying that ordering the Executive Council to reconsider what it deemed a “political” question would violate the separation of powers.

Joyce Maynard wrote “To Die For” in 1992, drawing from the Smart case. That inspired a 1995 film of the same name. The killer, William Flynn, and three other teens cooperated with prosecutors, served shorter sentences and have been released.

**Driver jumps out of stolen police cruiser, dies**

**CA** LANCASTER — A driver who stole a California Highway Patrol cruiser died Tuesday after he jumped out of the car during a high-speed chase down a desert highway.

The man was pronounced dead at a hospital, the CHP said. His name wasn’t immediately

released.

Officer Alec Pereyda said the CHP began receiving calls at around 11:45 a.m. of a reckless driver on Interstate 5 near Castaic, KNBC-TV reported. The driver struck another car and when CHP showed up to investigate, the man jumped into the patrol car and took off, Pereyda said.

The car was clocked at about 50 mph on State Route 138 near Lancaster in the high desert north of Los Angeles when the driver jumped after a spike strip punctured the rear tires, the CHP said.

**Ruling OKs some pot dispensary licenses**

**NY** NEW YORK — New York officials will be able to issue licenses for recreational marijuana dispensaries in some parts of the state after an appeals court narrowed the scope of a temporary injunction that had halted them because of a legal challenge.

The ruling on Tuesday from the U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals allows the state to hand out licenses in Brooklyn, central New York, the mid-Hudson region and western New York, while upholding the block on them in the Finger Lakes region while a lawsuit continues. A federal judge in Albany, N.Y., in November issued a temporary injunction against the licenses being handed out in those areas, after a lawsuit filed by Variscite NY One. The company is challenging how New York is issuing its licenses.

In designing the New York market, legislators intentionally looked for the first round of licenses to go to those who had pot convictions in their pasts or

their relatives, in an attempt to make sure those directly impacted by drug law enforcement had access to the new opportunities. Variscite’s lawsuit says that is a violation of constitutional interstate commerce protections.

**Board removes election officials over certification**

**NC** RALEIGH — North Carolina’s state elections board on Tuesday removed two local election officials who had refused to certify their county’s 2022 results after officials determined they violated state law.

The state board voted unanimously to dismiss Surry County elections secretary Jerry Forestieri and board member Timothy DeHaan in one of the strongest disciplinary actions taken against local officials across the U.S. who have delayed or refused to certify election results.

Forestieri and DeHaan had questioned the legitimacy of state election law and court decisions disallowing photo ID checks and voter residency challenges. They falsely claimed in a letter that the vote was “illegal” and “very uncertain.”

The two circulated the letter during a canvas meeting last fall when county election officials convened to certify the accuracy of the vote count. DeHaan ultimately signed on to certify, while Forestieri did not.

**State moving to raise age for buying tobacco to 21**

**KS** TOPEKA — Kansas is moving to increase its legal age for buying cigarettes, electronic cigarettes and other tobacco products to 21

from 18 after the federal government and most other states already have done it.

The state Senate approved a bill to raise the age Tuesday on a 28-11 vote, sending it Gov. Laura Kelly. The House had approved it earlier this month on a 68-53 vote.

The federal government raised its age to 21 in 2019 and told states they’d have to enforce the higher age to receive federal funds for substance abuse programs.

**Driver who hit Apple store charged with murder**

**MA** HINGHAM — A Massachusetts man whose SUV crashed through the glass storefront of an Apple store, killing one man and injuring nearly two dozen other people, has been charged with murder, prosecutors said.

Bradley Rein, 53, was indicted by a grand jury on Tuesday on charges of second-degree murder, motor vehicle homicide by reckless operation and 22 counts of assault and battery in connection with the Nov. 21 crash at a Hingham shopping plaza, Plymouth District Attorney Timothy Cruz’s office said in a statement.

Rein’s 2019 Toyota 4Runner crashed through the store, killing Kevin Bradley, 65, of New Jersey, who was doing construction at the site, and injuring 22 others.

Rein told police he was looking for an eyeglasses store at the shopping center when his right foot became stuck on the accelerator, according to court documents. He said he used his left foot to try to brake but couldn’t stop.

— From wire reports



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# FAU's big run fueled by selflessness

*Associated Press*

After being knocked out of the NCAA Tournament by a Florida Atlantic team that has defied expectation and description all season, Kansas State coach Jerome Tang described the secret to the Owls' success under coach Dusty May.

"Well, when you draw up plays with X's and O's, on some teams, all the O's don't have to be guarded so you can put your X's in the right spot to make it hard for the team to score on offense," Tang said. "Every one of his O's can score the ball, and that's what makes it hard to guard. It doesn't matter if they can score 30; they can all shoot, they can all dribble, they can all pass, and that puts your defense in a bind."

The Owls (35-3) from Boca Raton, Fla., are heading to the Final Four for the first time in school history with Division I's winningest team, a collection of interchangeable pieces that has been greater than the sum of the parts.

"Extremely rewarding to see

a group give as much as these guys have all season — shots, playing time, minutes, everything you could imagine, grit, everything 100% every day in practice — and then be rewarded because there's never a guarantee," May said Saturday night. "In this era where everyone wants the whole pie, these guys continued sharing the pie every single day, and this was the result."

FAU, the lowest-seeded team left in the field, will face San Diego State (31-6) in Houston on Saturday.

To win four tournament games so far, each by single digits, has taken contributions from up and down the roster.

The Owls have had three different leading scorers (Giancarlo Rosado vs. Memphis, Johnell Davis vs. FDU and Tennessee and Alijah Martin vs. Kansas State), three different leading rebounders (Vladislav Goldin, Davis and Nick Boyd) and three different leaders in assists (Boyd, Davis and Brandon Weatherspoon).

Seven different players have

registered at least one double-digit scoring performance, but only one of more than 17 points.

Davis is the closest thing the Owls have to a star, and he was coming off the bench for much of this season. The Conference USA Sixth Player of the Year has been a starter throughout the NCAA Tournament.

FAU's Elite Eight victory at Madison Square Garden against Kansas State epitomized the Owls' ethos.

The Wildcats had the player of the game in Markquis Nowell. The dynamic 5-foot-8 point guard from Harlem has been arguably the best player of the entire tournament through two weekends.

In two East Regional games at The Garden against Michigan State and FAU, Nowell had 50 points and 31 assists. According to ESPN Stats and Info, he became just the second player in NCAA Tournament history to have consecutive 20-10 games.

FAU was able to rotate several defenders on Nowell, who

played all 40 minutes in the 79-76 loss to the Owls.

"We game planned for him, and he still put up numbers," FAU's Bryan Greenlee said. "But we just know it's a team effort, and it's going to take the whole unit to really win this game, and it's not just one guy who can shut somebody down. It's just a group effort."

On the final possession of the game, Kansas State had no timeouts and 6.9 seconds left.

Boyd appeared to be the primary defender on Nowell, who started his dribble near the left sideline and worked his way to the middle of the floor as he crossed midcourt.

When Boyd was screened, Davis immediately switched to Nowell, with Martin lurking to the point guard's right side.

Sensing a double-team with 2.2 seconds left and still more than 30 feet from the basket, Nowell made a short pass to his right to Ismael Massoud, near the sideline. Davis and Martin quickly converged and Davis swiped the ball away from Massoud.

## Connecticut coach Hurley dismisses talk of 'favorites'

*Hartford Courant*

STORRS, Conn. — The UConn men's basketball team entered this year's NCAA Tournament feeling the pressure to just advance past the first round, having not done it in nine years.

After cruising past that preliminary goal, the team proceeded with a loose confidence and swagger that allowed it to dominate its way into the Final Four.

Now the Huskies are heavy favorites (-125) to win the whole thing.

"I don't think there's pressure around that. I think there was definitely more pressure around the first round," redshirt freshman Alex Karaban said

Tuesday. "But right now, I don't think so, I think we've blocked out the noise and I wouldn't consider us heavy favorites. I think the other three teams in this tournament are just as heavy favorites as we are, so we're going in there as like a clean, even slate."

UConn, as a No. 4, is the highest-seeded team remaining. Miami and San Diego State are both fives that have had to beat top-seeded teams along the way, and Florida Atlantic is a No. 9 that has had plenty of exciting results — the Owls (35-3) also have the most wins in the country.

But the Huskies have beaten every one of their opponents by

15 points or more and have been able to step back and take it all in during the final moments rather than sweat through the madness that March presents.

At the same time, head coach Dan Hurley and his team know they're not invincible.

"The struggles during the Big East play I think is a great reminder and something that we can reflect on, that if we get away from our identity — hardest-playing team on the court, play defense at an elite level, move the ball offensively and win the rebounding — if we get away from that, we're as vulnerable as anyone else," Hurley said, referring to the Huskies' stretch of six losses in eight

games in the middle of the season.

"We've already experienced it. And again, we were not a ranked team in the preseason. That was something that we utilized a lot early on. I guess it's harder now because we've had a great season to this point. But we didn't set out for the season, setting a goal of going to the Final Four — it's an incredible accomplishment, but we want to play for a national championship on Monday."

UConn has matched up with Miami 25 times in the program's history and won 17. The last time the two programs played was in the 2019 Charleston Classic and UConn won, 80-55.



# Iowa's Clark named AP Player of Year

Associated Press

DALLAS — Caitlin Clark has put together one of the greatest individual seasons in NCAA history with eye-popping offensive numbers.

Iowa's junior guard, though, saved her best performance for the game's biggest stage, recording the first 40-point triple-double in NCAA history to get Iowa to the Final Four for the first time in 30 years.

Clark was honored Thursday as The Associated Press women's basketball Player of the Year. She received 20 votes from the 28-member national media panel that votes on the AP Top 25 each week. Voting was done before March Madness began.

"It's a huge honor," Clark said. "I picked a place that I perfectly fit into and that's allowed me to show my skill set. I'd be ly-

ing if I said it didn't mean something. It's not the reason you play basketball, it's just something that comes along with getting to do what you love."

The Iowa coaching staff surprised Clark by sharing that she won the award while they were visiting the Iowa Children's Hospital — a place near and dear to her. It also has huge ties to the Hawkeyes athletic department.

They put together a video of some of the children in the hospital congratulating Clark on an outstanding season, and in the middle of it, Iowa coach Lisa Bluder popped on the screen to tell her she won.

"I'm there for inspiring the next generation and being there for the people that you know are going through a hard time," said Clark, who grew up in Iowa. "Being able to give joy to people

that watch you play and watch your team play is amazing."

She averaged 27.0 points, 8.3 assists and 7.5 rebounds during the season to help Iowa go 26-6. Clark has 984 points, the sixth-most in a season by any player in Division I women's history. She also has over 300 assists.

"She is spectacular. I don't know how else to describe what she does on the basketball court," Bluder said.

Next up for the Hawkeyes is undefeated South Carolina in the national semifinals. The Gamecocks are led by Aliyah Boston, last season's winner of the award. She garnered the other eight votes this season.

"There's so many great players, more than just me and (Aliyah)," Clark told the AP. "You can go on and on and list the tremendous players. I think that's really good for our game

when there's a lot of great players. That's what is going to help this game grow more than anything else."

Whether it's hitting deep threes from the Hawkeye logo at home games, hitting off-balance game-winning shots or throwing pinpoint passes to teammates for easy baskets, Clark has excelled on the court this year to get Iowa to a place it hasn't been in a long time.

"It's funny, because the better the opponent, almost the better she plays," Bluder said. "It's like she locks in on those, when we're playing against Top 25 teams. That's when her statistics even go up even more, against great opponents."

Clark is the second Iowa player to win the AP award in the past few seasons, joining Megan Gustafson who won it in 2019.

## NASCAR driver Wallace working on his confidence

Associated Press

A slow start to the NASCAR Cup Series season — two crashes and an engine failure through six races — has Bubba Wallace looking internally for the steadiness he needs to pull himself out of this early slump.

It was his mother who encouraged Wallace to do some self-reflection.

"It's day by day, right? Just got to be a better version of myself," Wallace told The Associated Press this week. "My mom had said to me, 'You know, if you want things to change, you got to change yourself.' So I'm just trying to change myself and be more active, working out, eating better and just trying to have a better mindset so Richmond should be good for us."

Yes, Wallace and NASCAR head next to Richmond Raceway for a Sunday short track race at a venue that has not

been one of Wallace's stronger tracks. His career-best finish at Richmond was 12th in 2019 when he drove for Richard Petty. He was 13th last fall in his new 23XI Racing ride.

But this weekend represents more to Wallace than a chance to show how far 23XI has come since its 2021 launch. The two-car team celebrated its first win of the season last week with Tyler Reddick at Circuit of the Americas and qualified three cars for the season-opening Daytona 500.

Wallace will use Richmond, a rare NASCAR stop at a facility located in a fairly urban area, for his second annual "Bubba's Block Party." The free Friday night event is a community-focused NASCAR initiative aimed at bringing awareness, access and engagement to the sport within the Black community.

The food truck village will

feature Black-owned businesses, and there will be live entertainment including iRacing, video games and a live pit stop demonstration by Wallace's Toyota crew. Wallace will host a "fireside chat" to discuss both his career and his attention on promoting diversity and inclusion across the sport.

Wallace, who is from Alabama, in 2020 successfully called on NASCAR to ban the Confederate flag at its events. He is the only full-time Black driver at NASCAR's top level.

"Richmond is in the heart of a minority market, a diverse market, and I feel like a lot of those people don't show up at the racetrack," Wallace said. "I wanted to provide an environment that's a Friday night coo-kout-type style vibes at a race-track, and get them out and encourage them to come out and cheer on their favorite driver — don't even have to be me."

"I think just getting them to feel welcome to walk in their own shoe, be comfortable in their own skin and have a great time just like they could go to NBA games, an NFL game, I think that's important. We have to make our markets feel just as welcoming as others."

After the party, it's back to focusing on racing, where Wallace is coming off back-to-back disappointments.

He spun without contact from anyone else two weeks ago at Atlanta on the 10th lap, hit the wall and finished 27th. At CO-TA, he showed early speed but was involved in an early crash and a 37th-place finish. Wallace seemed defeated in his post-incident interview.

"Trying my hardest not to go down that slippery slope of self-doubt here. Two weeks in a row making rookie mistakes. Six years in Cup, need to be replaced," he said.

# Cavs finish return to playoffs without LeBron

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Five years felt like 50.

When the Cleveland Cavaliers beat Houston 108-91 on Sunday night to clinch their first playoff spot since 2018, it ended a modest postseason drought for a franchise and its fans, who had grown spoiled by winning and challenging for NBA championships.

Blame LeBron James for that.

The superstar led Cleveland to four straight Finals, delivering the city its first pro sports title since 1964 in 2016. But since James left as a free agent five years ago — for the second time — his immense shadow had engulfed, if not overwhelmed, the Cavs.

They finally emerged from it.

After just missing the playoffs a year ago, the Cavs reached one of their goals and have a few others on their to-do list.

“They’re not satisfied with just this,” said coach J.B. Bickerstaff, who has been instrumental in the

team’s post-LeBron rebuild. “We ain’t done yet.”

Currently just 2 ½ games behind Philadelphia for the No. 3 seed in the Eastern Conference, Cleveland is healthy, playing its best ball in weeks and peaking as the regular season eases into its final days.

Taking advantage of a soft section in their schedule, the Cavs, who were knocked out in the play-in tournament a year ago, have won 9 of 12 and are on track for their first 50-win season without James on the roster since 1992-93.

The road back to relevance wasn’t smooth.

James’ departure in the summer of 2018 was followed by several notable failures, including coach Tyronn Lue’s firing six games into the 2019 season and the flawed decision to hire former Michigan coach John Beilein, who only made it to the All-Star break in 2020.

There were a pair of 19-win

seasons, excursions into the NBA lottery, major injuries, team in-fighting, roster tear-downs and general malfunction.

“The first year I got traded here, it was rough,” recalled center Jarrett Allen, whose arrival from Brooklyn as part of the three-team James Harden trade in 2021 accelerated the turnaround. “While it was still fun, a lot of things weren’t going our way at the time. Not playing for anything at the end of the year, looking forward to the summer, I think we all went through that.”

Along the way, Koby Altman, the team’s president of basketball operations, has made astute moves to restructure a roster left in virtual ruin following James’ departure. The Cavs now have one of the league’s strongest and most promising young cores.

Nothing, though, has changed them more than Donovan Mitchell.

When Altman swooped in and landed Mitchell, who was

thought to be headed to the New York Knicks, in a blockbuster trade with Utah in September, Cleveland sent a clear message that its home remodeling was finished.

One of the game’s most prolific scorers, Mitchell has blended in seamlessly, almost effortlessly. Not only has the supremely confident 26-year-old raised the Cavs’ win total, but the team’s expectations and outlook are soaring at levels not seen since James was wearing Cleveland’s wine and gold colors.

Following Sunday’s win, Mitchell reminded his teammates there was more to do.

“We have a bigger goal at stake. Not just making the playoffs, not just winning a first round, second round, third round,” he said. “Making it all the way. It’s going to be tough. There’s going to be guys or teams that have a lot of experience and have been there, but I think we’re up for that challenge.”

# Golden Knights overcome goalie injuries to lead West

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The Golden Knights’ latest loss was an exception to the recent play by Vegas and its multiple goalies.

Until then, the Knights kept finding ways to win, receiving more than adequate play from whoever filled in as the goaltender of the night.

Coach Bruce Cassidy said Wednesday that he hoped the 7-4 loss to the Oilers the previous night and all-around sloppy play was a “one-off,” and was encouraged by his players’ ability to work through adverse situations all season.

The Knights are the only team to have five goalies record multiple victories this season. Vegas also made NHL history when it became the first team ever to win four consecutive games with four different goalies last week.

“I think at the end of the day, they’re not concerned about who the starter is that night,” Cassidy said of his players. “They’re ready to go. I think that’s why we’ve kept on winning no matter who’s been in nets. Now credit the guys in nets for giving us a chance to win.”

Even with the loss to the Oilers, the Knights

entered Wednesday leading the Western Conference with 98 points and were set to potentially clinch a playoff spot Thursday at San Jose. The race, however, is tight in the Pacific Division with Los Angeles at 96 points and Edmonton at 95.

Cassidy brought over his defensive system from Boston to take pressure off the goalies. He spent six years there, and last season goalie Linus Ullmark began to emerge into a player who now leads the league with 1.90 goals-against average.

Under Cassidy’s system, opponents are often forced to shoot from angles, creating easier save opportunities for the goalies.

“It might make it feel like the other team is kind of pounding you, but we’re not being asked to make any back-door plays or (face) a lot of odd-man rushes because we’re so patient and our guys are kind of clogging up the middle of the ice,” goalie Laurent Brossoit said.

Brossoit and recent acquisition Jonathan Quick are the Knights’ healthy goalies at the moment.

Brossoit underwent offseason hip surgery

and then, after clearing waivers, spent most of the season in the AHL. He was promoted in February and soon after missed another 13 games because of injury. But Brossoit is 2-0-2 and leads the team with a 2.42 GAA and a .924 save percentage.

Quick came over from Columbus after being traded by Los Angeles, where he won two Stanley Cups and became a fan favorite. But he had a 3.50 GAA and .876 save percentage before the Kings parted ways. His numbers with the Knights are similar, though Quick is 5-2 and has flashed moments of his old form.

Cassidy has only eight games left to figure out his goaltender situation before the playoffs, and All-Star rookie Logan Thompson could be added to the mix if he returns from a lower-body injury. He was the Knights’ No. 1 goalie before going down Feb. 9.

“We’ve talked about it internally,” Cassidy said. “I think you’re going to see both goaltenders (Brossoit and Quick) is the easiest way I can put it. It’s not about revealing some secret, it’s that we don’t get that far ahead of ourselves, especially the wild card in (Thompson) and what he’s going to do.”