

## CENTCOM: 'We aren't done' hitting Iran

By MATTHEW ADAMS  
*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. military has destroyed more than 100 Iranian naval vessels, and "we aren't done," the leader of U.S. Central Command said Monday.

Adm. Brad Cooper, the commander of CENTCOM, provided an update following the 16th day of Operation Epic Fury in a video posted on X.

"To date, our Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps aviators have collectively flown more than 6,000 combat flights," Cooper said. The United States has continued targeting Iran's ballistic missiles, drones and naval threats.

Cooper's post comes after U.S. forces struck more than 90 targets on Iran's Kharg Island on Friday. The small coral island about 21 miles off Iran's coast is the primary terminal through which nearly all of Iran's oil exports pass.

President Donald Trump on Friday in a post on Truth Social said "for reasons of decency, I have chosen NOT to wipe out the Oil Infrastructure on the Island," but that the decision

would be reconsidered if transit through the Strait of Hormuz continues to be threatened.

CENTCOM's post Saturday, which included a video montage, noted that strikes hit military targets, like "naval mine storage facilities, missile storage bunkers," while also "preserving the oil infrastructure."

"Great update. Media should take note," Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said on X on Monday when reposting CENTCOM's message.

The U.S. and Israel launched extensive strikes against Iran on Feb. 28 after months of stalled negotiations over the country's nuclear program. Monday marked the 17th day of the operation.

Thirteen service members have been killed as of Friday, including six in the crash of a KC-135 refueling aircraft.

"I want to remember and honor our fallen warriors who made the ultimate sacrifice in the KC-135 refueling aircraft incident last week," Cooper said. "We hold their memories, their families, their friends and their teammates in our prayers. Their

selfless service and dedication hardens our resolve."

More than 2,000 Marines and at least one warship are headed from the Pacific to the Middle East, multiple news outlets reported Friday.

One U.S. official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, told The Associated Press that roughly 2,500 Marines from the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit and the amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli have been ordered to deploy.

Tripoli would join the world's largest aircraft carrier, USS Gerald R. Ford, as well as the USS Abraham Lincoln as part of an armada of American warships, stealth fighters and air defense systems in the region.

About 50,000 troops have been deployed.

On Tuesday, Bloomberg News reported that Trump lashed out against longtime allies, many of which have rejected his appeals for help in the Iran war effort, as the closure of a vital waterway continued to wreak havoc on global energy markets.

Trump scolded North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies in

particular, denouncing their "foolish mistake" in not joining the U.S. effort and claiming none in the group posed reservations at the start of the war, which the president has long claimed was needed to remove a potent nuclear threat.

"I've long said I wonder whether or not NATO would ever be there for us," Trump said Tuesday at the White House. "This was a great test because we don't need them, but they should have been there."

Trump in an earlier social media post insisted that he didn't need the help of NATO, Japan, Australia or South Korea, who have indicated they don't want to get involved in the U.S.-Israeli military operations.

"In fact, speaking as President of the United States of America, by far the Most Powerful Country Anywhere in the World, WE DO NOT NEED THE HELP OF ANYONE!" he said in a social media post.

Oil has continued to hover around \$100 a barrel as the Strait of Hormuz remains all but impassable for commercial shipping.

## Nearly 200 US troops have been wounded in Iran war

By LARA KORTE  
*Stars and Stripes*

Approximately 200 American troops across seven Middle Eastern countries have been wounded in the joint U.S.-Israeli war against Iran known as Operation Epic Fury, a U.S. Central Command spokesman confirmed Tuesday.

Ten of those troops were seriously wounded, said Navy Capt. Tim Hawkins, chief spokesman for CENTCOM.

The vast majority had minor injuries, and more than 180 of them have already returned to duty, he said.

Since the start of the war Feb. 28, Iran has retaliated with thousands of drones and missiles aimed at U.S. bases in the region. Troops have been injured in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Bahrain, Iraq and Israel.

Six Army reservists assigned to the 103rd Sustainment Com-

mand (Expeditionary) were killed in a drone attack on Port Shuaiba, Kuwait, on the second day of the war.

Another soldier, Sgt. Benjamin N. Pennington, 26, died after being wounded during a March 1 attack on Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia.

Six airmen were killed last week when their KC-135 Stratotanker crashed in western Iraq. The crash was not due to hostile or friendly fire and is still under

investigation, the Pentagon said.

Most of the injuries resulted from strikes with one-way attack drones, Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters Friday.

The United States has struck more than 7,000 targets in Operation Epic Fury as of Monday, including military headquarters, intelligence sites, Iranian ships, air defense systems and weapons production sites, according to CENTCOM.

# IG: General left classified maps on train

By MATTHEW ADAMS  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Army general responsible for coordinating support for Ukraine left a tube of classified maps behind on a train in Europe and lost control of the sensitive material for 24 hours, according to the Pentagon watchdog.

Gen. Antonio Aguto, a three-star general at the time, was also found to have sustained a concussion following a night of heavy drinking at a social event in Kyiv, leading to incoherence and confusion in a briefing the next day.

The Department of Defense Office of Inspector General report, released Thursday, investigated incidents that occurred between April and May 2024. Aguto was commander of the Wiesbaden, Germany-based Security Assistance Group-Ukraine. Aguto relinquished com-

mand of the group in August 2024, having presided over its activation in 2022. He retired the same month.

The Inspector General received three anonymous complaints between May 20 and May 24, 2024. The IG initiated an investigation June 6, 2024. The IG also investigated a subsequent allegation that Aguto's counterproductive leadership style created a "toxic environment" within Security Assistance Group-Ukraine headquarters, the report states.

The IG interviewed Aguto and 33 witnesses.

On March 24, 2024, Aguto and his staff traveled to Kyiv as part of the security assistance mission. Part of the trip required them to travel on the State Department chartered train from Poland to Ukraine.

Aguto and witnesses said he decided to bring a set of classi-

fied maps to Kyiv for this trip. Aguto and a witness told the IG that the maps were not packaged in accordance with directives because the maps were too big to wrap and the map tube was too small.

The general and his staff boarded the chartered train on April 3 to begin their journey back to Wiesbaden.

"When they arrived in Poland, the witness performed a quick scan of the train and did not notice anything out of the ordinary, but he did not see the map tube come off the train," the 56-page report states.

Aguto did not recall who discovered the map tube was missing, but his executive officer alerted him. It was found on the train the next day and returned, via staff with the U.S. Embassy Ukraine.

The second incident involving the general occurred on May 13,

2024. During a nearly six-hour dinner, a military engagement, a witness said Aguto drank two bottles of Chacha "throughout the course of the night." Chacha is a Georgian brandy containing 40-50% alcohol.

During a meeting in Aguto's hotel room that night to go over his schedule for the next day, two witnesses reported seeing him fall backward and strike his head on the wall. The witnesses did not see him trip on anything.

En route to the U.S. Embassy the next morning, Aguto and his staff decided to walk the remaining 50 meters to the embassy's main gate. Shortly after exiting the vehicle, Aguto fell forward, striking his right elbow and jaw, as well as tearing his jacket and shirt sleeve, the report says.

Aguto was later taken to a local hospital and diagnosed with a concussion.

## Pentagon program expands health care access in Japan

By MARC CASTANEDA  
AND ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

A pilot program aimed at improving health care access for Defense Department civilians in Japan has saved patients about \$1 million, but participants say significant barriers to care remain, according to a recent information session.

The Defense Health Agency launched the program last year to connect civilian employees with Japanese medical providers and assist with appointments, billing and, more recently, interpreter services.

The effort is intended to address long-standing challenges civilians face when seeking care off base.

During a March 11 online ses-

sion attended by about 200 participants, DOD officials said the program had facilitated more than 1,400 appointments and reduced upfront costs that can reach thousands of dollars.

Lt. Cmdr. Sierra Nichols, a senior health policy analyst with the Pentagon's health affairs office, said the program's success depends on broader participation.

Participants, however, raised concerns about the program's limitations. Some said it excludes dependents, restricts access to specialty care and leaves patients confused about insurance procedures.

Nichols encouraged participants to work with their insurance providers and share feedback directly.

## Hegseth calls for review of military's legal work

By ROSE L. THAYER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has ordered a review of the legal functions within the military intended to better align what positions require a uniformed service member versus those that could be filled by a civilian.

Each service has 45 days to assess how to split functions — what should remain within the Judge Advocate General Corps, and what work is better suited for general counsel. Hegseth provided six months following the review to implement changes.

"For too long — over 20 years — legal shops across the services have grown bloated, duplicative, they've muddied lines of

authority and pulled critical judge advocates away from what matters most: advising commanders in the fight, on operations [and] in deployed environments where seconds and minutes count," Hegseth said last week in a statement.

Keith Scherer, a former Air Force JAG who now works as a defense attorney for courts-martial, said the review's details and Hegseth's public statements show that Hegseth aims to create a cultural shift toward the warrior ethos he has said is lacking in today's military.

He aims to attract a certain type of lawyer to join the military — someone less corporate-minded who is a "warrior first and a lawyer second," Scherer said.

# TSA lines getting longer as DHS shutdown stretches on

*New York Daily News*

Airport security lines are getting longer and longer as the Department of Homeland Security government shutdown stretches on and screeners working without paychecks call in sick or quit altogether.

Viral clips on social media show travelers lining up in pre-dawn darkness out the door of terminals into parking lots and traffic ramps at popular spring break hot spots like Atlanta, Austin, Texas and South Florida.

The Transportation Security Administration on Monday said midmorning wait times were a relatively modest 15 to 30 minutes at check points at John F. Kennedy International Airport and Newark Liberty while LaGuardia was a bit less at 15 minutes or less.

But those numbers can vary from terminal to terminal and

passengers are being warned to show up at least 2.5 hours before their flights.

The situation is likely to keep getting worse in coming days with few signs of serious talks in Washington, D.C., to reach a compromise and end the partial shutdown that has cut funding to the TSA and other DHS agencies.

Democrats say they are willing to fund TSA and other DHS agencies but are demanding reforms to President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown before they release money for Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol that are spearheading the mass deportation campaign.

Trump and his Republican allies are insisting that Democrats agree to fund the entire DHS or TSA will remain in shutdown mode.

Airport screeners are consi-

dered a key pressure point in the standoff because they are considered essential workers and are supposed to continue working in a shutdown even though they would not get paid until the government fully reopens.

Millions of Americans quickly start to share in the pain if TSA workers fail to show up for work in large numbers.

Unlike previous shutdowns, like the record-setting 41-day closure late last year, this one only affects DHS agencies.

That means other federal government services like air traffic controllers, who are paid by the Department of Transportation, are functioning normally.

There is no real sign of any deal to end the pain.

The Senate, where a bipartisan 60 votes are needed to pass most legislation, has repeatedly refused to pass a spending package.

# Official resigns over war with Iran

*al.com*

The director of the National Counterterrorism Center resigned from his post Tuesday, citing disagreement with the Trump administration over the Iran war.

"I cannot in good conscience support the ongoing war in Iran," Joe Kent wrote in his resignation letter to President Donald Trump. "Iran posed no imminent threat to our nation, and it is clear that we started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby."

Kent, who said he was resigning as director of the center on Tuesday, accused "high-ranking members of the Israeli officials and members of the American media" of deploying "a misinformation campaign that wholly undermined your America First platform and sowed pro-war sentiments to encourage a war with Iran.

"This echo chamber was used to deceive you into believing Iran posed an imminent threat to the United States," Kent wrote to Trump, "and that you should you strike now, there was a clear path to victory."

"This was a lie and is the same tactic the Israelis used to draw us into the disastrous Iraq war that cost our nation the lives of thousands of our best men and women," Kent continued. "We cannot make this mistake again."

Kent told the president he prays "that you will reflect upon what you are doing in Iran, and who we are doing it for" and attempted to persuade Trump to get out of the conflict.

"The time for bold action is now. You can reverse course and chart a new path for our nation, or you can allow us to slip further toward decline and chaos. You hold the cards."

# Judge pauses changes to vaccines

*Bloomberg News*

A federal judge paused the Trump administration's decision to drastically slash the number of recommended childhood vaccines, halting the implementation of U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s unprecedented change to national immunization policy.

The decision Monday by Judge Brian Murphy of the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts also stays the appointments of 13 members Kennedy selected for the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, which helps determine which vaccines are covered by insurance and provided for free for some children.

The order granting the stay to the American Academy of Pedi-

atricians and other medical groups is a temporary victory over Kennedy's remaking of federal vaccine policy, which includes downgrading the status of COVID-19 shots for certain groups, while the case plays out in court.

Kennedy last June reconstituted the ACIP panel with his own selections critical of vaccines after removing all its previous members. The changes threw U.S. vaccine policy into disarray, with some states codifying previous immunization schedules that would differ from the federal government.

The advisory panel was scheduled to meet this week on Wednesday and Thursday at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention headquarters, but Murphy said "ACIP as

currently constituted cannot meet" this week.

"Plaintiffs have demonstrated that the harms described above will continue to arise out of further ACIP actions," Murphy wrote. "While Defendants argue that it is merely 'speculative' that ACIP will take any votes at a future meeting, the Court finds the evidence both credible and compelling that a vote is likely at ACIP's upcoming meeting."

Murphy said it "would be inappropriate" for the court either to block ACIP from meeting, or to "effectively select-by-veto a different ACIP."

A spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said the ACIP meeting is now postponed.

# Storms cancel flights as TSA agents not paid

*Associated Press*

ATLANTA — Hundreds of flights were canceled or delayed Tuesday, one day after powerful storms swept across the eastern half of the country and upended air travel in a cross-section of cities. Travelers have been facing additional jams at airport security checkpoints as a partial government shutdown strains screener staffing.

The disruptions come at an already challenging time for air travel, in part because the shutdown that began Feb. 14 has pressured staffing at some security checkpoints. At the same time, airports are crowded with spring break travelers and fans heading to March Madness games, the annual NCAA men's and women's college basketball tournaments.

Carriers canceled more than 1,000 U.S. flights on Tuesday and

delayed about 4,200 others, according to flight-tracking site FlightAware.

The disruptions were most severe at Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, with over 200 flights canceled and roughly 450 delayed.

Kelly Price, who was trying to get home to Colorado after a family vacation in Orlando, Fla., said her Sunday night flight wasn't canceled until early Monday.

"By that time the only place for us to sleep was the airport floor. So we're all tired and frustrated," she said, adding that the earliest flight she and her family could book was to leave Tuesday afternoon.

The nationwide cancellations on Monday included about 600 in and out of Chicago O'Hare International, more than 470 at Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson Interna-

tional and over 450 at LaGuardia Airport in New York City, according to FlightAware.

Citing severe weather, the Federal Aviation Administration ordered ground stops at Hartsfield-Jackson and Charlotte Douglas International Airport and ground delays at JFK and Newark Liberty International Airport.

Danielle Cash found herself stranded in St. Louis on Sunday while trying to get home to Tampa, Fla., after a weekend girls' trip to Las Vegas. Now she's spending several hundred dollars more than planned on a hotel room in a snowy city she wasn't dressed for.

"It was 80 degrees in Tampa when I left and then going to Vegas," she said. "And it was 90 degrees in the desert."

Cash booked a flight that will take her to Tennessee before fi-

nally returning to Tampa by Tuesday afternoon.

The storms unfolded just as airport security screeners missed their first full paycheck over the weekend. The current partial government shutdown affects only the Department of Homeland Security, which includes the Transportation Security Administration.

Democrats in Congress have said Homeland Security won't get funded until new restrictions are placed on federal immigration operations.

It is the third shutdown in less than a year to leave TSA workers temporarily without pay. Once the government reopens, employees will have to wait for back pay.

Some airports have reported longer security lines because of staffing shortages.

## Judge halts health care cuts to 4 states, for now

*Chicago Tribune*

CHICAGO — A federal judge has blocked efforts by the Trump administration to withhold \$600 million in health care grants from Illinois, California, Colorado and Minnesota, while the states' lawsuit over the cuts proceeds.

The judge had previously issued a temporary restraining order prohibiting the federal government from holding back the funds from the four states — but that order was good only for about a month. U.S. District Court Judge Manish Shah issued the preliminary injunction in the case late Friday afternoon.

"The loss of capacity to fund and maintain public health infrastructure puts the health of plaintiffs' residents in jeopardy," Shah wrote in his order for the preliminary injunction. "... The states' sovereign interests here outweigh the executive branch's likely unlawful interest in using preauthorized funding to shape

state-run governance."

The four states had sued the Trump administration in February after the Department of Health and Human Services told Congress it planned to cut the funding from the states. At the time, the department said in a statement to the Tribune, "These grants are being terminated because they do not reflect agency priorities."

The states allege in court documents that the Trump administration has targeted them for "devastating funding cuts ... based on sovereign choices by Plaintiff States, including whether the States choose to lend their scarce law enforcement resources to federal immigration enforcement."

The states contend that the cuts are unlawful because they are arbitrary and capricious and exceed the agencies' authority. They also allege the cuts are unconstitutional.

## Afghan who served with US dies in ICE custody

*Fort Worth (Texas) Star-Telegram*

An Afghan who had served alongside U.S. troops in Afghanistan died Saturday, less than a day after he was taken into immigration custody.

Mohammed Nazeer Paktiawal was detained outside his home in Richardson, Texas, after dropping his kids at school on Friday, CBS reported. According to the Department of Homeland Security, he was arrested during a targeted enforcement action.

"In the late evening of March 13, ICE contacted Emergency Medical Services when Paktiawal began complaining of shortness of breath and chest pains while in an ICE Dallas Field Office processing hold room," DHS said in a statement. "He was immediately transported to Parkland Hospital and received breathing treatment. The ER doctor recommended that he remain in the hospital for observa-

tion."

DHS said the next day, Parkland medical staff noticed Paktiawal's tongue was swollen while he was eating breakfast. He was pronounced dead at 9:10 a.m. on Saturday after multiple lifesaving attempts by the hospital. The agency said Paktiawal did not report any prior medical history, adding that his death is under active investigation.

Federal authorities said Paktiawal had been arrested twice last fall, on a felony charge of SNAP fraud and a theft charge.

The Star-Telegram could not independently verify his criminal record.

Paktiawal had served alongside U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan and entered the U.S. seeking asylum on Aug. 21, 2021, during the Taliban takeover. DHS said an immigration officer paroled him into the U.S. and the parole expired on Aug. 20, 2025.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Subway platform bump ends with fatal punch

**NY** NEW YORK — A 55-year-old man died after a man he bumped into on a Penn Station subway platform punched him in the face, sources familiar with the incident said Sunday.

The two men were walking near each other when the victim bumped into the attacker on the uptown C and E platform about 6:55 p.m. Saturday, sparking an argument, the sources said.

The attacker punched the victim once in the face and walked off, the sources said. The stunned victim dropped to the floor about five minutes later.

Police found the victim unconscious and medics took him to Lenox Hill Hospital, where he died.

### GLP-1 study finds small side effect increase

**PA** PHILADELPHIA — John “Gabe” Horneff, an orthopedic surgeon at Pennsylvania Hospital, had noticed a peculiar trend: Some patients taking GLP-1s would come in with significant tendon injuries from relatively minor physical excursion.

That anecdotal pattern of musculoskeletal injuries spurred him to conduct a study on whether using the popular weight-loss and diabetes drugs increased a person’s risk of osteoporosis and gout.

The rate of osteoporosis, a disease where the bones become fragile and brittle, was 3.2% in the group not taking the drug, compared to 4.1% in the GLP-1-taking group.

The study also found that incidence of gout, a painful form

of arthritis, was 6.6% in the group not taking the drug and 7.4% in the GLP-1 group. The condition’s caused by the buildup of uric acid, which rapid weight loss can trigger, he said.

### Businesses concerned about corporate taxes

**NJ** TRENTON — Gov. Mikie Sherrill said she would not raise taxes on New Jerseyans, but when she made her budget pitch on Tuesday, it became clear that the promise didn’t extend to businesses.

That caught business leaders off guard.

“Prior to the budget address, the governor had said many times, ‘no new taxes,’” said Tom Bracken, the president and CEO of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce.

But Bracken said Sherrill “really went after the business community” in parts of her first budget proposal. The Democratic governor planned to meet with South Jersey business leaders Monday to discuss her plan to address a projected \$3 billion gap.

Sherrill is seeking to address the budget deficit and direct resources to social programs that have lost federal funding under President Donald Trump. But business groups are taking issue with proposals that would cut down business tax deductions and require big companies to pay a fine if more than 50 of their employees are on Medicaid.

### Homeless deaths continue to drop

**CA** SAN DIEGO — In total, at least 375 homeless people died in San Diego

County in 2025, records show. That number is an almost certain undercount as the medical examiner generally only investigates those who die outside. Deaths in hospitals are harder to track.

Yet the total still marks the second straight year that homeless fatalities have declined. The last time the county saw fewer than 400 annual deaths was near the start of the pandemic.

Healthcare in Action is one of several groups working to further reduce that toll. Teams from the Long Beach-based nonprofit spend five days a week driving around San Diego, looking for current and potential patients.

More than a decade ago, Santa Clara County in Northern California figured out that the biggest expense accompanying a large homeless population wasn’t a social service or police patrol, but health care, adding up to more than \$275 million.

### Records reveal police’s lax traffic enforcement

**OH** CLEVELAND — Cleveland police are issuing far fewer tickets for common traffic violations than they did a decade ago, according to court data, a decline that comes as city officials warn drivers have grown increasingly brazen about ignoring traffic laws.

Speeding tickets issued in Cleveland have dropped 68% over the past decade, according to records from Cleveland Municipal Court. Citations for running stop signs fell more sharply, declining 70%.

Police Chief Dorothy Todd told Cleveland City Council dur-

ing budget hearings last month that a “culture” of ignoring traffic laws has taken hold in the city. She suggested that the police department’s restrictive pursuit policy is partially why enforcement has fallen.

Instead of relying on chases, Piet van Lier, who chairs the policy committee of Cleveland’s Community Police Commission, said the city should focus on other ways to improve safety, such as writing down license plates and issuing tickets to drivers who flee.

### Murkowski bill to cut visa fee for public schools

**AK** ANCHORAGE — U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski has introduced legislation to exempt public schools from a \$100,000 annual fee to hire international workers, a fee put in place for some visas by a Trump administration order in September.

Administrators at Alaska school districts, already burdened by high teacher vacancy rates, have pressed federal and state lawmakers for their help on scrapping the fee.

H-1B visas are for specialty or degree-related jobs. Before Trump’s order, these visas cost about \$5,000.

Murkowski’s bill would waive the \$100,000 fee for public schools to hire teachers under the visa.

Alaska public schools employ more than 500 international teachers, and about 340 of them work under an H-1B visa, according to the Alaska Council of School Administrators. International teachers account for over half of teachers in some rural districts.

— From wire reports

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Reporting  
World, National  
and Military News

# Venezuela tops Italy, will face US for WBC title

Associated Press

MIAMI — Venezuelan players danced in the dugout before the first pitch, then pranced past Italy and into their nation's first World Baseball Classic final.

Ronald Acuña Jr., Maikel Garcia and Luis Arraez hit run-scoring, two-out singles in a rapid seventh-inning rally that sparked a 4-2 victory Monday night and vaulted Venezuela into a title matchup against the United States.

Players celebrated in the clubhouse before quickly turning focus to the final.

"A lot of dancing," Garcia said. "We have to show the world who Venezuela is."

Before each WBC game, Venezuelan players gather around a drum in the dugout for the tambor, coastal Afro-

Venezuelan music and dance. They circle and shake, chant and enchant as they prepare to take the field in their nation's yellow, red and blue.

"That's us. That's our country," manager Omar López said. "That's winter ball. That's how we enjoy our baseball."

And who is tops at the tambor?

"Honestly, I think my cousin is the best dancer," Garcia said in the postgame interview room, turning to Acuña, who was seated next to him and laughed at his relative's remark.

Eduardo Rodríguez is slated to start Tuesday night against the Americans' Nolan McLean. Because both teams are 5-1, a coin toss was held earlier Monday to determine the home team, and the U.S. won.

Players avoided discussing the political turmoil between the U.S. and Venezuela.

"We're here to speak baseball," Acuña said. "Our country deserves the game tomorrow."

Venezuela overcame a 2-0, fourth-inning deficit after climbing out of a three-run hole to beat defending champion Japan in a quarterfinal. The Venezuelans reached the championship round for the first time after losing to South Korea in their only previous semifinal appearance in 2009.

In 2023, Venezuela wasted a two-run, eighth-inning lead in a 9-7 quarterfinal loss to the U.S. in Miami as Trea Turner hit an eighth-inning grand slam.

"Baseball gives you these kind of opportunities," Acuña

said. "Life is so ironic."

Italy, the first European nation to reach a WBC semifinal, had been 5-0 in the tournament and sparked attention with an espresso-sipping ritual after home runs and victory celebrations featuring Italian wine.

But a team with three Italy-born players, a handful of major leaguers and many from the minors couldn't hold a late-inning lead against a batting order that got three straight RBIs from All-Stars as a pro-Venezuelan sellout crowd of 35,382 at loanDepot park roared.

"In three years, they are going to take us seriously," Italy manager Francisco Cervelli said. "I just told the guys that they are the champions of this tournament. ... They revolutionized Italy. They put another sport on the map."

# Broncos trade for Dolphins wide receiver Waddle

Associated Press

The Denver Broncos acquired standout wide receiver Jaylen Waddle in a blockbuster deal that sends three draft picks to the Miami Dolphins, including a first-rounder, a person with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the deal hasn't been announced. Miami will receive the 30th overall pick in next month's NFL draft along with picks in the third and fourth rounds. Denver will get the Dolphins' fourth-rounder along with Waddle.

Waddle gives Bo Nix another main target along with Courtland Sutton, boosting a passing offense that finished 11th in the NFL last season.

The Broncos were the AFC's No. 1 seed last season but lost to New England in the AFC championship game without Nix, who broke his ankle in a game against Buffalo in the divisional round.

Waddle, a first-round pick in 2021, had three straight 1,000-yard receiving seasons to begin his career but hasn't reached that total since 2023.

The 27-year-old Waddle has averaged 81 receptions, 1,098 yards receiving and

six touchdowns over his five-year career.

## Chiefs trading for QB Fields

NEW YORK — The New York Jets have agreed to a trade that will send quarterback Justin Fields to the Kansas City Chiefs, a person familiar with the deal told The Associated Press on Monday.

The Jets will receive a sixth-round draft pick in 2027 for Fields and pick up \$7 million of his guaranteed \$10 million salary for this upcoming season, the person told the AP on condition of anonymity because the teams didn't announce the trade.

The deal, first reported by ESPN, is pending a physical.

The 27-year-old Fields signed a two-year, \$40 million deal — with \$30 million guaranteed — with New York last March and was the starter for most of the season until he was benched in favor of Tyrod Taylor in Week 12 in November. He didn't play another game for the Jets, ending the season by being placed on injured reserve in late December with a knee injury.

Fields went 2-7 as New York's starter with seven touchdowns and only one interception for 1,259 yards. He threw for fewer than 55 yards in four games, in-

cluding a season-low 27 in a loss to Buffalo in Week 2.

The Chiefs were searching for a veteran backup quarterback capable of filling in if two-time MVP Patrick Mahomes, who is rehabbing after tearing knee ligaments late in the season, is not ready for the start of the season.

In other NFL news:

■ Wide receiver Marquise "Hollywood" Brown and the Philadelphia Eagles have agreed on a one-year deal, a person with knowledge of the contract told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

Brown, a 2019 first-round pick by Baltimore, had 49 catches for 587 yards and five touchdowns last season for Kansas City. He joins a star-studded offense that features quarterback Jalen Hurts, 2024 AP NFL Offensive Player of the Year Saquon Barkley, A.J. Brown, DeVonta Smith and Dallas Goedert, who is returning on a one-year contract.

■ The San Francisco 49ers have signed veteran receiver Christian Kirk to a one-year, \$6 million contract to add needed depth at the position.

The 29-year-old Kirk had 28 catches for a career-low 239 yards and one TD in his only season with Houston last year.

# Alabama's Holloway arrested on drug charge

Associated Press

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — Alabama guard Aden Holloway was arrested on a felony drug charge Monday, just days before the start of the NCAA Tournament, authorities said.

Coach Nate Oats said Holloway has been suspended indefinitely, adding that the Crimson Tide are preparing to play without him this week.

"We've got standards in our program and ways we've held our guys accountable," Oats said during his weekly radio show. "We found out about what was going on this morning, and we had to suspend him pending the investigation by the (University of Alabama) office of student conduct.

"We're certainly disappointed in his behavior. That being

said, we still love him. He's still our guy and we're helping him get the help that he needs and we're going to help him in any way that we can."

Holloway, 21, was arrested after agents with the West Alabama Narcotics Task Force searched a residence near Alabama's campus and "recovered more than a pound of marijuana, paraphernalia and cash," Tuscaloosa police spokesperson Stephanie Taylor told The Associated Press in an email.

It was not immediately clear if Holloway had an attorney who could speak on his behalf.

"The University is aware of the allegations and is working to gather more information," the school said in a statement. "The student has been re-

moved from campus pending further investigation by the UA Office of Student Conduct."

Holloway was arrested on a first-degree charge of marijuana possession, not for personal use, which is a Class C felony, and failure to affix a tax stamp. The possession charge carries a penalty of up to 10 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$15,000.

Holloway was taken to the local jail shortly before 10 a.m. and was released before 11 a.m. on a \$5,000 bond, Taylor said.

Holloway is in his second season at Alabama. He is second on the team in scoring, averaging 16.8 points a game, and leads the Tide in 3-point shooting. He is hitting 43.1% from behind the arc. Holloway has started 27 of 28 games that he's

played this season.

Alabama has started 13 different starting lineups this season, the most in Oats' seven seasons — and will have another one to open NCAA play. Likely candidates to replace Holloway are Houston Mallette or Taylor Bol Bowen.

"If we're going to lose a guy, losing him in the backcourt is the place where we got the most depth," Oats said. "I told the guys that this team, more than any I've coached, is equipped to handle a situation like this. We've won plenty of games with guys not available, so they'll be ready."

The Crimson Tide (23-9) are a No. 4 seed in the NCAA Tournament and are scheduled to face Hofstra in the opening round Friday in Tampa, Fla.

## Nebraska seeking 1st March Madness win to end curse

Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Whenever Pryce Sandfort stops by the downtown Chipotle to grab a bite, someone in line will ask to take a picture with him and offer congratulations on what so far has been the greatest of all Nebraska basketball seasons.

Invariably, Sandfort also gets the same question his teammates and players of the past have been asked: Will this be the year the Cornhuskers' curse is broken?

All Sandfort can do is smile and say he hopes so.

For all the firsts this season has brought — the 20-0 start, top-five ranking and most conference wins, to name a few — there is one still out there yet to be accomplished that hangs over the program like an albatross.

Nebraska is the only school in a power conference that has never won a game in the NCAA Tournament. The Huskers are 0-8 on the sport's biggest stage.

"It's definitely a thing," said Sam Hoiberg, the fifth-year senior starting guard and son of coach Fred Hoiberg. "It's not like we don't talk about it. Everybody knows it."

Nebraska (26-6) will make its ninth appearance in March Madness on Thursday when they play Troy (22-11) in the first round in Oklahoma City. They're the No. 4

seed in the Midwest Region and 13.5-point favorites against their 13th-seeded opponent from the Sun Belt Conference, according to BetMGM Sportsbook.

Fans accustomed to having hope turn to heartbreak will find little comfort in the fact No. 4 seeds are 127-33 in the round of 64. After all, the Cornhuskers were a No. 3 seed in 1991 and lost to No. 14 Xavier.

Nebraska's most recent attempt at a breakthrough came in 2024. The Huskers lost 98-83 to Texas A&M. Current players Sam Hoiberg, Rienk Mast, Jamarques Lawrence and Cale Jacobsen were on that team and hope the experience serves them well.

"I remember just thinking we were going to win because we wanted it more," Sam Hoiberg said of the A&M game. "We're the team without the tournament win, only Power Five team without one, you know. You feel that once you get to that position, you're going to be so desperate it's going to fall into your hands. That's not the case."

Fred Hoiberg, who took the last four of his five Iowa State teams to the NCAA Tournament from 2012-15, said winning in the tournament requires sharing the ball, making simple plays, communication on the court, getting back in transition and not giving up easy baskets.

Dad's point is well taken, Sam said.

"You just have to do everything in your power to prepare the best you possibly can because you only get one chance at this," he said. "Especially for Rienk and I, being seniors, it's our last chance to get this tourney win for this program. I think we're bringing that urgency and trying to spread that to the rest of the team."

Nebraska started the season on a heater. The Huskers carried momentum from winning the inaugural Crown postseason tournament in Las Vegas in April, and their streak grew to 24 games following their 20-0 start. They are 6-6 since and coming off a first-round blowout loss to eventual champion Purdue in the Big Ten Tournament.

"The Big Ten Tournament got away from us against Purdue, but guess what? They're playing pretty damn good," Fred Hoiberg said.

Nebraska is healthy and will be well-rested with five days since its last game when it plays Troy.

Undoubtedly, how this special Cornhuskers season will be remembered hinges on whether they end the curse. A win certainly would make Sandfort's interactions with those fans at Chipotle, good as they are now, even better.

"It would really suck," he said, "if we weren't able to get that first win."

# Warriors hand Kerr 600th career victory

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Kristaps Porzingis scored 30 points, De'Anthony Melton added 27 and the Golden State Warriors snapped a five-game losing streak with a 125-117 victory over the Washington Wizards on Monday night, earning coach Steve Kerr his 600th career victory.

Kerr reached 600 in his 943rd regular-season game. Only three coaches have needed fewer, with Phil Jackson reaching it in 805 games, Pat Riley in 832 and Gregg Popovich in 887.

"It's surreal to hear my name in that group, but I can tell you that one thing that bonds us all together — those names and mine — is talent," Kerr said. "You can't win in this league without great players, and I was blessed from the day I took this job with incredible talent."

Golden State has been without much of that talent lately, as Stephen Curry (right knee), Jimmy Butler (torn right ACL), Seth Curry (left groin) and Al Horford (left calf strain) were

all out Monday.

Washington has dropped 12 in a row, but the Wizards still haven't taken over last place in the East because Indiana has lost 13 straight. Trae Young scored 21 points in 21 minutes for Washington.

**Hawks 124, Magic 112:** Nickeil Alexander-Walker scored a career-high 41 points, Jalen Johnson had his 13th triple-double of the season and host Atlanta rolled past Orlando, extending its winning streak to 10 games and snapping the Magic's at seven.

The Hawks improved to 38-31 and reclaimed eighth place in the Eastern Conference, bumping Philadelphia back to ninth.

Paolo Banchero had 18 points and 10 rebounds for Orlando.

**Trail Blazers 114, Nets 95:** Deni Avdija and Toumani Camara each scored 18 points, and visiting Portland coasted to a victory over Brooklyn.

Donovan Clingan finished with 14 points and 11 rebounds and reserve Scoot Henderson had 16 points for the Trail Blaz-

ers, who never trailed and led by as many as 31.

**Celtics 120, Suns 112:** Jaylen Brown had 18 of his 41 points in the fourth quarter and Jayson Tatum scored 21 in his fifth game back from an Achilles tendon injury to help host Boston beat Phoenix.

Devin Booker scored 40 for the Suns, who have lost back-to-back games after a four-game winning streak. Jalen Green scored 21 for Phoenix.

**Pelicans 129, Mavericks 111:** Zion Williamson scored 27 points and host New Orleans defeated Dallas.

Saddiq Bey had 23 points, while Jeremiah Fears and Trey Murphy III each added 17 to help the Pelicans win for the eighth time in 12 games.

**Bulls 132, Grizzlies 107:** Josh Giddey had 16 points, 15 rebounds and 13 assists for his fourth triple-double in five games, and host Chicago blew out Memphis to hand the Grizzlies their eighth straight loss.

Matas Buzelis led the Bulls with 29 points, including five 3-

pointers. The second-year forward, who was the 11th pick in the 2024 draft, has logged three of the four highest-scoring totals of his career in just the last three weeks.

**Lakers 100, Rockets 92:** Luka Dončić scored 36 points to lead visiting Los Angeles over Houston in the opener of a two-game series between teams fighting for Western Conference playoff position.

The Lakers moved 1½ games ahead of the Rockets for third in the West standings. There were 13 lead changes in a game that had a playoff atmosphere, but LA ultimately won its sixth straight.

**Spurs 119, Clippers 115:** Victor Wembanyama had 21 points and 13 rebounds, and visiting San Antonio overcame an early 14-point deficit before blowing most of a 24-point lead and recovering to hold off Los Angeles.

Stephon Castle had 23 points, eight assists and seven rebounds to lead the Spurs (50-18).

# Malkin nets 2 for Pens in first game after suspension

Associated Press

DENVER — Evgeni Malkin scored twice in a four-goal first period and added an assist in his return from a five-game suspension for slashing, sparking the Pittsburgh Penguins to a 7-2 victory over the league-leading Colorado Avalanche on Monday night.

Anthony Mantha, Elmer Soderblom, Erik Karlsson, Bryan Rust and Noel Acciari also scored for Pittsburgh, which matched its season high for goals on just 20 shots while playing for the 11th straight game without star center Sidney Crosby. The Penguins' leading scorer, who sustained a lower-body injury while playing for Canada in the Winter Olympics last month, has been skating

with the team during this five-game trip that wraps up Wednesday.

Karlsson added two assists and has three goals and 11 assists in his last 10 games for Pittsburgh, which moved two points ahead of the New York Islanders for sole possession of second place in the Metropolitan Division.

Nathan MacKinnon and Brent Burns scored for Colorado, which matched its most goals allowed in a game this season.

**Red Wings 5, Flames 2:** Patrick Kane scored twice for host Detroit in a victory over Calgary to move into sole possession of fourth place on the career goals list for players born in the United States.

Kane has 504 career goals,

trailing Mike Modano (561), Keith Tkachuk (538) and Jeremy Roenick (513).

Emmitt Finnie, Moritz Seider and Dominik Shine also scored and Alex DeBrincat had three assists for the Red Wings, who moved into a tie with Montreal for third place in the Atlantic Division.

**Devils 4, Bruins 3 (OT):** Jack Hughes had three assists to extend his productive run since scoring the gold medal-winning goal for the U.S. at the Olympics, and host New Jersey dented Boston's playoff chances.

Hughes set up Connor Brown's goal to become the fastest player in franchise history to 400 career points. He also had a hand in Jesper Bratt's goal and assisted on Paul Cotter's

winner with 6.2 seconds left in 3-on-3 overtime. Hughes has 12 points in 10 games since returning from Milan.

**Mammoth 6, Stars 3:** Jack McBain's tie-breaking short-handed goal early in the third period began a four-goal outburst and led visiting Utah over Dallas, ending the Stars' point streak at a franchise-record 15 games.

Clayton Keller, Kailer Yamamoto, Michael Carcone, Lawson Crouse and defenseman Nate Schmidt also scored for the Mammoth, who hold the Western Conference's first wild-card position by five points.

**Kings 4, Rangers 1:** Alex Laferriere had a goal and two assists to lead visiting Los Angeles over New York.