

## Iran keeps up strikes on US allies in Gulf

*Bloomberg News*

Iran pressed ahead with attacks on Gulf Arab states even after Israel signaled it would stop targeting the Islamic Republic's energy infrastructure, further unsettling oil and financial markets.

The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia said they intercepted missiles and drones overnight and into Friday, while Bahrain reported a fire at a warehouse. Kuwait shut several units at its Al Ahmadi refinery after multiple strikes.

Israel said it struck infrastructure across Iran, including in the capital Tehran, with hostilities showing no sign of easing.

The war, now three weeks long, has killed more than 4,200 people across the region and brought shipping through the Strait of Hormuz — a choke point for about a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas flows — to a near standstill.

Iran's attacks on critical energy sites have eased from a peak earlier this week, yet crude prices maintained their rise after closing on Thursday at the highest since mid-2022.

The U.S. is considering an operation to take over Kharg Island, Iran's major oil-export site, to pressure the Islamic Republic to reopen the Strait, Axios reported, adding that a decision hasn't been made.

The U.S. struck military sites on Kharg last weekend, but stopped short of targeting oil infrastructure.

Trump has consistently said the U.S. has no plans to send ground troops into Iranian territory, but hasn't ruled it out.

The risk of lasting damage to energy supplies from the war is great, even if fighting ends imminently. Qatar has said almost a fifth of its LNG production has been knocked out for as long as five years, while QatarEnergy said the attacks would cost

about \$20 billion a year in lost revenue.

The fallout of the war is spreading globally, with fuel, shipping and household costs on the rise. Central banks in Europe have pivoted toward potential interest-rate hikes to combat an expected rise in inflation, reversing a cutting cycle.

Israel said it would no longer target energy infrastructure after an attack on Iran's largest gas field on Wednesday sparked retaliatory strikes on similar assets and a rebuke from U.S. President Donald Trump.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday said his forces would aid U.S. efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and that the war would be over sooner than some anticipated — comments that helped calm markets on a day when energy prices had spiked once again.

For Washington, the costs of

the Iran campaign it started alongside Israel on Feb. 28 are becoming clearer. Iran said its air defense "seriously damaged" a U.S. F-35 stealth fighter, with U.S. Central Command saying one of the warplanes made an emergency landing and the pilot was in stable condition.

The Pentagon has asked Congress for an additional \$200 billion to pay for the war, a person familiar with the matter said. The enormous funding request suggested the U.S. is girding for a protracted conflict, though Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth downplayed such concerns and said the U.S. was "on plan" with its war goals.

The Trump administration moved ahead with \$23 billion in weapons sales to the UAE, Kuwait and Jordan, aiming to bolster those countries' defenses as they come under attack, according to a State Department spokesperson.

## 4 minesweepers heading from Mideast to Philadelphia

*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

Four U.S. Navy vessels, long counted on to suss out mines planted in Middle East waters, were bound for Philadelphia last week following their recent decommissioning — even as the U.S. war with Iran shows no signs of abating.

A U.S. Navy official confirmed that the Avenger-class ships — the USS *Devastator*, USS *Dextrous*, USS *Gladiator* and USS *Sentry* — were en route to Philly, where they would "continue onwards in the inactivation process."

The timing of the ships' Philadelphia arrival is concurrent

with the escalation of the war in Iran, in which the Strait of Hormuz has become a focal point.

The New York Times, citing U.S. officials, reported last week that Iran had begun using smaller boats to mine the Strait of Hormuz. CNN has reported that Iran boasted the capability to lay "hundreds" of mines in the Strait.

For decades, the U.S. had relied on the four recently decommissioned ships to locate such devices.

In a September 2025 news release announcing the decommissioning of the vessels, the Navy said the ships had for

years been a vital form of defense, using "sonar and video systems, cable cutters and a mine detonating device that could be released and detonated by remote control," according to the Navy.

They were also capable of conventional mine sweeping measures.

Today, just four of the mine countermeasures ships — or MCMs — remain in use. All are stationed in Sasebo, Japan.

According to last year's release, the four decommissioned ships were slated to be replaced by four littoral combat ships.

However, the LCS program

has been beset by issues, including budgetary overruns and concerns over the vessels' ability to perform in combat situations.

What's more, it's unclear how many of the newer vessels have been deployed to the Middle East to replace those taken out of commission.

The Navy said last year that the USS *Canberra* had arrived in Bahrain in May, but a Navy official last week declined to say whether the other three LCS vessels had arrived in the Middle East — referring a reporter to the public affairs office for U.S. Central Command.

# Trump, Takaichi announce \$40B reactor project in US

*Bloomberg News*

President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi announced a nuclear power project in the southern U.S., the latest initiative stemming from an investment fund the countries established as part of a trade pact.

At the White House on Thursday, the two leaders said that GE Vernova Inc. and Hitachi Ltd. will build BWRX-300 small modular nuclear reactors in Tennessee and Alabama at a cost of as much as \$40 billion, according to a White House fact sheet. Japan will also invest up to \$33 billion in natural gas power plants in Pennsylvania and Texas.

The projects are intended to stabilize electricity prices and bolster U.S. leadership in global technology competition according to a White House official, who shared the details before

the announcement on condition of anonymity, referring to the global race by technology giants to build power-hungry data centers to drive artificial intelligence development.

The small modular nuclear reactors, known as SMRs, would help fuel American industrial growth by adding power that can be generated on demand, the official added. Specific details, including when the reactors would be operational, weren't immediately clear.

While the Trump administration and the nuclear-power industry are taking steps to hasten the development of these reactors, most such designs still need regulatory approval. No SMRs have yet been added to U.S. grids.

SMRs will feature less capacity than traditional reactors, which typically boast 1 gigawatt. But the technology is in-

tended to be developed faster than the decade it usually takes to site, build and finance traditional reactors.

The reactor deal is the latest from the \$550 billion fund that the U.S. and Japan agreed to as part of an agreement that saw Trump lower auto tariffs and other levies. The two countries also announced a trio of debut projects totaling \$36 billion last month, including a U.S. oil export terminal, gas power plant and synthetic diamond manufacturing facility.

The U.S. and Japan also signed an agreement to accelerate cooperation on deep-sea critical minerals, including rare-earth muds near Japan's Minamitorishima Island. They also agreed on a plan to increase the production and diversity of critical minerals, including a trade initiative supported by price floors or other measures.

## Deadline set for deal on Homeland Security

*CQ-Roll Call*

WASHINGTON — Senate Majority Leader John Thune set a deadline of next week for resolving the Homeland Security Department funding standoff, as Senate appropriators of both parties held a face-to-face meeting Thursday with White House "border czar" Tom Homan.

Thune, a South Dakota Republican, said the meeting — the first of its kind since the department's partial shutdown began a month ago — was a "pretty big deal and a recognition that we need to get this resolved." He also threatened to curtail a scheduled two-week spring recess in early April if there was still no deal by then.

"It needs to get resolved by the end of next week," Thune told reporters. "I can't see us taking a break if the government's still shut down."

But lawmakers signaled little progress after the roughly 90-minute meeting with Homan adjourned at the Capitol Thursday afternoon.

"I'm glad that the White House is here, but we're still a long ways apart," said Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash. and the top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee. Asked if both sides were closer to a deal, she said, "No."

Homan wouldn't characterize progress from the talks and said lawmakers need to "get the government back open."

The meeting drew participation from several key moderates who broke ranks to help end the historic partial government shutdown last fall, including Sens. Maggie Hassan, D-N.H., and Angus King of Maine, an independent who caucuses with Democrats.

## Trump cracks joke about Pearl Harbor

*Los Angeles Times*

WASHINGTON — Before Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi departed for Washington, she told her nation's lawmakers that her Oval Office meeting with President Donald Trump on Thursday would be "very difficult."

Actually, it was awkward.

After a reporter questioned Trump about not warning Japan before launching his "surprise" offensive in Iran, Trump said that surprise was the point.

"Who knows better about surprise than Japan?" Trump said, turning toward a visibly tense Takaichi, seated next to him. "Why didn't you tell me about

Pearl Harbor, OK?"

The joke hung in the air. There was brief and muted laughter.

Takaichi's eyes appeared to widen, but she kept her expression neutral as the cameras rolled. She did not comment on the president's remark. (She smiled at other times during their meeting.)

When leaders of the United States and Japan have raised the events of Dec. 7, 1941 — the day of "infamy" that plunged the U.S. into World War II — the circumstances have previously been far more solemn.

In 2016, President Barack Obama and Japanese Prime

Minister Shinzo Abe scattered petals together on the waters of Pearl Harbor to honor the more than 2,400 killed in the attack. Abe laid a wreath in honor of the dead.

"Ours is an alliance of hope that will lead us to the future," Abe said, speaking to World War II veterans after paying tribute at the Pearl Harbor memorial. "What has bonded us together is the power of reconciliation, made possible through the spirit of tolerance."

Japan, long constrained by its pacifist constitution, is now under intense pressure from the White House to support the U.S.-led war in Iran.

# Ex-official pushes claims of Israeli influence

*New York Daily News*

A top intelligence official who quit his post in protest told right-wing pundit Tucker Carlson that Israel successfully pressured President Donald Trump into launching the war against Iran.

Expanding on his explosive claims about Israel's behind-the-scenes power, Joe Kent even claimed the Jewish state had more access to Trump than American intelligence officials, an edge he says helped convince the president to bomb Iran.

"Key (American) decision makers were not allowed to express their opinions. There wasn't a robust debate," Kent said.

Kent, a right-wing former Republican congressional candidate with ties to white nationalists, spoke out on Carlson's popular podcast after stepping down from his post as head of

the National Counterterrorism Center in protest of Trump's decision to start the war.

"The Israelis drove the decision to take this action," Kent told Carlson. "This speaks to the broader issue: Who is in charge of our policy in the Middle East?"

Kent pointed to Secretary of State Marco Rubio's comments in the first days of the war that Israel cornered the U.S. into joining the war by warning Trump it would launch widespread attacks on Iran, whether the U.S. agreed or not. Rubio later sought to backtrack from the candid remarks.

Trump and his allies have dismissed Kent's claims even as some MAGA allies who generally oppose military intervention overseas have rallied behind him.

Some Jewish leaders say Kent's accusations about Israel's influence amount to an

anti-Semitic smear that Jews and Israel pull the strings behind major geopolitical events.

Trump himself confirmed Thursday that Israel and the U.S. have different approaches. He confirmed telling Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to halt attacks on energy infrastructure after Israel struck a sprawling Iranian gas field.

"I told him don't do that," Trump said.

Shredding two of President Trump's rationales for launching a full-blown war, Kent said the U.S. had no evidence that Iran planned to launch any attack on American or allied targets.

"There was no intelligence that said ... the Iranians are going to launch this big sneak attack, (that) they're going to attack one of our bases," said Kent, a Trump appointee.

Asked by Carlson if Iran was trying to build a nuclear weap-

on, Kent said there was no evidence of such a program before either the launching of the war last month or the bombing of Iranian nuclear sites last year.

"No. They weren't three weeks ago when this started, and they weren't in June either," Kent said.

The FBI has launched a probe into Kent for allegedly leaking classified intelligence information but it's not clear if it is tied to the Iran war.

Trump defended his administration's plans to ask Congress for an estimated \$200 billion more for the Pentagon to bankroll the war.

Lawmakers say the request is likely to spark a bitter debate on the war, the reasons for launching it and Trump's goals for declaring victory.

"It's a small price to pay to make sure that we stay tippy top," Trump said.

## Sanders looks to block sale of bombs to Israel

*CQ-Roll Call*

WASHINGTON — Sen. Bernie Sanders on Thursday filed three joint resolutions to block a pending sale of nearly \$659 million worth of weapons — including 22,000 bombs — to Israel after the Trump administration this month told lawmakers it would use emergency measures to bypass congressional review of the sale.

The sale and subsequent opposition to it come amid the ongoing U.S.-Israeli war with Iran, which has spread across the Middle East and tested the abilities of countries in the region to contend with missile and drone strikes by Tehran.

It also marks at least the fourth time in President Donald Trump's second term

that the State Department advanced a weapons sale to Israel over congressional objections, a defiance that critics have said bucks nearly half a century of tradition and reduces lawmakers' oversight of U.S. arms exports.

"Given the horrific destruction that Israel's extremist government has wrought on Gaza, Iran and Lebanon, the last thing in the world that American taxpayers need to do right now is to provide 22,000 new bombs to the Netanyahu government," Sanders, I-Vt., said in a news release.

Sanders was joined in putting forth the joint resolutions by Senate Democrats Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, Jeff Merkley of Oregon and Peter Welch of Vermont.

## Comey subpoenaed in Trump conspiracy probe

*Bloomberg News*

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department sent a subpoena to former FBI Director James Comey as part of an investigation into whether former law enforcement and intelligence officials waged a years-long conspiracy against President Donald Trump, according to people familiar with the matter.

The grand jury subpoena was issued last week by the U.S. attorney's office for the Southern District of Florida, according to the people, who asked not to be identified.

The subpoena seeks information about Comey's role in putting together an intelligence assessment about Russia's interference in the 2016 presidential election, according to the people.

The U.S. attorney's office has previously sent subpoenas to other former U.S. officials. The office is conducting a sweeping investigation into whether former U.S. officials allegedly took actions to sabotage Trump starting in 2016 through his indictment over the handling of classified documents in 2023.

The new subpoena, reported earlier by Axios, marks an escalation of Justice Department efforts targeting Comey in particular, who Trump has repeatedly said should be investigated.

Comey was previously indicted by a federal grand jury for allegedly lying to senators during a congressional hearing — a claim that Comey has denied. The indictment was dismissed after a federal judge ruled that the U.S. attorney was unlawfully appointed.

# Kenyan troops leaving Haiti as antigang force transitions

*Miami Herald*

After 21 months of struggling to help Haiti's security forces reign in armed gangs, the international security mission led by Kenya is beginning to draw down, signaling the troubled Caribbean nation's transition to a new phase of international intervention.

A group of 215 Kenyan police officers who formed the second contingent of the Multinational Security Support Mission arrived in Nairobi earlier this week, Kenya's Ministry of Interior confirmed in a statement. Last Friday, a smaller contingent of troops from The Bahamas and Jamaica that made up the Caribbean component also departed Port-au-Prince.

"The mission has now entered a transition and draw-down phase that will see more officers gradually return home from their tour of duty," the Kenyan interior ministry said in a statement.

Jack Mbaka, who served as spokesman for the Kenya-led mission, told journalists in Haiti on Thursday that Kenya is currently reducing troop levels in preparation for the arrival of a larger number of personnel under the Gang Suppression Force. Backed by the United States, that force was authorized by the United Nations in late September and is expected to start deploying in April with a small contingent of soldiers from Chad.

A number of Kenyan police officers will remain in Haiti to serve as a bridge during the transition, though Mbaka declined to give a timetable for the full departure of the Kenyan troops. The ongoing process, he said, "aims to ensure a smooth transition" to the new force's expected 5,500 troops.

The Kenyan-led mission was designed to deploy about 2,500 personnel, but at its peak only had about 1,100 officers. Mean-

while, three Kenyan police officers lost their lives in Haiti during antigang operations.

Though Kenya is among a "Standing Group of Partners" charged with overseeing the new mission, the east African nation is not expected to be part of the new mission, whose personnel will draw from other African nations and consist mostly of soldiers. As for the future of Caribbean troops' participation, that remains unclear.

Under the original Kenya-led mission, Jamaica served as deputy command and its soldiers were instrumental in providing expertise in cybersecurity and tracking gang leaders' movement on social media. But the hurricane that devastated Jamaica in October has added a new wrinkle to its ability to deploy members of its defense force.

Meanwhile, The Bahamas has not said whether it will send troops to Haiti.

# Harris trails Newsom for president in Calif. poll

*Los Angeles Times*

LOS ANGELES — Californians have never been forced to choose between Gavin Newsom and Kamala Harris, two home-grown political darlings, during any election.

But if the state's registered Democrats picked now, Newsom would trounce Harris as their party's next nominee for president and have the edge over other Democratic contenders, according to a poll released Friday by the UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies and cosponsored by The Times.

Twenty-eight percent of the California Democrats who were surveyed selected the governor as their top choice in the 2028 presidential election. U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., followed with 14% and former U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg received 11%. Harris came in fourth, with only 9% of voters in her own state naming her as their preferred Democratic nominee.

"It's quite a positive result for Newsom," said Mark DiCamillo, director of the Berkeley IGS Poll. "He's separated himself from the rest of the pack, and especially when you compare him to the other major Californian in the considerations, he's three times as much as Kamala. That's quite impressive."

The political careers of the governor and former vice president have orbited each other but never crossed since Newsom was sworn in as San Francisco's mayor and Harris as the city's district attorney on the same day in 2004. Now the two Bay Area natives are both flirting with the 2028 presidential contest as they travel the country promoting their life stories on respective book tours.

# Action star Chuck Norris dead at 86

*From wire reports*

Action star and martial artist Chuck Norris has died. He was 86 years old.

Family members confirmed to TMZ that Norris died Thursday morning in Hawaii.

"It is with heavy hearts that our family shares the sudden passing of our beloved Chuck Norris yesterday [Thursday] morning," they said in a statement. "While we would like to keep the circumstances private, please know that he was surrounded by his family and was at peace."

It follows news that Norris earlier this week experienced a medical emergency while training on the island of Kauai. He was hospitalized, but friends

said he appeared to be in good spirits at the time.

In his final Instagram post on March 10, Norris can be seen sparring with his trainer to ring in his 86th birthday.

"I don't age up," he says into the camera. "I level up."

In the caption, he added: "I'm 86 today! Nothing like some playful action on a sunny day to make you feel young. I'm grateful for another year, good health and the chance to keep doing what I love. Thank you all for being the best fans in the world. Your support through the years has meant more to me than you'll ever know."

Norris served in the Air Force and gravitated toward martial arts during an assignment to

South Korea. After he was honorably discharged in 1962, he opened a martial arts studio, which expanded to a chain that counted Hollywood stars among its clients. One was Steve McQueen, whom Norris later credited with encouraging him to get into acting.

In the 1970s, Norris appeared in a string of action movies. And during the 1990s, he took the title role in the TV series "Walker, Texas Ranger."

During the 2000s, Norris' toughman image became the stuff of legend. "Chuck Norris Facts" went viral online with such wildly hyperbolic statements as, "Chuck Norris had a staring contest with the sun — and won."

# Doncic scores 60, Lakers beat Heat

Associated Press

MIAMI — Luka Doncic scored 60 points, LeBron James had a triple-double on a night where he tied the NBA record for games played, and the Los Angeles Lakers pushed their season-best winning streak to eight games with a 134-126 victory over the Miami Heat on Thursday.

Doncic tied his second-highest point total in a game, behind a 73-point night against Atlanta in 2024 and matching a 60-point night against New York in 2022. Doncic also broke the record for a Heat opponent, topping the 58-point effort from James Harden for Houston on Feb. 28, 2019.

Doncic — the NBA's scoring leader — has now scored at least 30 points in eight consecutive games, reached 50 for the second time in his last five games and did so on the second night of a back to back. James finished with 19 points, 15 rebounds and 10 assists, and Austin Reaves scored 18 for the Lakers.

Bam Adebayo had 28 points for Miami, which has dropped three straight. Tyler Herro scored 21 points and Norman Powell had 20 for Miami, which led by as many as 15 in the early going.

James played his 1,611th regular-season game, tying Robert Parish's NBA record.

**Hornets 130, Magic 111:** Reserve Coby White had 27 points and led Charlotte's 3-point barrage in a rout of visiting Orlando.

White shot 5 of 8 from beyond the arc and was one of four players with three or more 3-pointers, joining Brandon Mill-

er (5 of 10), Kon Knueppel (4 of 9) and LaMelo Ball (3 of 8) as the Hornets finished 21 of 46 overall to win their fourth game in their past five.

Miller had 25 points and eight assists, Knueppel scored 23 points and Ball added 20 for Charlotte, which improved to 36-34. It's the first time the Hornets have been two games over .500 since late in the 2021-22 season when the franchise had its last winning record at 43-39.

Desmond Bane had 24 points and Paolo Banchero 20 to lead Orlando.

**Pistons 117, Wizards 95:** Jalen Duren had 24 points and 11 rebounds and Detroit never trailed in a win at Washington.

It was the Pistons' first game since All-Star guard Cade Cunningham was ruled out for at least two weeks with a collapsed left lung.

Paul Reed added 17 points, while Duncan Robinson, Caris LeVert and Kevin Huerter each had 14 for the Pistons.

Tristan Vukcevic scored 21 for the Wizards, who lost their season worst-tying 14th consecutive game. Washington (16-53) is two games from matching a franchise-record slide of 16 losses.

**Cavaliers 115, Bulls 110:** James Harden scored 36, Evan Mobley added 26 points and 14 rebounds and Cleveland hung on to win at Chicago even though Donovan Mitchell missed the game because of a bruised left eye.

Harden nailed seven 3-pointers. Jaylon Tyson chipped in with 18 points and 11 rebounds, and the Cavaliers hung on after a 29-point lead in the third quar-

ter dwindled to one in the game's closing minutes.

Chicago's Tre Jones cut it to 103-102 when he made two free throws with 3:33 remaining. Sam Merrill answered with a 3 for Cleveland.

The Cavaliers were up 110-107 when Jones missed a potential tying 3 and Leonard Miller missed a layup with about a minute left. Harden hit a pull-up jumper to make it a five-point game with 33 seconds left and Cleveland hung on for the win.

**Pelicans 105, Clippers 99:** Trey Murphy III scored 27 points and New Orleans extended its home winning streak to seven games with a victory over Los Angeles.

Saddiq Bey had 20 points and Zion Williamson added 15 for the Pelicans, who swept the two-game set against the Clippers after a 124-109 win, also at home, on Wednesday night.

Dejounte Murray was held out to rest as part of his comeback from a ruptured Achilles tendon. He had 17 points and a season-high 11 assists Wednesday night in his ninth game since making his season debut last month.

Derrick Jones Jr. scored 22 points, John Collins had 18 and Bogdan Bogdanovic added 16 for the Clippers, who lost their fourth in a row.

**Spurs 101, Suns 100:** Victor Wembanyama hit a 17-foot, pull-up jumper with a second left and San Antonio wrapped up a playoff spot to end a six-season drought, beating visiting Phoenix.

Wembanyama had 34 points and 12 rebounds. His winning

jumper capped a furious final-minute rally to secure the top-six finish in the Western Conference.

De'Aaron Fox added 23 points and Julian Champagnie had 14 in the Spurs' fourth straight victory.

Collin Gillespie scored 24 points and Devin Booker had 22 for the Suns. They remain seventh in the West.

**Jazz 128, Bucks 96:** Ace Bailey made seven 3-pointers and scored 33 points as host Utah snapped a four-game skid with a victory over Milwaukee.

Bailey also had nine rebounds, four assists and three steals. Cody Williams scored 19 of his 23 points before halftime to give Utah's offense an early spark. Elijah Harkless added 23 points and 10 assists, while Kyle Filipowski had 16 points and eight rebounds.

Ryan Rollins led Milwaukee with 15 points and five assists. Cam Thomas added 14 points and Ousmane Dieng had 13 for the Bucks.

**76ers 139, Kings 118:** Rookie VJ Edgecombe scored a career high 38 points with 11 assists, Justin Edwards was 7 of 11 from 3-point range and finished with 32 points, and Philadelphia won at Sacramento.

Quentin Grimes scored 27 points as the 76ers ended a five-game road losing streak and won for the fourth time in their last six games playing without their two biggest stars — Joel Embiid (strained right oblique) and Tyrese Maxey (finger).

Maxime Raynaud led the Kings with 30 points and Daewon Plowden had 20. Dylan Cardwell had 14 rebounds.

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# 12th-seeded High Point stuns Wisconsin

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Chase Johnston made his first 2-point basket of the season, a fast-break layup with 11.7 seconds remaining that gave No. 12 seed High Point an 83-82 victory over fifth-seeded Wisconsin on Thursday in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

Johnston finished with 14 points, including four 3-pointers for the Panthers, who were 10½-point underdogs, according to BetMGM Sportsbook. He came in shooting 64 of 136 (47.1%) from 3-point range but 0 of 4 inside the arc, and he had played more minutes (406) and scored more points (196) without making a 2-point shot than any player in the country.

“I wasn’t really thinking whether it was a 2 or a 3, I was just trying to put it in and win the game,” Johnston said.

Rob Martin had 23 points and 10 assists for the Panthers, who will face No. 4 seed Arkansas in the second round of the Midwest Region on Saturday.

Nick Boyd finished with 27 points and John Blackwell added 22 points and 10 rebounds for the Badgers (24-11), who have lost to a lower-seeded team in each of their past four NCAA Tournament appearances. They fell to No. 11 seed Iowa State in 2022 and No. 12 seed James Madison in 2024 and lost in the second round last year as a 3 seed to sixth-seeded BYU.

This latest upset was responsible for ending the hopes of the vast majority of entrants who tried to complete a perfect bracket.

“You get sent home when you don’t take care of the things you need to take care of,” Wisconsin coach Greg Gard said.

After Johnston’s bucket gave High Point the lead, Owen Aquino blocked a driving layup by Boyd. The Panthers’ Cam’Ron Fletcher was fouled and missed a free throw, giving the Badgers a chance with 1 second left, but Andrew Rohde’s long pass was stolen by Terry Anderson and the celebration was on for High Point and first-year coach Flynn Clayman.

High Point earned a spot in the tournament by winning the Big South title for the second straight season. This was the first March Madness win for the Panthers, who lost to Purdue in the first round last year.

## East Region

**No. 1 Duke 71, No. 16 Siena 65:** At Greenville, S.C., the Blue Devils barely avoided a shocking upset to open the NCAA Tournament, having to rally from 13 points down and going ahead for good in the final 5

minutes to beat the Saints.

Cameron Boozer had 22 points and 13 rebounds for the East Region’s headliner, which hit its first four shots yet need a comeback against a fearless upstart playing just five players right up to the final seconds.

The Saints took it to the Blue Devils (33-2) at every turn.

The No. 1 seeds entered the week with a 158-2 record against 16 seeds in the tournament, the outliers being Virginia’s loss to UMBC in 2018 and Purdue’s loss to Fairleigh Dickinson in 2023.

Duke — a blueblood with five NCAA titles — spent much of Thursday in serious danger of being added to that list before finally wrestling away control of the game in the last 8 minutes.

Gavin Doty scored 21 points to lead the Saints (23-12), with his third 3 giving Siena a 61-56 lead with 7:53 left. But Duke ran off 11 unanswered points to finally push ahead for good, securing a date against TCU in the second round.

**No. 3 Michigan State 92, North Dakota State 67:** At Buffalo, N.Y., Carson Cooper matched his career high with 20 points and grabbed 10 rebounds as the Spartans routed the Bison to reach the second round of the tournament for the 22nd time in 28 straight appearances under coach Tom Izzo.

Michigan State (26-7) advances to play Louisville (24-10) in the second round Saturday after the No. 6 seed in the Midwest held on to beat South Florida 83-79. It will be the fifth NCAA Tournament matchup between the schools and first since 2015, when the Spartans beat the Cardinal in overtime to reach the Final Four.

Damari Wheeler-Thomas scored 16 points to lead 14th-seeded North Dakota State (27-8). The Summit League champions qualified for the NCAA Tournament for the sixth time in 18 seasons and first since the 2020 tournament that was canceled.

**No. 6 Louisville 83, No. 11 South Florida 79:** At Buffalo, N.Y., Isaac McKneely scored 23 points and the Cardinals hung on to beat the Bulls for their first NCAA Tournament victory since Rick Pitino’s final season as coach in 2017.

Louisville (24-10) showed signs of struggling without starting point guard Mikel Brown Jr., who missed his fifth straight game with back issues. It was evident in the Cardinals’ issues against South Florida’s press in nearly squandering a 22-point lead over the final 11:25.

Brown is not expected to return for Louis-

ville’s second-round matchup with Michigan State on Saturday.

Joseph Pinion scored 27 points for South Florida (25-9) in a game in which the Bulls missed 20 of their first 21 3-point attempts. The Bulls were making just their fourth tournament appearance and first since reaching the Sweet 16 in 2012.

**No. 9 TCU 66, No. 8 Ohio State 64:** At Greenville, S.C., Xavier Edmonds made a layup to beat the shot clock with 4.3 seconds left, and the Horned Frogs held off a furious second-half rally by the Buckeyes to open the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

Bruce Thornton’s half-court heave at the buzzer hit all backboard, and the Buckeyes’ standout senior leaned forward and put his hands on his knees in dismay near midcourt as TCU began its celebration.

Micah Robinson scored 18 points for TCU, Edmonds finished with 16 and David Punch had 16 points and 13 rebounds. TCU (23-11) will play Saturday against Duke, the No. 1 overall seed in the tournament.

John Mobley Jr. scored 15 points to lead Ohio State (21-13), making its first March Madness appearance since 2022.

## South Region

**No. 2 Houston 78, No. 15 Idaho 47:** At Oklahoma City, Kingston Flemings scored 18 points, Emanuel Sharpe added 16 and the Cougars routed the Vandals in their NCAA Tournament opener after losing last year’s championship game.

The Cougars (29-6), the second seed in the South, will play No. 10 seed Texas A&M in the second round on Saturday.

Chris Cenac Jr. had a career-high 18 rebounds for Houston, which lost to Florida in last year’s final.

Kolton Mitchell scored 14 points for 15th-seeded Idaho, a heavy underdog making its first tournament appearance since 1990.

The Vandals (21-15) qualified by winning four games in five days to win the Big Sky championship, despite being seeded seventh in the conference tournament.

**No. 3 Illinois 105, No. 14 Pennsylvania 70:** At Greenville, N.C., David Mirkovic had 29 points and 17 rebounds as the Fighting Illini dominated the Quakers.

Keaton Wagler added 18 points, seven assists and seven rebounds for the Fighting Illini (25-8), who moved on to face No. 11 VCU in the second round on Saturday.

Kylan Boswell had 13 points, while Ben Humrichous and Tomislav Ivisic each

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# March Madness: VCU, Texas score upsets

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chipped in with 12 as Illinois shot 50% from the field and made 15 3-pointers while out-rebounding the smaller Quakers 48-25.

Michael Zanoni finished with 20 points on 9-of-18 shooting for Penn (18-12), the Ivy League champion.

TJ Power, who scored 44 points in the Quakers' overtime win over Yale that got them into the tournament, finished with six points on 2-of-8 shooting in 30 minutes after missing the previous two practices with an illness that left his status uncertain.

**No. 4 Nebraska 76, No. 13 Troy 47:** At Oklahoma City, Pryce Sandfort scored 23 points and the Cornhuskers rolled to their long-awaited first NCAA Tournament victory, beating the Trojans.

The Cornhuskers (27-6), the No. 4 seed in the South Region, entered March Madness as the only school from a power conference without a tournament win — they were 0-8, with many of the losses coming as the higher seed. Sandfort helped the Huskers end the drought by making seven 3-pointers.

Braden Frager and Jamarques Lawrence each scored 13 points and Rienk Mast added 11 points, seven assists and six rebounds for the Huskers, who will play No. 5 seed Vanderbilt in the second round on Saturday.

Victor Valdes scored 14 points for 13th-seeded Troy (22-12), the Sun Belt Tournament champion.

**No. 5 Vanderbilt 78, No. 12 McNeese State 68:** At Oklahoma City, Tyler Tanner had 26 points, seven rebounds and five assists, and the Commodores rallied to beat the Cowboys in the first round.

The Commodores (27-8), the No. 5 seed in the South Region, will play No. 4 seed Nebraska in the second round on Saturday.

Duke Miles scored 13 points and Devin McGlockton and Tyler Nickel each added 12 for Vanderbilt, which trailed by 12 points in the first half and then took control after the break.

The Commodores shot 51% (26 of 51) from the field and made 17 of 20 free throws.

Garwey Dual scored 16 points and Larry Johnson added 15 for No. 12 seed McNeese, which was trying to knock off a No. 5 seed for the second straight year. The Cowboys beat Clemson in the first round last year under Will Wade, who then left for N.C. State.

**No. 11 VCU 82, No. 6 North Carolina 78 (OT):** At Greenville, N.C., Terrence Hill Jr. made a stepback 3-pointer with 15 seconds left in overtime and the Rams erased a 19-point second-half deficit to stun the Tar Heels.

Hill finished 7 for 10 from 3-point range and scored 20 of 34 points after halftime as VCU (28-7) won its first NCAA Tournament game since 2016.

Nyk Lewis added 16 points, including two clutch free throws, to seal the game for the Rams, who will face No. 3 seed Illinois in the second round on Saturday.

Henri Veesaar had 26 points and 10 rebounds for the Tar Heels (25-8), who went 0-3 after star Caleb Wilson was ruled out for the season with an injury.

**No. 10 Texas A&M 63, Saint Mary's 50:** At Oklahoma City, Rashaun Agee had 22 points and nine rebounds as the Aggies beat the Gaels.

Ruben Dominguez added 11 points for the Aggies (22-11), who advanced to face No. 2 seed Houston on Saturday.

Joshua Dent scored 18 points and Liam Campbell added 15 for Saint Mary's (27-6). Paulius Murauskas, who had averaged 18.8 points per game, scored just four on 1-for-6 shooting. It was a season-low point total for the Gaels, who hadn't scored fewer than 70 points since Jan. 31.

## West Region

**No. 3 Gonzaga 73, No. 14 Kennesaw State 64:** At Portland, Ore., Graham Ike scored 19 points and the Bulldogs held off the tenacious Owls in a defensive battle.

Davis Fogle added 17 for the Bulldogs, who will face No. 11 seed Texas on Saturday.

RJ Johnson and Amir Taylor each had 15 points for Kennesaw State (21-14), which made its second March Madness appearance after winning the Conference USA Tournament.

Fogle's dunk gave Gonzaga its first double-digit lead at 57-46 with 7:54 to go, but the Owls capitalized on a series of late fouls by the Bulldogs that enraged both the large Gonzaga crowd and coach Mark Few.

Jalen Warley added 12 points and 12 rebounds for Gonzaga (31-3), which has made 27 straight tournament appearances. The Zags lost in the national title game in 2017 and 2021.

**No. 4 Arkansas 97, Hawaii 78:** At Portland, Ore., Darius Acuff Jr. had 24 points and seven assists, and the Razorbacks continued their strong play after winning the Southeastern Conference Tournament with a victory over the Rainbow Warriors.

Arkansas (27-8) moves on to face No. 12 High Point in the second round. The Panthers knocked off No. 5 Wisconsin 83-82 in the first game in Portland.

Meleek Thomas had 21 points and eight

rebounds for coach John Calipari's Razorbacks, Trevon Brazile added 19 points and three blocks, and Malique Ewin had 16 points and 12 rebounds.

Dre Bullock finished with 21 points and eight rebounds for Hawaii (24-9), the Big West Conference champion, and Isaac Johnson scored 15.

**No. 11 Texas 79, No. 6 BYU 71:** At Portland, Ore., Matas Vokietaitis had 23 points and 16 rebounds, and the Longhorns knocked off the Cougars, overcoming 35 points from Cougars forward AJ Dybantsa.

Dybantsa played every minute of the game but it wasn't enough as BYU (23-12) had its season — and perhaps his college career — come to an end. Dybantsa was two points shy of tying BYU's NCAA Tournament record for points in a game, held by Danny Ainge and Jimmer Fredette.

The freshman who led the nation in scoring with 25.3 points per game will be a candidate for the No. 1 pick in the NBA draft if he leaves school.

## Midwest Region

**No. 1 Michigan 101, No. 16 Howard 80:** At Buffalo, N.Y., Morez Johnson Jr. had 21 points and 10 rebounds on a perfect shooting night, and the Wolverines rode a second-half surge to a victory over the Bison.

Towering center Aday Mara had 19 points, seven rebounds and six assists for a Wolverines team that set the Big Ten regular-season record with 19 conference victories. Johnson shot 8 of 8 from the field as Michigan (32-3) moved within one win of matching a program record set in 2017-18.

Michigan advances to play ninth-seeded Saint Louis (28-5) on Saturday.

Cam Gillus and Bryce Harris scored 21 points each, and Cedrick Taylor had 19 points and six rebounds for Howard (24-11). The Bison were playing two days after their 86-83 victory over UMBC in the First Four at Dayton, Ohio, on Tuesday — the program's first March Madness victory in six appearances.

**No. 9 Saint Louis 102, No. 8 Georgia 77:** At Buffalo, N.Y., Dion Brown scored 18 points on 9-of-10 shooting, all layups and dunks, in a Billikens blowout.

Saint Louis (29-5) set a school record for victories in a season and advanced to meet top regional seed Michigan on Saturday.

Jeremiah Wilkinson scored 30 points for No. 8 seed Georgia. This was the most lopsided loss of the season for the Bulldogs (22-10), who had the most regular-season wins in program history.

# Bobrovsky, Panthers shut out Oilers

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Sergei Bobrovsky made 21 saves to earn his fourth shutout of the season as the Florida Panthers continued to plague Edmonton, emerging with a 4-0 victory over the Oilers on Thursday night in a rematch of the past two Stanley Cup finals.

Cole Reinhardt, A.J. Greer, Anton Lundell and Carter Verhaeghe scored for the injury-riddled Panthers, who snapped a two-game losing skid.

Sam Bennett, Evan Rodrigues and Mike Benning all had two-assist games. The Panthers are almost certain to miss the playoffs and a chance to defend their back-to-back titles.

Connor Ingram made 19 stops for Edmonton.

The Oilers had a two-game winning streak halted and missed out on an opportunity to move ahead of idle Anaheim into first place in the Pacific Division.

Edmonton remained without star forward Leon Draisaitl, out for the rest of the regular season with a lower-body injury.

Florida has been hit hard by injuries all season. Among those out of the lineup on Thursday were Aleksander Barkov, Sam Reinhart and Brad Marchand. Only defenseman Gustav Forsling has managed to appear in all 68 games this season.

**Bruins 6, Jets 1:** Lukas Reichel had a goal and an assist in his Bruins debut, Jeremy Swayman made 22 saves and Boston beat visiting Winnipeg to end a two-game losing streak.

David Pastrnak scored his 27th goal of the season and had an assist. Viktor Arvidsson and Pavel Vacha also each had a goal and assist, and Fraser Minten and Jonathan Aspirot added late goals.

Fighting for one of the final Eastern Conference playoff spots, the Bruins finished in regulation for only the second time in seven games. They were

coming off overtime losses at New Jersey on Monday night and Montreal on Tuesday night.

Jonathan Toews ended Swayman's shutout bid on a tip-in at 5:38 of the third. Connor Hellebuyck stopped 22 shots for Winnipeg.

**Senators 3, Islanders 2:** Brady Tkachuk scored with 11.1 seconds left to give Ottawa a victory over visiting New York.

Tkachuk controlled the loose puck in the crease and squeezed it past goalie Ilya Sorokin for the comeback victory.

New York dropped out of a playoff position in the tight Eastern Conference, while Ottawa closed within four points of the Islanders.

**Red Wings 3, Canadiens 1:** Alex DeBrincat scored the go-ahead goal with 3:25 remaining and assisted on Detroit's two other goals in a victory over visiting Montreal.

DeBrincat scored the winner on a backhand after stealing the puck from defenseman Mike Matheson in the Canadiens' zone. J.T. Compher scored earlier in the period and Andrew Copp added an empty-net goal with 16.8 seconds remaining.

John Gibson made 32 saves for the Red Wings, who won for the second straight game following a three-game losing streak.

Detroit recorded back-to-back victories for the first time since a three-game winning streak in mid-January.

**Blue Jackets 6, Rangers 3:** Adam Fantilli scored twice, including an empty-net goal with 2:54 remaining, and Columbus beat visiting New York, keeping alive hopes for its first playoff berth since the 2019-20 season.

Columbus extended its point streak to 11 games and took over third-place in the Metropolitan Division thanks to the New York Islanders' 3-2 loss in Ottawa.

Boone Jenner had a goal and an assist, and Isac Lundestrom,

Conor Garland and Damon Severson also scored. Zach Werenski's three assists give him 52 on the season and his second career 70-plus point season, tying him with Artemi Panarin for the most in team history. Jet Greaves made 22 saves for Columbus, which has won three straight.

**Blackhawks 2, Wild 1:** Connor Bedard scored a goal and defenseman Alex Vlasic made a game-saving stop as time ran out as Chicago won at Minnesota to snap the NHL's longest active point streak for one team against another.

Ilya Mikheyev also scored and Spencer Knight made 28 saves for the Blackhawks, who were 0-18-1 in their past 19 games against Minnesota. Chicago's last victory over the Wild was on Dec. 15, 2019.

With Jesper Wallstedt pulled for an extra attacker, the Wild nearly tied it in the final seconds. Knight got a piece of Quinn Hughes' shot, but the puck trickled behind him in the crease. Before a Minnesota player could get to it, the 6-foot-6 Vlasic swept his stick into the crease and tucked the puck beneath his goalie.

**Predators 3, Kraken 1:** Filip Forsberg scored a goal and added two assists and Justus Annunen made 25 saves to lead Nashville to a victory over visiting Seattle in a matchup of teams vying for a Western Conference wild card.

Ryan Ufko and Ryan O'Reilly also scored for the Predators, winners of two straight.

Frederick Gaudreau scored and Joey Daccord made 24 saves for the Kraken, who are 2-6 in their past eight games.

Nashville pulled even with the Kraken, both with 71 points, just outside the wild-card spots.

**Lightning 6, Canucks 2:** Nikita Kucherov and Anthony Cirelli each had a goal and two assists as visiting Tampa Bay beat NHL-worst Vancouver.

Kucherov moved into sole possession of second place in the NHL scoring race with 114 points, one behind Edmonton's Connor McDavid. Tampa Bay is second in the Atlantic Division, four points behind Buffalo.

**Mammoth 4, Golden Knights 0:** Karel Vejmelka stopped all 28 shots he faced, while Golden Knights counterpart Adin Hill was chased after allowing three goals without making a save in visiting Utah's victory at Vegas.

Vejmelka had his second shutout of the season and eighth in five NHL seasons to help Utah solidify its hold on the first wild-card spot in the Western Conference. The Mammoth built on a 6-3 home victory over Dallas on Monday night that snapped a four-game losing streak.

The Golden Knights, third in the Pacific Division, lost their second straight to finish a homestand 2-2.

**Sabres 5, Sharks 0:** Alex Lyon made 23 saves for his 10th straight road victory as Buffalo scored three times in a span of less than two minutes in the second period to beat host San Jose.

Sam Carrick scored twice, Rasmus Dahlin had a goal and an assist, and Noah Ostlund and Tage Thompson also scored to help the Sabres win for the 11th time in 12 games.

Lyon posted his seventh career shutout and moved one road win away from the longest streak in NHL history. San Jose's Evgeni Nabokov and Minnesota's Devan Dubnyk each won 11 straight on the road.

**Flyers 4, Kings 3 (SO):** Trevor Zegras and Matvei Michkov scored in a shootout to give visiting Philadelphia its fourth victory in five games.

Noah Cates had a goal and an assist, Travis Konecny and Travis Sanheim also scored, and Samuel Ersson made 22 saves.

The Flyers remained six points behind Boston and Detroit for the two Eastern Conference wild-card spots.