

## Afghan cease-fires offer a small respite

By J.P. LAWRENCE

*Stars and Stripes*

PUL-E-ALAM, Afghanistan — Cease-fires between the Taliban and Afghan troops allowed Hussain Qadri to visit his childhood home in a Taliban-contested village near a former U.S. base for the first time in two years.

The cease-fires, which were independently announced by the Taliban and the Afghan government to mark the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, brought respite to Joi Yak, the village where Qadri grew up and located within walking distance of Pul-e-Alam, the capital of the strategically important province of Logar, about 40 miles south of Kabul.

But while Qadri, like others in the village that day, welcomed any amount of peace, he worried that the fighting would resume after the holiday with increased ferocity.

“The three-day cease-fire was very good for the Taliban,” said Qadri, an adviser to Logar’s governor. “They take rest, they complete logistical movements, they plan for attacks after the cease-fire.”

The Taliban control much of Logar prov-

ince already and were fighting for more of it before the cease-fire. If a power-sharing agreement cannot be worked out, many here worry that the Taliban could use the area as a springboard to attack the nation’s capital.

“Logar is the gateway to Kabul,” said Humma Ahmadi, a member of parliament. The province is still recovering from an unclaimed bombing that killed at least 25, many of them students.

“It’s not the first time Logar has been attacked; it will not be the last,” she said.

Ahmadi met Friday in Pul-e-Alam with the provincial governor, Abdul Qayum Rahimi, whose armed convoy visited Qadri’s village. The governor wanted to meet with residents in areas normally too dangerous to visit. He and his men took selfies, listened to concerns and gave children money and cookies.

“This is the way governance should be; we have to lessen the distance between the government and the people,” Rahimi said.

But residents of the village seemed wary of the governor’s convoy. The village’s main

street was empty and people hid in their homes when the convoy arrived, only coming out to greet the governor after he left his vehicle to walk through the village on foot.

The reaction was a stark contrast to a cease-fire three years ago that led to mass celebrations in Pul-e-Alam and Logar province, with Taliban fighters coming to the city and rural citizens lining the streets to cheer on Afghan government troops.

The cease-fire this year proved more dour. Peace negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban led to a deal last year to pull out American and coalition troops, but fighting between Afghan and anti-government forces only intensified in the country, including in Joi Yak.

One resident, Abdul Hamid, said that while he welcomed the respite from violence, it wasn’t enough.

“I want it to be forever, not just three days,” Hamid said.

The governor, Rahimi, said he understands why the citizens are pessimistic.

“People see a war coming after the cease-fire,” he said.

## Israeli airstrike in Gaza destroys media building

*Associated Press*

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — An Israeli airstrike destroyed a high-rise building in Gaza City that housed offices of The Associated Press and other media outlets on Saturday, hours after another air raid on a densely populated refugee camp in the city killed at least 10 Palestinians from an extended family, mostly children.

The strike on the high-rise came nearly an hour after the military ordered people to evacuate the 12-story building, which also housed Al-Jazeera, other offices and residential apartments. The strike brought down the entire structure, which collapsed in a gigantic cloud of dust. There was no immediate explanation for why it was attacked.

The earlier Israeli airstrike on the Gaza City refugee camp was the deadliest single strike of the current conflict between Israel and the militant group Hamas. Both sides

are pressing for an advantage as cease-fire efforts gathered strength.

The latest outburst of violence started in Jerusalem and spread across the region over the past week, with Jewish-Arab clashes and rioting in mixed cities of Israel. There were also widespread Palestinian protests Friday in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli forces shot and killed 11 people.

The spiraling violence has raised fears of a new Palestinian “intifada,” or uprising at a time when there have been no peace talks in years.

Palestinians on Saturday were marking Nakba (Catastrophe) Day, when they commemorate the estimated 700,000 people who were expelled from or fled their homes in what was now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding its creation. That raised the possibility of even more unrest.

U.S. diplomat Hady Amr arrived Friday

as part of Washington’s efforts to de-escalate the conflict, and the U.N. Security Council was set to meet Sunday. But Israel turned down an Egyptian proposal for a one-year truce that Hamas rulers had accepted, an Egyptian official said Friday on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations.

Since Monday night, Hamas has fired hundreds of rockets into Israel, which has pounded the Gaza Strip with strikes. In Gaza, at least 139 people have been killed, including 39 children and 22 women; in Israel, eight people have been killed, including the death Saturday of a man killed by a rocket that hit in Ramat Gan, a suburb of Tel Aviv.

The strike on the building housing media offices came in the afternoon, after the building’s owner received a call from the Israeli military warning that it would be hit. AP’s staff and others in the building evacuated immediately.

# Washington adjusts to new mask rules

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Jill Biden says finally going mask-free feels like “we’re moving forward.” A Republican senator says going unmasked “certainly helps the flow of conversation.”

But the conversation on the House floor on Friday approached sniping as lawmakers objected to being required to keep masking up until all 435 of them get their COVID-19 shots.

Across Washington, the government is adjusting to new federal guidance easing up on when masks should be worn.

“So much for following the science,” Rep. Greg Murphy, R-N.C., a urologist, said after complaining that he’d have to put his mask back on after his House floor speech despite being fully vaccinated.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday that fully vaccinated people

— those who are two weeks past their last required dose of a COVID-19 vaccine — can stop wearing masks outdoors in crowds and in most indoor settings. Partially vaccinated or unvaccinated people should keep wearing masks, the guidance says.

But on Capitol Hill, lawmakers have to keep wearing masks on the House floor, according to a memo from the Office of the Attending Physician, Dr. Brian Monahan.

“The present mask requirement and other guidelines remain unchanged until all Members and Floor staff are fully vaccinated,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a memo to her Democratic colleagues. “Returning the Capitol to the welcoming and safe venue that it has been requires us to not only secure it physically but to make it safe from the virus.”

Recent surveys suggest that about 1 in 4 House lawmakers are not fully vaccinated.

Lawmakers can remove their masks while on the House floor to make speeches, but must mask up after they finish. They are, however, free to resume “pre-pandemic activities” elsewhere in the House complex of office buildings and public spaces.

In the Senate, Republicans Susan Collins of Maine and Joni Ernst of Iowa were among senators who didn’t hesitate to remove their masks as soon as they heard the news. They were seen entering the Senate chamber Thursday marveling at being mask-free and calling out, “Freedom!”

Senate leadership has not commented on the updated mask guidance, which came down as Biden and a group of Republican senators discussed

infrastructure in the Oval Office.

“So we all looked at each other ... we took all of our masks off,” Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., told Fox News on Friday. “It felt very freeing, and we had a great discussion after that. We all felt good about it, and it certainly helps the flow of conversation.”

It was a much different scene Friday at the White House.

Reporters caught up with President Joe Biden as he made an unannounced appearance on the White House driveway to pose for photos with a departing staff member. Asked if he was enjoying his first workday without a mask, Biden replied “yes” as he reentered the West Wing.

For the first time in about a year, reporters went barefaced as they questioned White House press secretary Jen Psaki at the daily briefing.

## Energy director: Gas service back to normal soon

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm says the nation is “over the hump” on gas shortages following a ransomware cyberattack that forced a shutdown of the nation’s largest gasoline pipeline.

Problems peaked Thursday night, and service should return to normal in most areas by the end of the weekend, Granholm said Friday in an interview with The Associated Press.

“The good news is that ... gas station outages are down about 12% from the peak” as of Friday afternoon, with about 200 stations returning to service every hour, she said. “It’s still going to work its way through the system over the next few days, but we should be back to normal fairly soon.”

A cyberattack by hackers who lock up computer systems and demand a ransom to release them hit the Colonial Pipeline on May 7. The hackers didn’t take control of pipeline operations, but the Georgia-based

company shut it down to prevent malware from affecting industrial control systems.

The Colonial Pipeline stretches from Texas to New Jersey and delivers about 45% of the gasoline consumed on the East Coast. The shutdown has caused shortages at the pumps throughout the South and emptied stations in the Washington, D.C., area.

President Joe Biden said U.S. officials do not believe the Russian government was involved, but said “we do have strong reason to believe that the criminals who did the attack are living in Russia.”

As Colonial reported making “substantial progress” Friday in restoring full service, two people briefed on the matter confirmed the company had paid a ransom of about \$5 million.

Granholm, like other Biden administration officials, urged drivers not to panic or hoard gasoline.

“Really, the gasoline is coming,” she said. “If you take more than what you need, it be-

comes a self-fulfilling prophecy in terms of the shortages. Let’s share a little bit with our neighbors and everybody should know that it’s going to be okay in the next few days.”

Granholm’s agency is leading the federal response to the ransomware attack. She said the incident shows the vulnerability not only of U.S. infrastructure, but also personal computers. Her 86-year-old mother recently suffered a ransomware attack on her iPad, Granholm said.

“So it’s just happening everywhere,” she said. “All these cybercriminals see an opportunity in the cloud and in our connectivity. And so we all have to be very vigilant. That means we’ve got to have security systems on our devices and individually we shouldn’t be clicking on any email with attachments from people you don’t know. I mean it’s just around us.”

Biden signed an executive order on cybersecurity this week, and the Energy Department and other agencies are working to protect critical infrastructure, she said.

# US warns of extremist threats as rules ease

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A national terrorism alert issued Friday warns that violent extremists may take advantage of the easing of pandemic restrictions to conduct attacks.

The alert does not cite any specific threats. But it warns of potential danger from an increasingly complex and volatile mix that includes domestic terrorists inspired by various grievances, racial or ethnic hatred and influences from abroad.

Those threats were exacerbated by COVID-19, which spawned conspiracy theories and deepened anger at the government in some quarters over the shutdown of the economy.

As virus conditions improve, the alert says new dangers loom.

“Violent extremists may seek to exploit the easing of COVID-19-related restrictions across the United States to conduct attacks against a broader range of targets after previous public capacity limits reduced opportunities for lethal attacks,” the bulletin said.

The National Terrorism Advisory System bulletin issued by the Department of Homeland Security is an extension of one issued earlier this year in the wake of the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. That alert was due to expire Saturday.

The bulletin, which expires Aug. 13, warned of the lingering potential for vio-

lence from people motivated by antigovernment sentiment after President Joe Biden’s election, suggesting the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol may have emboldened extremists and set the stage for additional attacks.

That sentiment is still present, with the latest alert noting online calls for violence against politicians, law enforcement, and government buildings.

“Many of the threats outlined in today’s bulletin persist from the long shadow cast by the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol,” said Rep. Bennie Thompson, a Mississippi Democrat who serves as chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security.

# Legislator's behavior may lead to review

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A year before her election to Congress, Marjorie Taylor Greene searched for Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez at her Capitol office, taunting the New York Democrat to “get rid of your diaper” and “talk to the American citizens,” as shown in video unearthed by CNN.

“I am an American citizen. I pay your salary through the taxes that you collect from me through the IRS,” Greene says through the mail slot of a locked door. “I am a woman. I am a female business owner and I’m proud to be an American woman. And I do not support your socialist policies.”

The Georgia Republican continued: “If you want to be a big girl, you need to get rid of your diaper and come out and be able to talk to the American citizens.” Two men appear along

with her in the video, also mocking Ocasio-Cortez and her staff through the mail slot.

The release of the since-deleted video, which was initially broadcast in February 2019 on Facebook Live, came the same week that Greene followed Ocasio-Cortez off the House floor, shouting that the Democrat supported “terrorists” and doesn’t “care about the American people,” as first reported by The Washington Post. She has been challenging Ocasio-Cortez to a debate on Twitter, entreaties that Ocasio-Cortez had been ignoring.

Asked Friday about the “context” of the 2019 video, Greene told reporters, “Walking around and talking to members of Congress who serve the taxpayers that, now we’ve got taxpayers aren’t even allowed to come talk to us, that’s the context.”

The incidents add to a portrait of the activ-

ist-turned-lawmaker who has shown little interest in governing, but has instead used her platform to float conspiracy theories, push Donald Trump’s false claims about a stolen 2020 election and further her own notoriety. Her combativeness toward colleagues has only grown after an unprecedented rebuke where the House stripped her of committee assignments, effectively ending her ability to shape legislation.

Greene’s behavior has alarmed some members of Congress, where feelings remain raw after the deadly Jan. 6 storming of the Capitol by a mob of Trump supporters intent on overturning the outcome of the 2020 election.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Greene’s behavior was “beyond the pale” and raised the possibility of an ethics investigation.

# Tiger search continues as alleged owner back in jail

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Texas — While a Texas man who police allege is the owner of a tiger that frightened residents after it was seen briefly wandering around a Houston neighborhood was ordered back behind bars on Friday, the animal’s whereabouts remain a mystery.

An all-day court hearing Friday didn’t reveal any new information on the tiger’s whereabouts as Houston police say about 300 tips they’ve so far received haven’t panned out.

Police allege Victor Hugo Cuevas is the owner of the tiger, a 9-month old male named India, and he is facing a charge of evading ar-

rest after authorities allege he fled from Houston officers who responded to a call about a dangerous animal on Sunday night.

After a court hearing in a separate case Cuevas, 26, is facing in neighboring Fort Bend County, his attorney, Michael W. Elliott, reiterated his client doesn’t own the tiger. Elliott said he only knew the first name of the owner, that he has been working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to find India and that Cuevas only wants for the animal to be safe.

At a separate news conference in Houston earlier Friday, police Cmdr. Ron Borza said some of the tips officers have received on the

tiger’s possible location have been “a little bit crazy.”

“We know the group of people that are involved in the exotic animal trade here in Houston ... We have visited all of them and no luck so far,” Borza said.

Investigators believe the tiger has likely been passed around between six and eight different locations in Houston in an effort to hide it but that the animal is probably still in the city, Borza said.

Carole Baskin, from the Netflix’s docuseries “Tiger King,” has offered a \$5,000 reward for the tiger’s safe return.

## Flames engulf cargo ship's remains in Ga.

*Associated Press*

SAVANNAH, Ga. — The remains of an overturned cargo ship being dismantled along the Georgia coast caught fire Friday as workers used torches to cut into the hull, sending up black smoke and causing loud bangs that sounded like explosions.

The multiagency command overseeing demolition of the Golden Ray said in a statement late Friday that crews had put out the fire, which burned for several hours, and would remain on the scene overnight in case the blaze flared up again.

Susan Inman of the Altamaha Riverkeeper conservation group told The Associated Press she could see flames shooting from the open ends and the top of the Golden Ray on Friday afternoon as she watched from a boat about 300 yards away near St. Simons Island. She also heard several loud popping sounds from the shipwreck.

Several hours later, the fire was being sprayed with hoses from the towering crane being used to dismantle the ship as well as at least two boats equipped with water cannons.

"It's kind of like a roller coaster where it seems to die down for about 20 minutes or half an hour, and then it picks back up again," Inman said.

No injuries were reported and all demolition crew members near the shipwreck were safely evacuated, said Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Himes, a spokesman for the multiagency command in charge of the demolition.

Himes said it was too early to know how much the blaze might further delay efforts to remove roughly one-half of the shipwreck that remains partly submerged in St. Simons Sound. Once it's safe for workers to return to the wreck, he said, an engineering analysis will be performed to determine the extent of the fire damage.

The South Korean-owned Golden Ray measured 656 feet long when it overturned on Sept. 8, 2019. A towering crane that straddles the wreck is cutting the ship into giant chunks using 400 feet of anchor chain to tear through the hull like a blunt-edged saw.

An active 2020 hurricane season and the coronavirus pandemic kept demolition from starting until November. Though the job reached the halfway mark in April, progress has been slower than initially expected.

## Chinese spacecraft lands on Mars for the 1st time

*Associated Press*

BEIJING — China landed a spacecraft on Mars for the first time on Saturday, a technically challenging feat more difficult than a moon landing, in the latest step forward for its ambitious goals in space.

Plans call for a rover to stay in the lander for a few days of diagnostic tests before rolling down a ramp to explore an area of Mars known as Utopia Planitia. It will join an American rover that arrived at the red planet in February.

China's first Mars landing follows its launch last month of the main section of what will be a permanent space station and a mission that brought back rocks from the moon late last year.

"China has left a footprint on Mars for the first time, an important step for our country's space exploration," the official Xinhua News Agency said in announcing the landing on one of its social media accounts.

The U.S. has had nine successful landings on Mars since 1976. The Soviet Union landed on the planet in 1971, but the mission failed after the craft stopped transmitting information soon after touchdown.

A rover and a tiny helicopter from the American landing in February are currently exploring Mars.

China has landed on the moon before but landing on Mars is a much more difficult undertaking. Spacecraft use shields for protection from the searing heat of entering the Martian atmosphere, and use both retro-rockets and parachutes to slow down enough to prevent a crash landing. The parachutes and rockets must be deployed at precise times to land at the designated spot. Only mini-retro rockets are required for a moon landing, and parachutes alone are sufficient for returning to Earth.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, in a congratulatory letter to the mission team, called the landing "an important step in our country's interplanetary exploration journey, realizing the leap from Earth-moon to the planetary system and leaving the mark of the Chinese on Mars for the first time ... The motherland and people will always remember your outstanding feats!"

NASA Associate Administrator Thomas Zurbuchen tweeted his congratulations, saying, "Together with the global science community, I look forward to the important contributions this mission will make to humanity's understanding of the Red Planet."

The rover, named after the Chinese god of fire Zhurong, is expected to be deployed for 90 days to search for evidence of life.

## Back-to-back tornadoes hit central, eastern China, causing fatalities

*Associated Press*

BEIJING — Back-to-back tornadoes killed 12 people in central and eastern China and left more than 300 others injured, authorities said Saturday.

Eight people died in the inland city of Wuhan on Friday night and four others in the town of Shengze, about 250 miles east in Jiangsu province, local governments said.

The first tornado struck Shengze about 7 p.m., damaging homes and factories and knocking out power, the official Xinhua News Agency reported. The Suzhou city government, which oversees the town, said in a social media post that four people had died and 149 others had minor injuries. Shengze is near Shanghai on China's east coast.

Another tornado hit Wuhan at about 8:40 p.m. with winds of 53 miles per hour, destroying more than two dozen homes and triggering a power outage affecting 26,600 households, Xinhua said. Officials in Wuhan said at a news conference Saturday that eight had died and 230 were injured.

They said that 28 homes collapsed in Wuhan, another 130 were damaged and put economic losses at \$5.7 million, the Hubei Daily newspaper said. Construction site sheds and two cranes were also damaged, while downed power lines knocked out electricity, Xinhua said.

Photos showed a swarm of rescuers searching through building debris in Wuhan after midnight Friday and workers clearing metallic debris at a factory in Shengze in the morning.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Lady poses as student to push Instagram page

**FL** MIAMI — A woman who wanted to promote her Instagram page attempted to blend in with students at a Miami-area high school, police said.

The stunt at American Senior High School landed Audrey Francisquini, 28, in jail, where she's facing charges of burglary, interfering with a school function and resisting arrest without violence, records show.

Francisquini started handing out pamphlets printed with her Instagram account after sneaking onto the campus, police said. She had a black backpack and carried a skateboard as she walked through the hallways, recording herself.

Authorities tracked her down through her Instagram page and arrested her later at her home in North Miami Beach.

### Student blamed for cyberattack on school

**MA** AGAWAM — A student was behind a cyberattack on a Massachusetts school system that temporarily shut down the district's computer network, disrupted remote learning and forced the postponement of exams, officials said.

The attack on the Agawam school district prevented students and staff from logging on to the system and sending emails, WWLP-TV reported.

Agawam Junior High School staff questioned students and at least one admitted to being involved, Mayor Bill Sapelli told the station.

Police are investigating, but

no charges have been filed.

### Teacher charged with growing marijuana

**NC** LELAND — A middle school teacher in North Carolina grew large quantities of marijuana using a greenhouse at her home, authorities said.

Catherine Teague, 47, was charged with manufacturing and trafficking marijuana and possession with intent to sell or deliver, according to a warrant from the Brunswick County Sheriff's Office obtained by news outlets. Deputies said they discovered about 25 pounds of the drug.

Also known as Catherine Nelly, Teague resigned from her job as a sixth grade math and science teacher at Leland Middle School after her arrest, news outlets reported.

### Cat fleeing fire survives 5-story jump, walks off

**IL** CHICAGO — A Chicago cat may now have eight lives after jumping out of a fifth-floor window to escape an apartment fire.

Chicago Fire Department personnel were taking a video of the exterior of the building as firefighters were extinguishing the blaze when a black cat appeared through billowing smoke at a broken window. The fire-fleeing feline briefly tested the side of the building with its front paws, and then jumped.

Onlookers gasped as the cat fell. But it missed a wall as it hurtled downward and instead landed on all four paws atop grass, where it bounced once and immediately ran away.

The cat was not injured, fire department spokesman Larry Langford said.

### Couple fakes story of infant in stolen pickup

**AZ** PHOENIX — A couple whose pickup truck was stolen fabricated a story about a baby being in the vehicle because they wanted police to respond rapidly to the reported theft, a Phoenix Police Department spokeswoman said.

Stormee Wagner, 40, and James E. Wagner, 37, were arrested after investigators became suspicious and determined that there was no infant in the truck taken by a man and a woman whom the couple had just met, Sgt. Mercedes Fortune said, according to KTAR-FM. Jail records indicated that they were arrested on suspicion of making a false report to law enforcement.

The report by the couple, who said they were caring for an 18-month-old girl who was in the vehicle driven away from a convenience store, had prompted police to launch an "intensive and exhaustive search" that included 50 officers and a police helicopter, Fortune said.

### Man accused of fleeing police, hiding at zoo

**NE** OMAHA — A man, 33, is accused of fleeing police and trying to hide at Omaha's zoo.

KETV-TV reported that officers on patrol noticed a wanted man driving a Chevy Silverado. When they tried to stop him, the man sped away.

Police said they later learned

that the suspect jumped a fence from Interstate 80 and went on to the grounds of the Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium.

Officers found the man near the elephant exhibit.

### 1 arrested in connection with Hitler stickers

**RI** BRISTOL — Police in Bristol announced an arrest in connection with the posting of stickers bearing an image of Adolf Hitler in town.

Chase Gilroy, 26, of Warwick, turned himself in after an arrest warrant was issued, Police Chief Kevin Lynch said in a statement.

Gilroy was released on personal recognizance on charges of vandalism and conspiracy to commit vandalism. He's due back in court June 18.

### New bill: Juneteenth to be a paid, state holiday

**WA** OLYMPIA — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee signed a measure making Juneteenth a legal state paid holiday, starting in 2022.

Juneteenth — also known as Emancipation Day and Freedom Day — commemorates when the last enslaved African Americans learned they were free on June 19, 1865 in Galveston, Texas, where Union soldiers brought them the news two years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

In 2007, the Legislature designated Juneteenth as a day of remembrance. South Dakota and Hawaii are the only other states that don't have some sort of official observance of Juneteenth.

-From The Associated Press

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# NBA still has much left to determine

*Associated Press*

The play-in field isn't quite set.

And nobody knows who'll play anybody yet.

Welcome to the final weekend of the NBA's regular season, with every first-round playoff matchup — even every play-in game matchup — still undecided, and the defending champion Los Angeles Lakers needing two wins in the season's final two days to avoid the play-in round.

Even with the uncertainty, the Lakers are still the second choice among FanDuel bettors to win the NBA title and the favorites to win the Western Conference. That's without them even knowing yet if they'll be in the postseason.

## Friday developments

■ The NBA released the play-in schedule. The first two games in the East — No. 8 at No. 7, which will be Boston, and No. 10 at No. 9 will be Tuesday. In the West, those games will be Wednesday, with the only known slot being that San Antonio will be No. 10. The East play-in concludes Thursday, the West concludes Friday. (For those still learning the format, the 7 vs. 8 winner will be the No.

7 seed, the 9 vs. 10 loser is eliminated, and the 9 vs. 10 winner will play at the 7 vs. 8 loser for the No. 8 seed.)

■ Washington clinched the last remaining Eastern Conference play-in berth by beating Cleveland, a result that ended Chicago's playoff hopes. The East play-in field will be No. 7 Boston, followed in some order by Charlotte, Indiana and Washington.

■ Dallas beat Toronto to clinch no worse than No. 6 in the Western Conference and will avoid the play-in round.

■ Memphis beat Sacramento, setting up a game at Golden State on Sunday that will essentially serve as a play-in to the play-in. The winner of the Grizzlies-Warriors game will be the No. 8 seed entering the West play-in round, while the loser will be No. 9 and must go 2-0 in the play-in games to make the playoffs.

■ Philadelphia clinched the No. 1 seed in the Eastern Conference by beating Orlando.

## The West

The good news for the Lakers is LeBron James was listed as questionable for Saturday at Indiana, and the fact that he wasn't listed as out probably

meant he'd attempt to play for just the third time in his team's last 29 games because of an ankle injury.

The bad news is the Lakers need two wins to escape No. 7, and even that might not be enough.

The Lakers' only hope is two wins — and a Portland loss to Denver on Sunday. If Portland wins its regular-season finale, the Lakers are play-in bound, regardless of anything else.

Sunday's Blazers-Nuggets matchup is interesting for both sides; the Blazers will avoid the play-in with a win, while the Nuggets are tied with the Los Angeles Clippers for the third-best record in the West at 47-24. The Clippers lost at Houston on Friday, notable because they slipped back to No. 4 in the West race (Denver holds the tiebreaker there) and now, no matter what, cannot play the Lakers in Round 1 of the playoffs.

## The East

The jostling to see who will finish eighth, ninth and 10th going into the play-in will be wild. Charlotte and Indiana are both 33-37, Washington is 33-38, yet all three clubs entered the weekend seeing scenarios that put them in any of the three

available play-in slots.

Charlotte played at New York on Saturday while the Pacers simultaneously played host to the Lakers. On Sunday, Indiana goes to Tampa, Fla., to finish against Toronto while the Hornets play in Washington.

If there are ties, Charlotte holds tiebreakers over both the Pacers and Wizards. Washington would win a tiebreaker over Indiana.

The race for the No. 2 seed could've ended Saturday if Brooklyn beat Chicago and Milwaukee lost to Miami. If both of those results happened, Brooklyn has the 2 seed.

Otherwise, that race goes to Sunday.

Brooklyn is 46-24, a game ahead of 45-25 Milwaukee — but the Bucks hold the head-to-head tiebreaker. Brooklyn plays host to Cleveland on Sunday, while Milwaukee finishes at Chicago.

And seeds 4, 5 and 6 in the East will go, in some order, to Atlanta (40-31), Miami (39-31) and New York (39-31). The Hawks finish Sunday against Houston. Miami played Milwaukee on Saturday and plays Detroit on Sunday. New York played Charlotte on Saturday and plays Boston on Sunday.

# 76ers wrap up top seed in Eastern Conference

*Associated Press*

PHILADELPHIA — Joel Embiid and the 76ers are happy to have earned home-court advantage for the playoffs — but they are a long way from their goal.

Seth Curry scored 20 points, Embiid had 13 points and 11 rebounds and Philadelphia clinched the top seed in the Eastern Conference with a 122-97 victory over the Orlando Magic on Friday night.

Ben Simmons added 13 points and nine assists to help the 76ers improve to 48-23. Philadelphia could've clinched earlier this week, but lost at Indiana on Tuesday and at Miami on Thursday.

**Wizards 120, Cavaliers 105:** Russell West-

brook had his first triple-double since passing Oscar Robertson and becoming the NBA's career leader, lifting host Washington past Cleveland and helping his team clinch a spot in the play-in tournament.

**Mavericks 114, Raptors 110:** Luka Doncic had his 11th triple-double of the season with 20 points, 10 rebounds and 11 assists and host Dallas guaranteed a top-six finish in the Western Conference to avoid the NBA's play-in next week, beating Toronto.

**Jazz 109, Thunder 93:** Bojan Bogdanovic scored 22 points and visiting Utah beat Oklahoma to inch closer to claiming the top overall seed.

**Nuggets 104, Pistons 91:** Markus Howard

scored a career-high 20 points, Nikola Jokic had a triple-double and visiting Denver beat Detroit to move closer to a higher playoff seed.

**Rockets 122, Clippers 115:** Kelly Olynyk scored 20 points and fell a rebound shy of a triple-double as host Houston snapped a seven-game skid with a victory over a Los Angeles team that rested several starters.

**Warriors 125, Pelicans 122:** Jordan Poole scored a career-high 38 points despite an injury scare in the third quarter and host Golden State held off New Orleans.

**Grizzlies 107, Kings 106:** Justise Winslow had season highs with 25 points and 13 rebounds and host Memphis held on to beat Sacramento.

## Jets top Toronto in finale

Associated Press

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Kyle Connor scored twice and the Winnipeg Jets beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-2 on Friday night in the regular-season finale for both teams.

"It's always good for confidence, everyone loves to score," Connor said.

Mason Appleton and Jansen Harkins, with an empty-netter, also scored and Connor Hellebuyck made 34 saves to help the Jets finish 30-23-3.

Pierre Engvall and Ilya Mikheyev scored and Jack Campbell stopped 20 shots for North Division champion Toronto. The Maple Leafs finished 35-14-7.

Toronto gave forward Mitch Marner the night off, with Adam Brooks taking his spot on a line with Auston Matthews and Alex Galchenyuk.

The game meant little as both teams already have their first-round playoff matches set.

The Jets start their first-round series with the Oilers on Wednesday night in Edmonton, while the Maple Leafs welcome Montreal for Game 1 on Thursday night — the first postseason meeting between the Original Six rivals since 1979.

"Looking forward to it, kind of a sense of excitement in that room," Jets coach Paul Maurice said. "You win a game, feel good, and you get to play fun games now."

"You go through the regular season and the grind of it to get to the playoffs," Maple Leafs forward Jason Spezza said. "For me, I think our team is very excited to play in the playoffs. I think we're built for the playoffs. I think we're a team that has a chance to have a lot of success. Now we're just getting excited to get going."

# No secrets, no certainty in one-of-a-kind playoffs

Associated Press

There will be no mysteries when Tampa Bay and Florida meet in the first round of the NHL playoffs after facing off eight times this season and twice in the past week. Same deal for Montreal and Toronto, who have played 10 times since mid-January.

"I don't want to say it takes kind of some of the fun out of it, but it does because you know a lot more what to expect," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said.

A strange NHL regular season has given way to a one-of-a-kind playoff tournament for the Stanley Cup. It will feature an opening two rounds of all divisional play for the first time in almost 30 years and re-seed the final four to crown a champion for the first time in league history.

"It's just another thing about our year that's incredibly unique," Vegas general manager Kelly McCrimmon said Friday. "You could see matchups that you would generally only see in a Stanley Cup Final situation, so that's going to add another layer of uniqueness to an already unique season."

It's so unique that by the time Calgary and Vancouver finish their regular seasons, some first-round playoff series will be two games old. A total of 57 games were postponed this season — 51 for virus-related reasons — so the playoffs opened a few days later than planned when Washington hosted Boston on Saturday night.

After expanding to 24 teams to complete the 2020 season, the playoff field is back to the traditional 16 with four from each temporarily realigned division. The first two rounds are a return to the divisional playoff format the NHL used from

1982-93, and things should be even spicier after a season of all divisional play.

"There's really no secrets," said Carolina's Rod Brind'Amour, one of six head coaches in the playoffs who played in that old format. "It's going to be too much going on, both teams trying to do the same things and we're each in each other's way, so something's going to give."

Cooper thinks Game 1 of each series will better resemble a Game 2 or 3 since teams won't need any time to get familiar with each other. They've had at least eight chances to get acquainted over the past four months.

"Bad blood's already there, typically if you've played a team eight times and both teams are in the playoffs," Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said. "Instead of sort of a buildup over time where gradually you get to Game 4 and all of a sudden now the nastiness starts, you'll just see it sooner. Familiarity will breed contempt quicker."

Nashville GM David Poile believes that familiarity will also breed better series. The league has tried for years to gin up rivalries, and while these aren't the circumstances anyone wanted, there's no love lost in any of the eight first-round matchups.

"There's been a lot to, I guess, not like about this year, but one of the things is playing these same teams and building up these rivalries," Poile said. "It's really, really good, and I think it's going to make for good hockey."

There will likely be different styles of hockey across the divisions: Nashville-Carolina and Tampa Bay-Florida in the Central, Boston-Washington and

the New York Islanders vs. Pittsburgh in the East, St. Louis-Colorado and Minnesota-Vegas in the West and Montreal-Toronto and Winnipeg-Edmonton in the North. For one, there are still no fans allowed in arenas in Canada, while every arena in the U.S. will have a crowd of at least 4,000 to start the playoffs.

"By this time, I think we're pretty used to it with no fans," Winnipeg forward Nate Thompson said. "In the bubble (last summer), every team had to create their own momentum, their own excitement."

There's no bubble this time, and the NHL is even relaxing pandemic protocols for each team that has 85% of its traveling party fully vaccinated. Even after he and the Lightning won the Cup in quarantine as bubble hockey champions, Tampa Bay center Yanni Gourde said "it's a completely different vibe" this year and is excited to get back to sharing the playoffs with family.

"It does feel a lot more normal, or like it used to be in the years past," Bruins captain Patrice Bergeron said. "Traveling, two games on the road, two games back at home and then 1-1-1, so it's back to regular playoffs, and kind of looking forward to that."

Hockey players and coaches know better than to look too far forward. But reseeding the final four provides the potential for cross-continental semifinals and Cup Final matchups that would ordinarily never be possible.

Boston and Toronto could meet for the Cup after several recent first-round series. It could be Washington-Carolina, Edmonton-Vegas or Nashville-St. Louis.

# Retired Black players demand equal treatment for brain-injury payouts

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Thousands of retired Black professional football players, their families and supporters are demanding an end to the controversial use of “race-norming” to determine which players are eligible for payouts in the NFL’s \$1 billion settlement of brain injury claims, a system experts say is discriminatory.

Former Washington running back Ken Jenkins, 60, and his wife Amy Lewis on Friday delivered 50,000 petitions demanding equal treatment for Black players to Senior U.S. District Judge Anita B. Brody in Philadelphia, who is overseeing the massive settlement. Former players who suffer dementia or other diagnoses can be eligible for a payout.

Under the settlement, however, the NFL has insisted on using a scoring algorithm on the dementia testing that assumes Black men start with lower cognitive skills. They must therefore score much lower than whites to show enough mental decline to win an award. The practice, which went unnoticed until 2018, has made it harder for Black former players to get awards.

“My reaction was, ‘Well, here we go again,’ ” said Jenkins. “It’s the same old nonsense for Black folks, to have to deal with some insidious, convoluted deals that are being made.” Jenkins is now an insurance executive and is not experiencing any cognitive problems, but has plenty of NFL friends who are less fortunate.

In March, Brody threw out a civil rights lawsuit that claimed the practice is discriminatory. But she later said in a filing that the practice raised “a very important issue” and asked a magistrate judge to compile a re-

port on the problem. She told The Associated Press she did not know when it would be completed.

Class counsel Chris Seeger, through his spokesman, has said he wants to end the practice of race-norming and investigate any awards that were affected by adjustments in the past.

“We are investigating whether any claims have been impacted by a physician’s decision to apply such an adjustment. If we discover an adjustment has been inappropriately applied, I will fight for the rights of Black players to have those claims restored,” Seeger said.

NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy has declined to comment on the issue in the past, and did not immediately return an email seeking comment Friday.

The majority of the league’s 20,000 retirees are Black. And only a quarter of the more than 2,000 men who sought awards for early to moderate dementia have qualified under the testing program. Lawyers for Black players have asked for details on how the \$800 million in settlement payouts so far have broken along racial lines, but have yet to receive them.

Race norming is sometimes used in medicine as a rough proxy for socioeconomic factors that can affect someone’s health. Experts in neurology said the way it’s used in the NFL settlement is too simplistic and restrictive, and has the effect of systematically discriminating against Black players.

Jenkins, the former Washington player, believes it all comes down to money.

“Race-norming may have had a benign origin, but it quickly morphed into a tool that can be used to help the folks in power save money,” he said.

# Mariners’ Kelenic homers for 1st major league hit

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Jarred Kelenic hit a two-run homer for his first major league hit and tacked on two doubles, leading the Seattle Mariners to a 7-3 win over the Cleveland Indians on Friday night.

After going hitless in his big league debut Thursday, Kelenic brought the crowd to its feet with a drive to right-center against Aaron Civale in the third inning. The ball was clocked at 109.3 mph off the bat and Kelenic’s sprint around the bases seemed just as fast.

Kyle Seager and Mitch Haniger also connected for Seattle.

**Padres 5, Cardinals 4:** Joe Musgrove got through five innings for his first victory since throwing a no-hitter on April 9, and host San Diego beat St. Louis in their first meeting since the Padres eliminated the Cardinals from the playoffs last year.

Musgrove (3-4) had lost four decisions in five starts since pitching the first no-hitter in Padres history at Texas. He held the Cardinals to one run and five hits while striking out five and walking four.

**Nationals 17, Diamondbacks 2:** Trea Turner hit his 14th career leadoff homer and Yan Gomes had five hits, powering visiting Washington to the run-away win.

The 17 runs were a season high for the Nationals, who also had a season-high 22 hits.

**Dodgers 9, Marlins 6:** Max Muncy hit a three-run homer during host Los Angeles’ eight-run second inning, and Clayton Kershaw racked up a season-high 11 strikeouts.

**Rays 3, Mets 2:** At St. Petersburg, Fla., Brett Phillips hit an RBI single with two outs in the ninth inning, and the Rays stopped the Mets’ seven-game winning streak.

**Yankees 5, Orioles 4:** Aaron Judge went deep twice and Gio Urshela delivered a key pinch-

hit shot, leading banged-up New York to the road win.

**Royals 6-1, White Sox 2-3:** Rookie Andrew Vaughn, starting the nightcap at first base after AL MVP Jose Abreu was injured in a frightening collision in the first game, homered to lead host Chicago to a double-header split.

The Royals ended an 11-game slide in the opener, stopping the White Sox’s six-game winning streak.

**Rockies 9, Reds 6:** Garrett Hampson led off the first inning with a triple, one of 15 hits for Colorado, and the host Rockies spoiled Wade Miley’s encore to his first career no-hitter.

**Phillies 5, Blue Jays 1:** At Dugout, Fla., Rhys Hoskins hit a three-run double during Philadelphia’s five-run seventh inning.

**Astros 10, Rangers 4:** Martín Maldonado homered and drove in three runs to back seven solid innings from Zack Greinke, and host Houston earned its fourth straight victory.

**Braves 6, Brewers 3:** Marcell Ozuna and Ozzie Albies hit his team’s first back-to-back homers of the season to help visiting Atlanta snap a three-game skid.

**Red Sox 4, Angels 3:** Hunter Renfroe and Bobby Dalbec each hit a two-run homer, lifting host Boston to the win.

**Athletics 6, Twins 1:** At Minneapolis, Ramón Laureano hit the first of Oakland’s four homers, and Frankie Montas pitched six effective innings.

**Pirates 3, Giants 2 (11):** Host Pittsburgh’s Adam Frazier tripled home the tying run in the 11th inning with his fourth hit of the game and scored the winner on Gregory Polanco’s sacrifice fly.

**Cubs 4, Tigers 2:** Kris Bryant hit a two-run homer, and visiting Chicago snapped Detroit’s four-game winning streak.