

## Amid Russia tensions, NATO conducts war games

*Associated Press*

**ABOARD HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH**—As tensions with Russia simmer, thousands of NATO troops, several warships and dozens of aircraft are taking part in military exercises stretching across the Atlantic, through Europe and into the Black Sea region.

The war games, dubbed Steadfast Defender 21, are aimed at simulating the 30-nation military organization's response to an attack on any one of its members. It will test NATO's ability to deploy troops from America and keep supply lines open.

Already in recent years, the United States and its allies have deployed troops and equipment in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to try to reassure those members neighboring Russia that their partners will ride to the rescue should they come under attack.

Russia's decision last month to send thousands of troops to the border area with Ukraine has

raised concern at the military alliance, which launched one of its biggest ever defense spending initiatives after Russian troops annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014.

Top NATO brass insist that the military exercises, involving some 9,000 troops from 20 nations, are not aimed at Russia specifically, but they focus on the Black Sea region, where Russia stands accused of blocking the free navigation of ships.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg says the exercises send an important message to any potential adversary: "NATO is ready."

"NATO is there to defend all our allies, and this exercise sends a message about our ability to transport a large number of troops, equipment across the Atlantic, across Europe and also to project maritime power," Stoltenberg told The Associated Press aboard a British aircraft carrier off the coast of Portugal.

The ship, the HMS Queen Elizabeth, is the pride of the British Navy. It's making its maiden voyage and carrying 18 F-35 jets: the first ever deployment of so many of the 5th generation planes aboard an aircraft carrier.

The ship's presence, part of a 6-7 month deployment that will take it south past India, through Southeast Asia to the Philippines Sea, is aimed in part at restoring Britain's tarnished image as a major global power since it left the European Union.

Adorned with high-tech U.S. jets and flanked by warships from other NATO countries, the carrier strike force also stands as an important symbol of unity as the world's biggest security organization tries to recover from four tumultuous years under the Trump administration.

Stoltenberg will chair a NATO summit in Brussels on June 14 with U.S. President Joe Biden and his counterparts keen to usher in a new era of trans-Atlantic cooper-

ation, as troops leave its longest-ever mission in Afghanistan while tensions with Russia, and increasingly China, mount.

The war games tie in two new NATO command centers, one in Norfolk, Va.; the other in Ulm, Germany. Part of the focus of its first phase was to protect the undersea cables that carry masses of commercial and communications data between the U.S. and Europe.

NATO says Russia is mapping the cables' routing and might have darker intentions.

"We all lulled ourselves into thinking that the Atlantic was a benign region in which there was not anything bad going on, and we could just use it as a free highway," Norfolk's commander, U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Andrew Lewis said.

"There are nations out there mapping those cables. They may be doing something else bad. We have to be aware of that and answer that," he told reporters.

## Austin: US troops' Afghanistan exit ahead of schedule

**BY COREY DICKSTEIN**  
*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. drawdown from Afghanistan is "slightly ahead" of schedule, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told lawmakers Thursday, as the military worked to remove all its forces from the country where it has fought for nearly two decades.

Austin provided no additional details about the drawdown effort in Afghanistan, where U.S. troops have remained since first invading in October 2001 just weeks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. He offered the update on the withdrawal that began May 1 and are scheduled to be complete by Sept. 11 during a hearing Thursday before the House Appropriations Committee's defense subpanel.

"We accomplished the mission

for which our troops were sent to Afghanistan," Austin said in his opening remarks. "I am proud of that and of the brave men and women who made it possible, and those who gave their lives for that mission."

Austin testified Thursday alongside Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in the hearing called ostensibly to review the Pentagon's fiscal year 2022 budget request. But the hearing lacked specifics of that forthcoming spending plan, which is set to be unveiled by the White House on Friday.

The Defense Department will request some \$715 billion in President Joe Biden's first federal budget proposal, which would keep Pentagon spending essentially at the

same levels as it was under former President Donald Trump. News reports on Thursday, including from The New York Times and The Washington Post, revealed Biden's federal budget request would call for a total of some \$6 trillion, among the largest White House budget requests since World War II — accounting for inflation — and dwarfing Trump's roughly \$4.8 billion request last year.

While Biden's increases on domestic discretionary spending will be welcomed by congressional Democrats, some liberal lawmakers have encouraged the president to significantly cut defense spending. Republicans, meanwhile, have called for increased Pentagon spending, based in part on a 2018 Congress-mandated study that

called for yearly increases of 3% to 5% in defense spending to retrain military advantages over power rivals China and Russia.

Rep. Ken Calvert, of California, the top Republican on the House subpanel, said Thursday that he was "greatly concerned" a flat budget would slow the U.S. military's modernization efforts, which Austin and Milley listed among the Pentagon's top priorities.

The defense secretary defended his budget request as "adequate" in preparing the U.S. military for a future fight against a peer adversary, including China. Austin has labeled China as the Pentagon's "pacing threat" as Beijing works to modernize its own forces aimed at reaching parity with American military power in the coming decades.

# Biden urged to protect Afghans who helped US

*CQ-Roll Call*

WASHINGTON — Pressure is building on the Biden administration to secure the safety of Afghans who worked with the U.S. military and whose lives will likely be at risk when the U.S. withdraws in the coming weeks.

“With only six to eight weeks left before potential full withdrawal, it’s really time for action,” Elizabeth Neumann, former assistant secretary for counterterrorism and threat prevention at the Department of Homeland Security, said in a media call Thursday.

A day earlier, she and other former national security officials urged the Biden administration in a letter to “swiftly devise an evacuation strategy” for Afghan nationals and their families ahead of the September withdrawal deadline. Neumann noted that some estimates have the withdrawal done by July.

Afghans employed by the U.S. government can apply for protection in the U.S. through the Special Immigrant Visa program, but the processing for the program is notoriously slow and more than 18,000 Afghans are currently on the wait list.

The law requires visa applications to be processed within nine months, but current wait times stretch for years.

Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have been sounding the alarm for weeks. On Tuesday, 33 House lawmakers reintroduced legislation to authorize 4,000 new Afghan Special Immigrant Visas, but they acknowledged the State Department must also take steps to address current issues with the program.

“While our legislation will provide additional life-saving visas, more needs to be done to clear the backlog at the State Department before the United States withdraws,” Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., the bill’s primary sponsor, said in a statement.

Advocates have pushed for the executive branch to take a more active role in expediting the visa application process.

The White House didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.

With only weeks until the U.S. withdrawal deadline more drastic actions are being floated as well.

“We recognize that a very important task is to ensure that we remain faithful to them, and that we do what’s necessary to ensure their protection, and if necessary, get them out of the country, if that’s what they want to do,” Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley said Wednesday, Defense One reported, speaking about a possible evacuation of Afghan nationals.

## NATO chief says Afghan forces can cope alone

*Associated Press*

ABOARD HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH — NATO has helped provide security in Afghanistan for almost two decades but the government and armed forces in the conflict-torn country are strong enough to stand on their own feet without international troops to back them, the head of the military organization said Thursday.

NATO took charge of security efforts in Afghanistan in 2003, two years after a U.S.-led coalition ousted the Taliban for harboring former al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden. Fewer than 9,000 troops remain, including up to 3,500 US personnel, and they are scheduled to leave by Sept. 11 at the latest.

“I think that the Afghans, they also realize that we have been there now for 20 years and we have invested heavily in blood and treasure in Afghanistan,” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told The Associated Press, aboard a U.K. aircraft carrier involved in wargames off the coast of Portugal.

“Afghanistan has come a long way, both when it comes to building strong, capable security forces, but also when it comes to social and economic progress. At some stage, it has to be the Afghans that take full responsibility for peace and stability in their own country,” Stoltenberg said in an interview.

But as NATO troops leave, much of the country stands as contested ground. The government in Kabul holds sway in towns and cities, but the Taliban dominate the countryside.

Stoltenberg said that NATO countries would continue to support Afghanistan through civilian experts who will help to advise government ministries, by funding the security forces and with support for slow-moving peace talks between Kabul and the Taliban.

He said that NATO is also “looking into the possibility of providing some training out of country for the Afghan security forces, but no final decision has been taken.”

Stoltenberg said that NATO plans to provide financial support to keep Kabul airport up and running, but the details of how all this might play out remained unclear.

## Outside group to evaluate Marine amphibious operations after deaths

*The Orange County Register*

The Marine Corps’ top general on Wednesday spoke for the first time publicly about the investigations into a training accident last summer in which eight Marines and a sailor died when their amphibious assault vehicle sank to the ocean floor, announcing he is convening an outside board to look into the state of the Corps’ amphibious operations.

Since the deadly accident, all the ship-to-shore amphibious operations remain suspended.

The board will be led by retired Gen. Thomas Waldhauser and made up of retired amphibious operation experts.

“This is what we need to learn as an institution to make sure that in the years to come, we know how to do what is our core competency,” Berger said during a conversation from the Pentagon with military reporters where he discussed the events of the deadly training accident and his thoughts on what happened.

Berger said he could not provide a timeline.

# Republicans block probe into Jan. 6 riot

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans on Friday blocked creation of a bipartisan panel to study the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, turning aside the independent investigation in a show of party loyalty to former President Donald Trump and an effort to shift the political focus away from the violent riot by his GOP supporters.

The Senate vote was 54-35 — short of the 60 votes needed to take up a House-passed bill that would have formed a 10-member commission evenly split between the two parties. It came a day after emotional ap-

peals from police who fought with the rioters and lawmakers who fled Capitol chambers that day.

Six Republicans voted with Democrats to move forward. Eleven senators missed the rare Friday vote.

Though the Jan. 6 commission bill passed the House earlier this month with the support of almost three dozen Republicans, GOP senators said they believe the commission would eventually be used against them politically. And Trump, who still has a firm hold on the party, has called it a “Democrat trap.”

The vote is emblematic of the profound

mistrust between the two parties since the siege, especially among Republicans, as some in the party have downplayed the violence and defended the rioters who supported Trump and his false insistence that the election was stolen from him.

The attack was the worst on the Capitol in 200 years and interrupted the certification of Democrat Joe Biden’s win over Trump. Four people died that day, and Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick collapsed and died afterward of what authorities said were natural causes. Two police officers took their own lives in the days after the riots.

# Harris gives keynote speech to Navy grads

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Vice President Kamala Harris focused on the challenges of the pandemic, climate change and cybersecurity threats during her keynote speech to graduates at the U.S. Naval Academy on Friday, the first by a woman at the 175-year-old institution.

Harris, the nation’s first female vice president and the first Black woman and person of South Asian descent to hold the office, said the pandemic “has accelerated our world into a new era.”

“It has forever impacted our world,” she said. “It has forever influenced our perspective, and if we weren’t clear before, we

know now: Our world is interconnected. Our world is interdependent, and our world is fragile.”

A pandemic can spread throughout the world in a matter of months, a gang of hackers can disrupt the fuel supply, and one country’s carbon emissions can threaten the sustainability of the Earth, the vice president said.

“This, midshipmen, is the era we are in, and it is unlike any era that came before,” Harris said. “So, the challenge now, the challenge before us now is how to mount a modern defense to these modern threats.”

Harris described the cyberattack earlier this month that shut down the nation’s

largest fuel pipeline as “a warning shot” in what the new Navy and Marine Corps officers will be facing.

“In fact, there have been many warning shots, so we must defend our nation against these threats, and at the same time we must make advances in things that you’ve been learning — things like quantum computing and artificial intelligence and robotics and things that will put our nation at a strategic advantage,” Harris said.

In her speech to more than 1,000 graduates, including ones who majored in mechanical, electrical and ocean engineering, Harris described climate change as “a very real threat to our national security.”

# Senate to vote on innovation bill to counter China

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Despite opposition from a handful of Republicans, a sweeping Senate bill aimed at making the United States more competitive with China and shoring up domestic computer chip manufacturing with \$50 billion in emergency funding headed toward final votes Friday after a last-minute attempt to halt it.

The American Innovation and Competition Act, an effort to boost scientific research and development, is key to President Joe Biden’s infrastructure plans. Its passage was still expected despite the GOP efforts to impede it, but timing was uncertain as the Senate reopened Friday morning after a nearly round-the-clock session.

“We have every intention of sticking it out until the job is done,” Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said as he opened

the chamber.

The emerging final product has enjoyed broad, bipartisan support and would be one of the more comprehensive investments in U.S. research and development in recent years as the country tries to bolster and rebuild home state industries that have shifted overseas during the era of globalization.

It’s also a test of whether the split 50-50 Senate can accomplish bipartisan achievements when there’s pressure on Democrats to change the rules to push past obstruction and gridlock.

A top Republican author, Sen. Todd Young of Indiana, characterized his underlying proposal that anchors the bill — the Endless Frontier Act he co-authored with Schumer — as part of the country’s history of innovation, like the moon landing or the launch of the internet, that Washington needs to foster if

America is to remain competitive.

“It’s not about beating China,” Young said in a speech Thursday. He said it’s about rising to the challenge posed by China “to be a better version of ourselves.”

Other measures spell out national security concerns and target money laundering schemes or cyberattacks by entities on behalf of the government of China. There are also “buy America” provisions for infrastructure projects in the U.S.

At the same time, senators agreed to tack on amendments showing shifting attitudes over China’s handling of the COVID-19 outbreak. One would prevent federal funds for the Wuhan Institute of Virology amid fresh investigation into the origins of the virus and possible connections to the lab’s research. The city registered some of the first virus cases.



# Biden \$6T budget raises taxes on rich, firms

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden's \$6 trillion budget proposal for next year would run a \$1.8 trillion federal government deficit despite a raft of new tax increases on corporations and high-income people designed to pay for his ambitious spending plans.

Biden had already announced his major budget initiatives, but during a rollout Friday he will release them as a single proposal to incorporate them into the government's existing budget framework, including Social Security and Medicare. That provides a fuller view of the administration's fiscal posture.

Democratic aides disclosed key elements of the Biden plan, speaking on condition of anonymity because the document is

not yet public.

The whopping deficit projections reflect a government whose steadily accumulating pile of debt has topped \$28 trillion after well more than \$5 trillion in COVID-19 relief. The government's structural deficit remains unchecked, and Biden uses tax hikes on businesses and the wealthy to power huge new social programs like universal prekindergarten and large subsidies for child care.

The budget incorporates the administration's eight-year, \$2.3 trillion infrastructure proposal and its \$1.8 trillion American Families Plan and adds details on his \$1.5 trillion request for annual operating appropriations for the Pentagon and domestic agencies.

It is sure to give Republicans fresh ammunition for their crit-

icisms of the new Democratic administration as bent on a "tax and spend" agenda with resulting deficits that would damage the economy and impose a crushing debt burden on younger Americans. Huge deficits have yet to drive up interest rates as many fiscal hawks have feared, however, and anti-deficit sentiment among Democrats has mostly vanished.

"Now is the time to build (upon) the foundation that we've laid to make bold investments in our families and our communities and our nation," Biden said Thursday in an appearance in Cleveland to tout his economic plans. "We know from history that these kinds of investments raise both the floor and the ceiling over the economy for everybody."

The unusual timing of the

budget rollout — the Friday afternoon before Memorial Day weekend — indicates that the White House isn't eager to trumpet the bad deficit news. Typically, lawmakers host an immediate round of hearings on the budget, but those will have to wait until Congress returns from a weeklong recess.

Under Biden's plan, the debt held by the public would exceed the size of the economy and soon eclipse record levels of debt relative to gross domestic product that have stood since World War II. That's despite more than \$3 trillion in proposed tax increases over the decade, including an increase in the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28%, increased capital gains rates on top earners, and returning the top personal income tax bracket to 39.6%.

## VA may add illnesses to its toxic exposure list

By NIKKI WENTLING  
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs will initiate the federal rulemaking process to consider creating a fast track to health care and disability compensation for some veterans suffering from respiratory illnesses.

The effort could result in health care and benefits for veterans who were exposed to burn pits or other toxins while deployed to overseas conflicts in Southwest Asia, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

In an announcement Thursday, the VA listed asthma, sinusitis and rhinitis as conditions that could be added to the VA's presumptive list, which lowers the amount of evidence that veterans must provide in order to receive benefits. VA Secretary Denis McDonough said it was possible that more conditions would be considered during the rulemaking process.

"This is just the beginning of our effort to help veterans suffering

from toxic exposure, not the end of that effort," McDonough said during a news conference Thursday.

Throughout the 1990s and the post-9/11 wars, the military used open-air pits to burn garbage, jet fuel, paint, medical waste, plastics and more. Veterans diagnosed with cancer, respiratory issues and lung disease at young ages have blamed exposure to the toxic fumes. They have sought VA benefits and health care, but the department has contended that there isn't sufficient evidence to support their claims.

Once confirmed as VA secretary, McDonough started a review of scientific evidence regarding toxic exposure.

Earlier this week, House and Senate lawmakers introduced two sweeping bills aimed at helping veterans who suffer from illnesses because of toxic exposure. The bills would grant VA health care and benefits to millions of veterans who served in overseas conflicts in the past 31 years.

## Store traffic rebounding but not to 2019 numbers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Americans are going back to one of their favorite pastimes: store shopping.

With more people getting vaccinated and dropping their face masks, retailers from Walmart to Macy's are seeing an eager return to their stores after more than a year of their customers migrating online during the pandemic.

Marcia Williams, who lives in a Philadelphia suburb and who stuck to online shopping only during the height of COVID-19, went back to her local mall right after she was fully vaccinated last month. That was her first time in more than a year.

"I am definitely getting out," said Williams, a hair and makeup artist who spent nearly \$1,000 on clothing for herself and her three children during several buying trips. "I do feel more comfortable. I like the experience of trying on clothes. I love grocery shopping. It's my outlet."

The return to store shopping, highlighted in many retailers' earnings reports in recent days, of-

fers a big relief in part because fewer shoppers ask for their money back after making a purchase at the store — 8% compared with 25% for online, according to Forrester Research. And store customers tend to do more impulse buying. For clothing, for instance, 25% of purchases are done on a whim versus 16% online, says market research firm NPD Group Inc.

"Retailers want you in the store," said Marshal Cohen, NPD's chief industry adviser. "They need you to be in the store so you generate more traffic. Crowds bring more crowds. (Shoppers) buy more product."

Analysts are carefully watching the battered department store sector's market share, which shrunk from 3% in 2019 to 2% last year and has remained at that figure for the first four months of the year, according to NPD. In comparison, discounters' market share held steady at 21% last year from 2019 but ticked up to 22% for the early part of this year. Overall, market share for online retail rose to 26% last year from 23% in 2019.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Gator swaps swamp life for a beach getaway

**TX** PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE — A young alligator traced to the Louisiana bayous traded swamp scum for a sandy Padre Island beach in South Texas.

In an unusual spin from “Jaws,” the gator showed up on Malaquite Beach, about 25 miles southeast of Corpus Christi, Padre Island National Seashore officials said in a Facebook post.

National Park Service rangers found it and checked its tail notch and tags on its rear feet to determine it had come from Louisiana.

How it got to South Texas remains a mystery, but its spring break ended abruptly as rangers took it to a rehabilitation center to recover from its journey.

### Wildlife officials trap, euthanize grizzly bear

**MT** HELENA — Authorities in Montana have trapped and killed a grizzly bear after it was accused of killing yearlings on a ranch near Avon.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks grizzly specialist Rory Trimbo said ranchers riding horseback were checking cattle on Saturday when they came across the bear on a horse carcass, the Independent Record reported.

U.S. Department of Agriculture personnel responded to the incident on the ranch, west of Helena. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks officials inspected the area the following day, discovered another dead yearling and set a trap nearby. The trap caught an angry 411-pound griz-

zly bear that was taken to Missoula where it was euthanized, said Jamie Jonkel, bear specialist for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

Officials believed the euthanized bear was possibly responsible for four attacks, including two yearlings killed over the weekend, Jonkel said.

“Usually when we get adult males that kill multiple livestock on the first incident that’s fairly common,” Jonkel said. “If we don’t know, a lot of times they’re relocated. And if they come back and kill another sheep or kill another calf, then that’s a no-brainer. But the evidence was quite clear that he had killed these two last yearlings.”

### Large quartz cluster stolen from gem mine

**NC** HENDERSONVILLE — A large quartz crystal cluster was stolen from a gem mine in western North Carolina, authorities said.

The Henderson County Sheriff’s Office wrote in a Facebook post Tuesday that the rock was taken from the Elijah Gem Mine in Hendersonville sometime between May 21 and May 22.

An accompanying photo shows the crystal in a wooden box that has “94.80 KGS” carved on the lid, which equals more than 200 pounds.

WLOS-TV reported that the mine planned to display the cluster at its new peacock habitat. Such quartz pieces can sell for thousands of dollars, according to the station.

### Deputy demoted after police dog’s death in car

**GA** FORSYTH — A sheriff’s deputy in Georgia has been demoted after the

death of a police dog he was handling.

Monroe County Sheriff Brad Freeman said Sgt. Willie Barkley, now a deputy, was working overnight May 13 when he left K-9 officer Khan asleep in the car while he was working on reports. Barkley then went home and left Khan in the car. When he awoke the next day, he found Khan dead in the car, WMAZ-TV reported.

Freeman called the dog’s death “an avoidable accident.”

Freeman said Barkley was demoted to deputy and moved from field operations to working at the jail. He was also suspended for five days without pay.

### Fireworks planned, but fair won’t return until ‘22

**MO** ST. LOUIS — After a year off due to the coronavirus pandemic, fireworks will return to the St. Louis riverfront on Independence Day, but Fair St. Louis will have to wait another year.

Organizers of Fair St. Louis announced Wednesday that the Fourth of July Fireworks Spectacular will begin around 9:40 p.m. July 4. The fireworks will be launched from barges on the Mississippi River. Organizers also plan a parade that will begin at 10 a.m. on July 3.

But Fair St. Louis won’t return to the Gateway Arch National Park until 2022. The event is traditionally one of the nation’s largest Fourth of July festivals, drawing tens of thousands of people.

### Preacher charged after bathroom videos found

**WV** MORGANTOWN — A preacher at a West Virginia church has been

charged with invasion of privacy after he allegedly placed a smartphone in a men’s bathroom, recording videos of two victims.

William Page, 59, of Morgantown, was charged in a criminal complaint with the misdemeanor, news outlets reported.

The complaint said church members told Monongalia County sheriff’s deputies that a smartphone had been placed on a ledge above a men’s restroom urinal on April 28. Deputies said the phone belonged to Page and contained videos of two males using the restroom along with several short videos of Page setting up the device.

Deputies said in the complaint that the videos “were captured without the victims’ consent in a place where privacy would be assumed.”

### Volcano stops erupting after months of lava

**HI** HONOLULU — Hawaii’s Kilauea Volcano has stopped erupting.

The U.S. Geological Survey’s Hawaiian Volcano Observatory updated the status of the Big Island volcano Wednesday.

Kilauea, which had been erupting at its summit crater since December, has “paused” producing new lava, the USGS said. The latest eruption had produced a new lava lake at the summit.

Officials said the lava could begin erupting again soon or it could move into a phase of quiescence before its next eruption.

Kilauea, one of the world’s most active volcanoes, had been erupting for 157 days and produced over 11 billion gallons of lava in that time.

— From wire reports

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# Tebow 'improving' at tight end for Jaguars

Associated Press

Tim Tebow caught touchdown passes from Trevor Lawrence and Gardner Minshew on Thursday in Jacksonville, Fla., showing signs that reviving his NFL career as a tight end is far from a publicity stunt or personal favor.

Tebow essentially looked the part on a sunbaked afternoon that capped his first week of organized team activities with the Jacksonville Jaguars.

With team owner Shad Khan in attendance along with a media throng eager to see how the 33-year-old Tebow was adjusting to his new position, the 2007 Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback didn't drop a pass and even made a couple of plays that surely got more attention than they deserved.

Tebow is hardly a polished route-runner and doesn't appear to be a down-the-field threat. But anyone who thought he would embarrass himself by changing positions nine years after last playing a meaningful snap in the league probably would have been surprised to see him hold his own in a No. 85 jersey.

"It's 1 in 90 trying to make the team," Jaguars coach Urban Meyer said. "He has improved. It's all new for him. ... That posi-

tion's trending upward; they're doing a nice job."

Meyer declined to provide much insight into how he plans to potentially use Tebow. There has been speculation that Tebow could be a goal-line and short-yardage quarterback or even line up in the backfield alongside Lawrence.

"I think it's one step at a time and see what happens," Meyer said. "Before you start having those conversations, you've got to feel where he's at on the depth chart, etc. Obviously, it's only been a couple of days. We have not had that conversation as an offensive staff yet."

For now, tight ends coach Tyler Bowen — whose nickname, coincidentally, is "T-Bow" — is trying to get the much more popular Tebow comfortable at his new position. Bowen urged Tebow for "a little more tempo off the ball" early in the two-hour workout.

Later, Bowen jokingly asked an intern "you need the trainers" after the equipment guy was tasked with trying to block Tebow using a dummy pad.

Tebow had his most success in seven-on-seven drills near the goal line, catching two short passes for scores.

"He's just another guy," Jaguars safety Rayshawn Jenkins said. "I met him briefly in the locker room, so a really good guy from what I can tell. But I don't look at it as 'Tebow' or anybody who's just right there. I just look at it (as) what do I need to do this play? What are my keys? What am I looking at? It doesn't matter what number the jersey is or whoever's right there in front of me."

Tebow signed a one-year, \$920,000 deal with Jacksonville last week, getting the veteran minimum for a player with his experience. He received no signing bonus or guaranteed money. He's returning to the NFL after five years (2016-20) in the New York Mets' organization and he's reuniting with Meyer, his college coach, for the first time since his senior year in 2009.

His comeback is unprecedented because of his age, his new position and the fact that he last played in a regular-season game in 2012, with the New York Jets.

"We don't get caught up in any of that," Jenkins said. "You can't get star struck around here. It's the business. I played with numerous superstars. I can name a list full, but we're all friends at the end of the day, we're all co-workers at the end of the day."

## IndyCar vets still going strong as careers wind down

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Tony Kanaan sat in Chip Ganassi Racing's suite one day this May, savoring a rare second IndyCar farewell tour.

At age 46, running a part-time schedule with no future guarantees and a talented crop of young drivers chasing them, Kanaan and his fellow veterans can see the sunset approaching for one of IndyCar's greatest generations.

Four of the 33 starters in Sunday's Indianapolis 500 are listed among the top 12 in career wins. Ryan Hunter-Reay is tied for 24th. Kanaan needs one win to tie Hunter-Reay with 18 and Juan Pablo Montoya is just two behind Kanaan despite spending 13 seasons in Formula One and NASCAR.

These magnificent seven, all in their 40s, have combined for 207 victories, 14 series cham-

pionships and nine Indianapolis 500s since emerging as the series' most revered stars over the last two decades. And their passions and personalities from around the globe have changed the sport.

"Every year that goes by, I realize how special those years were," Kanaan said Thursday, referring to the four drivers who suited up in Michael Andretti's garage in the 2000s. "What we had, what we did is we showed that you could race against each other and still have a lot of fun with your teammates."

It became a blueprint for repairing the damage from the yearslong split of American open-wheel racing series.

Andretti's team featured Kanaan, the bubbly Brazilian; Dario Franchitti, the resolute Scotman; Bryan Herta, the laid-back American; and beloved British driver Dan Wheldon.

On the track, they were a powerhouse.

Franchitti won 31 races and three 500s before a horrific crash forced him into retirement in November 2014. The beloved Wheldon won 16 times, twice at Indy, but died at age 33 from injuries suffered in a 2011 crash at Las Vegas. Herta, whose son Colton qualified second for Sunday's race, had four series wins. And Kanaan captured the 2004 series title and the 500 in 2013.

Off the track, they goofed around, became close friends and played pranks like hiding all of Wheldon's drivers shoes or sawing Kanaan's mountain bike in half while he was doing a television interview, changing Gasoline Alley forever.

With budding young stars starting to catch up to IndyCar's elder statesmen, many continue to outrun Father Time.

Scott Dixon of Chip Ganassi

Racing is a six-time series champ, the points leader and Sunday's pole-sitter. Should he win a second 500 this weekend, Dixon would tie Mario Andretti (52) for second all-time in wins and stay in position to join A.J. Foyt as only the seven-time IndyCar champion. If he leads 82 laps, Dixon would break Al Unser's career mark for most 500 laps led (644).

Hunter-Reay, age 40, hopes to claim his second 500 crown after qualifying seventh last weekend. He's one spot ahead of Castro-neves, the exuberant 46-year-old Brazilian with Michael Shank Racing who again is chasing a record-tying fourth race win.

"It's a great group of guys and I learned a lot from them," Castro-neves said. "That's what makes you better and I probably wouldn't have been as successful without them pushing me."



# Lakers enjoy homecoming playoff win

*Associated Press*

LOS ANGELES — Each time Anthony Davis sprawled to the ground after a tough foul or a difficult finish, he felt the cheers of about 7,000 frenzied Los Angeles Lakers fans lifting him back up.

The big man can't wait until a full Staples Center has got his back. In the meantime, his Lakers intend to keep pushing their way past the Phoenix Suns, who pushed back too late — and a bit too zealously — in Game 3.

Davis had 34 points and 11 rebounds, LeBron James added 21 points and nine assists and Los Angeles celebrated its first home playoff game in more than eight years with a 109-95 victory over Phoenix on Thursday night.

Dennis Schröder added 20 points and the seventh-seeded defending NBA champs took a 2-1 lead with their second straight victory in the first-round series — and the first postseason game for this championship core in front of its home crowd.

"It was good for us, good for our team," Davis said of the cheers. "We just can only imagine how it will be when it's 20,000 in here. It was still loud, still electric. When we're able to get the whole stadium in here, the whole fans screaming and yelling, I know it's going to be even better."

Buoyed by both their fans and Davis' second straight stellar game, the Lakers pulled away from the erratic Suns in the second half again,

much to their fans' enjoyment.

"It's a beautiful thing," James said. "It was a special night, and we just tried to reward our fans for the loyalty they have for us, and just try to play the game the right way."

A fierce late rally by Phoenix came up short — and when it did, the Suns came unglued. Devin Booker and Jae Crowder both were sent to the locker room early, with Booker tossed for a flagrant foul on a two-handed push to an airborne Schröder that Davis called "a dirty play." Game 4 is Sunday in Los Angeles.

Several thousand masked fans watched inside Staples Center as the Lakers hosted their first playoff game in their downtown arena since April 28, 2013.

## Rivers, Jokic lead Denver past Portland for 2-1 series advantage

*Associated Press*

PORTLAND, Ore. — Denver newcomer Austin Rivers stole the spotlight from Nikola Jokic with a fourth-quarter outburst against Portland.

Jokic dominated as usual, with 36 points and 11 rebounds in the Nuggets' 120-115 victory Thursday night over the Trail Blazers. But Rivers propelled Denver to a 2-1 lead in the first-round playoff series.

Signed late last month when the Nuggets were struggling with injuries, Rivers hit four three-pointers during a crucial stretch in the final quarter and finished with 21 points. Third-seeded Denver had 20 threes overall.

"It feels good. I don't know how much I can elaborate on that, this feels really good," Rivers said. "This game can bring you the lowest feeling in the world. I swear, some of these nights you feel so low. And this game can make you feel so good about yourself too."

Portland struggled from three-point range and got poor shooting from their bench players despite cheers from the biggest home crowd allowed at the Moda Center this season. Damian Lillard led all scorers with 37 points.

Game 4 is Saturday at the Moda Center.

The Nuggets led 84-79 heading into the final period, but the Blazers tied it at 91 on Carmelo Anthony's three-pointer with just under seven minutes to play.

Rivers' third straight three-pointer put Denver up 102-94 with 3:49 left and his

teammates rushed over to celebrate with him as a timeout was called.

Portland was hurt when Jusuf Nurkic fouled out with 5:15 left. Nurkic finished with 13 points and 13 rebounds.

The Trail Blazers pulled within 108-103 after Lillard's dunk with 1:38 left, but Rivers answered with another three-pointer that all but sealed it.

"The guy was sitting at home for two and a half months waiting for the phone to ring and it wasn't ringing. That's crazy to even think about. Austin Rivers is a good player. He's played in 45 playoff games prior to this 2021 playoffs. It just worked out that he's here," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said.

Rivers had five three-pointers overall. Sixteen of his points came in the fourth quarter.

"He won the game, he brought the energy, he scored when we needed," Jokic said. "He was really good."

Sixth-seeded Portland opened the first round with a 123-109 victory in Denver. But the Nuggets adjusted to take Game 2 128-109.

The playoffs have been a scrappy battle for points between Lillard and Jokic. Lillard was averaging 38 points and 11.5 rebounds through the first two games, while Jokic averaged 36 points and 12 rebounds.

The Nuggets led by as many as 12 points in the opening half as Portland uncharacteristically struggled from the perimeter. The Blazers' bench also struggled, with just three points collectively in the opening half.

## Bucks push Heat to 3-0 series brink

*Associated Press*

MIAMI — Another game. Another blowout.

The Milwaukee Bucks have a chance to sweep the Miami Heat out of the playoffs, and they're making the task of dispatching the reigning Eastern Conference champions look very simple.

Khris Middleton scored 22 points, Jrue Holiday added 19 points and 12 assists and the Bucks took a 3-0 lead in their East first-round series with a 113-84 victory in Miami on Thursday night.

Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 17 points and 17 rebounds for Milwaukee, which can finish the sweep and move into the East semifinals with a win Saturday afternoon.

"The last two games haven't been easy," Antetokounmpo said. "Obviously, we were up 3-0, but it's not easy. ... I'll say this: I'll say by us doing our job, I'm not surprised that we're able to win a game because once we focus on ourselves, play together, have fun and be tough, good things are going to happen. And in these three games, good things have happened for us."

Miami has lost three games by 29 points or more this season — all against Milwaukee, two of them in the last two games of this series. The Bucks held leads of 51 and 36 points against the Heat in games earlier this season.

# Jays' Manoah dominates Yanks in debut

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Alek Manoah (1-0), the No. 11 overall pick in the 2019 amateur draft, dominated with six innings of two-hit ball to win his major league debut and lead the Toronto Blue Jays over the New York Yankees 2-0 Thursday in a double-header opener.

New York rebounded to win the second game 5-3 behind Aaron Judge's tying, two-run homer in the third inning off Robbie Ray (2-2) and Gary Sánchez's go-ahead solo drive in the fourth.

**Cubs 5, Pirates 3:** At Pittsburgh, Javier Báez ran the first baseline backward while being chased by first baseman Will Craig during a two-run third.

**Cardinals 5, Diamondbacks 4 (10):** Yadier Molina had an RBI double in the 10th inning

that led St. Louis past host Arizona, which has lost 11 straight games.

**Indians 5, Tigers 2:** At Detroit, Shane Bieber (5-3) took a no-hit bid into the seventh before Jonathan Schoop led off with a home run and struck out 12 in seven one-hit innings.

**Mets 1-4, Rockies 0-2:** José Peraza homered off Germán Márquez (3-5) starting the third inning of the opener in New York and singled off Antonio Senzatela (1-5) to break a 1-1 tie in the fourth inning of the second game.

**Phillies 3, Marlins 2:** At Miami, Odubel Herrera tripled leading off the ninth and broke a 2-2 tie on Ronald Torreyes' comebacker as Yimi García (3-3) threw to second in a failed attempt for an inning-ending double play.

**Brewers 6, Padres 5:** At Milwaukee, Jackie Bradley Jr.'s two-out hit off the right-field wall against Miguel Diaz (2-1) brought home Omar Narváez in the 10th inning.

**Rays 7, Royals 2:** Tampa Bay's Austin Meadows hit a two-run triple in the first off visiting Kansas City starter Brady Singer (2-4) and connected on a third-inning two-run homer.

**Nationals 5-0, Reds 3-3:** Trea Turner and Josh Bell hit run-scoring singles in the sixth inning in the completion of a suspended game, and Sonny Gray (1-3) pitched six innings of two-hit ball to win the nightcap.

**White Sox 5, Orioles 1:** Dylan Cease struck out 10, Yermín Mercedes homered and drove in three, and host Chicago handed Baltimore its 10th straight

loss.

**Dodgers 4, Giants 3:** Max Muncy hit a go-ahead solo shot leading off the sixth — one of five home runs in the game — and Los Angeles beat visiting San Francisco.

**Athletics 5, Angels 0:** At Oakland, Calif., Chris Bassitt pitched a two-hitter for his first career complete game, Sean Murphy hit a two-run single in the decisive sixth inning and the A's took advantage after Bay Area traffic kept Shohei Ohtani off the mound for a win over the Angels.

**Mariners 5, Rangers 0:** Chris Flexen threw seven shutdown innings and was backed by home runs from Tom Murphy and Jacob Nottingham, and host Seattle defeated Texas.

## Canadiens top Leafs in overtime, force Game 6

Associated Press

TORONTO — Nick Suzuki scored 59 seconds into overtime and the Montreal Canadiens beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-3 on Thursday night, rebounding after blowing a three-goal lead to force Game 6 in the Original Six first-round matchup.

Cole Caufield intercepted Alex Galchenyuk's pass in Montreal's zone and moved in with Suzuki on a 2-on-0. Suzuki made a pass to Caufield after crossing into Toronto's zone, got the puck back from his rookie teammate and beat Jack Campbell to the blocker side.

"Sometimes those 2-on-0s are a little bit more difficult," Suzuki said. "We're both capable of scoring and making plays. It was a great play by him to touch it right back."

Joel Armia scored twice, Jesperi Kotkaniemi added a goal and Carey Price made 32 saves to help the Canadiens cut the Maple Leafs' series lead to 3-2.

"Resiliency," Price said. "It's not easy to have the right mentality going into an overtime like that after giving up a two-goal lead in the third."

Jake Muzzin scored twice for Toronto. Zach Hyman had a goal and Campbell stopped 26 shots.

"Any time your back's against the wall, you push back," Hyman said. "You saw that from them. We've been in that situation before and you always respond."

The Quebec government will allow 2,500 fans into the Bell Centre on Saturday for Game 6, the first NHL crowd in Canada since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

"They will deserve that game big time," Montreal center Phillip Danault said. "It's going to be crazy there. It's going to be awesome. I can't wait to be in front of our fans. Been waiting for that all year. And here we are, Game 6 against Toronto, Saturday night at home. Can't get any better than that."

The Maple Leafs missed an opportunity to win a playoff series for the first time since 2004, but still have two more cracks at advancing.

The Winnipeg Jets await the winner following their sweep of Edmonton.

## Canes win again in OT, advance

Associated Press

The Carolina Hurricanes spent their first-round playoff series falling behind early and grinding through tough overtime games.

Yet the Hurricanes showed enough resilience to push through and advance anyway, earning a second round matchup with reigning Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay.

The Hurricanes beat the Nashville Predators 4-3 in overtime on Thursday night to close the best-of-seven series in six games. That came after they rallied from a two-goal deficit while playing a fourth consecutive game that extended past regulation time.

"I think we're a resilient group," said Hurricanes defenseman Dougie Hamilton, who forced overtime by scoring at 13:59 of the third period. "We just keep playing no matter what happens. We just keep going, keep going, keep going. And it's been like that for a couple years now."

Nothing came easily for the Hurricanes, who won the Central Division — their first division crown since their Cup-winning season in 2006 — and were in the Presidents' Trophy race to the regular season's final week.