

## Travelers head to US as limits eased

*Associated Press*

The United States fully reopened its borders with Mexico and Canada on Monday and lifted restrictions on travel that covered most of Europe, setting the stage for emotional reunions nearly two years in the making and providing a boost for the travel industry decimated by the pandemic.

The restrictions, among the most severe in U.S. history, kept families apart, including uncles and aunts who have not met nieces and nephews who are now toddlers, spouses who have not been able to hug in months and grandparents whose grandchildren doubled in age since they last saw them.

Lines moved quickly Monday morning at San Diego's border with Mexico, the busiest crossing in the U.S., despite the added checks for vaccinations required to

enter the country.

The new rules also allow air travel from a series of countries from which it has been restricted since the early days of the pandemic — as long as the traveler has proof of vaccination and a negative COVID-19 test.

American citizens and permanent residents were always allowed to enter the U.S., but the travel bans grounded tourists, thwarted business travelers and often separated families.

Gaye Camara was already imagining her reunion with her husband, who she has not seen since before COVID-19 brought the fly-here-there-and-everywhere world to a halt.

"I'm going to jump into his arms, kiss him, touch him," said Camara, 40, as she wheeled her luggage through Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport, which could almost

be mistaken for its pre-pandemic self, busy with humming crowds, albeit in face masks.

When Camara last saw him in January 2020, they had no way of knowing that they'd have to wait 21 months before holding each other again. She lives in France's Alsace region, where she works as a secretary. He is based in New York.

"It was very hard at the beginning. I cried nearly every night," she said.

Video calls, text messages, phone conversations kept them connected — but couldn't fill the void of separation.

"I cannot wait," she said. "Being with him, his presence, his face, his smile."

Airlines are preparing for a surge in activity — especially from Europe — after the pandemic and resulting restrictions caused international travel to plunge.

## Thousands of workers seek religious vaccine exemptions

*The Washington Post*

As the Monday deadline passed, high percentages of federal workers reported they have been vaccinated against the coronavirus. But tens of thousands of holdouts have requested exemptions on religious grounds, complicating President Joe Biden's sweeping mandate to get the country's largest employer back to normal operations.

Federal agencies have yet to act on the requests piling into managers' inboxes from vaccine resisters seeking accommodations that would allow them to continue their jobs unvaccinated rather than face the possibility of being fired as the administration has threatened. A far smaller number of employees has asked for exemptions on medical grounds, officials said, prompting what are likely to be more clear-cut decisions on whether to grant them.

The number of religious objectors ranges from a little more than 60 people at the Education Department to many thousands among the 38,000-strong workforce at the Bureau of Prisons, according to federal employee union officials.

A Texas-based IRS affinity group, Christian Fundamentalist Internal Revenue Employees, wrote a four-page letter to the official handling exemption requests, citing Scripture and mistrust of the government among African Americans, as well as falsely claiming thousands of deaths from the coronavirus vaccine.

The letter questioned whether granting exemptions would pose any undue hardship, citing the agency's widespread use of telework during the pandemic.

"The IRS already has accommodations in place to meet the requests and still accomplish

their mission to the taxpayer," Lorenzo Henry, the group's national president, wrote.

Exemption requests have become the go-to alternative for those opposed to the vaccine because managers must hold off on any discipline while requests are reviewed. With a Nov. 22 deadline for employees to show proof of full vaccination status, Monday was the deadline to get a Johnson & Johnson shot or a second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines.

The process could take months for officials designated at each agency, leaving anxious employees in limbo and delaying implementation of a mandate Biden announced in September as a model for employers around the country. The administration saw the vaccine program as essential to getting workers back in their offices and improving services to tax-

payors.

How to fairly and legally weigh the surging requests and determine who receives an exemption has consumed federal attorneys, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, unions and outside lawyers helping employees with the process. The deliberations are particularly acute as the government tries to balance the right to religious freedom against the goal of creating safe workplaces for 2.1 million civilian employees.

Managers will soon assume the thorny role of deciding whether someone is sincere or requesting an exemption for political reasons. In a directive issued in January, the EEOC said the objections do not have to stem from an organized religion and can be beliefs that are new, uncommon or "seem illogical or unreasonable to others."

## DOD can't say when F-35 will finish testing

*Bloomberg*

Pentagon officials still haven't set a date for Lockheed Martin's F-35, the costliest U.S. weapons system, to complete the final 42% of mission testing to determine whether it's up to countering the top Russian and Chinese air defenses and fighters.

The F-35 was supposed to fly one month of testing in a highly advanced simulator last December, the latest delay since the original goal of 2017. But that was postponed yet again by unresolved technical problems in the "Joint Simulation Environment" test facility, compounded by the COVID pandemic. Then, the Pentagon's office of operational testing estimated in January that the exercise would commence midyear or by this December.

Defense Department acquisition, legal and testing officials didn't arrive at a new date when they met last month to review progress of software and verification procedures needed to validate that the simulation of 64 sorties will replicate real-world encounters.

The simulation "will be executed after the JSE capabilities are sufficiently validated, verified and accredited to conduct the mission trials," Pentagon acquisition spokesperson Jessica Maxwell said in a statement. Asked when the Defense Department's F-35 program office will set a new schedule, Laura Seal, a spokeswoman, said "we will provide updates when we have them."

The Pentagon's test office reiterated in a statement its long-standing view that the simulation is necessary as part of legally required testing before Bethesda, Md.-based Lockheed can proceed with full-rate production. Of a potential fleet of 3,000 or more F-35s for the United States and international customers, 720 already have been delivered. Those may need to be retrofitted based on findings from the tests.

Test teams have completed 89 F-35 in-flight missions, according to the testing office, and the 64 remaining sorties in the simulator will complete the missions required in the congressional mandated trials.

## Japanese PM won't stop MCAS Futenma relocation

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
AND MARI HIGA

*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Japan's new leader vowed this week to push ahead with relocating Marine Corps air operations on Okinawa, dealing a blow to the prefectural governor and other activists who stridently oppose the move.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida dispatched Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno to Okinawa on Saturday to meet with Gov. Denny Tamaki and relay the government's position, a prefectural spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone Monday.

The meetings were part of Kishida's strategy to engage Okinawa and its people while pushing forward with bilateral agreements, he told Japan's governing body, the Diet, on Oct. 8.

"To maintain the U.S.-Japan alliance for its deterrent power and to remove the danger related to [Marine Corps Air Station] Futenma, I think that relocation of the base to Henoko is the only solution," Matsuno told Tamaki, according to a video posted online by Japanese

public broadcaster NHK. He asked for the "understanding" of the Okinawa people.

Kishida's hand was strengthened by the Oct. 31 Lower House election of Liberal Democratic Party candidate Aiko Shimajiri, a former minister overseeing Okinawa affairs, to represent Nago. Shimajiri's district includes Henoko, the area around Camp Schwab, where the new Marine airfield to replace MCAS Futenma is under construction.

Shimajiri defeated vocal anti-base incumbent Tomohiro Yara of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan.

Tamaki had hoped the new administration would change course and move Marine air operations off Okinawa altogether, a position supported by a majority of the island's voters, according to a February 2019 referendum that saw 72% of residents vote in opposition.

"The construction of a new base in Henoko, that many Okinawa citizens are against, will take 12 years for completion and will not lead to the immediate removal of danger related to Futenma Air Station," Tamaki told Matsuno. "Therefore, the construction must be stopped immediately."

## Japanese police arrest US Marine on suspicion of DUI after collision

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
AND MARI HIGA

*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Japanese police on Okinawa said they arrested a U.S. Marine on suspicion of drunken driving early Saturday just as he was attempting to leave a crash scene in another vehicle.

Cpl. Bryce Ray Six, 20, of Camp Kinser, was taken into custody at 1:18 a.m. along Route 329 in the Igei area of Kin town, an Ishikawa Police spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone Monday on a customary condition of anonymity.

Six's car struck a guardrail, several parked cars and a streetlight, according to the spokesman. Six has denied any wrong-

doing, he said.

Police arrived just as Six was about to leave the scene in another car bearing a "Y" license plate, the spokesman said. Y plates are issued to drivers under the status of forces agreement, typically U.S. service members, Defense Department employees and family members.

A breath test measured Six's blood alcohol content at 0.09%, three times Japan's legal limit of 0.03%, the spokesman said. By comparison, all 50 U.S. states have set 0.08% as the legal limit for driving under the influence or driving while impaired.

A passenger from the car that appeared to be picking Six up from the crash scene is also being questioned by police, the spokesman added.

# China has built mock-ups of US warships

Associated Press

BEIJING — Satellite images show China has built mock-ups of a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier and destroyer in its northwestern desert, possibly for practice for a future naval clash as tensions rise between the nations.

China has massively upgraded its military in recent years, and its capability and intentions are increasingly concerning to the United States as tensions rise over the South China Sea, Taiwan and military supremacy in the Indo-Pacific.

The images captured by Colorado-based satellite imagery

company Maxar Technologies dated Sunday show the outlines of a U.S. aircraft carrier and at least one destroyer sitting on a railway track.

Maxar identified the location as Ruqiang, a Taklamakan Desert county in the northwestern Xinjiang region.

The independent U.S. Naval Institute said on its website that the mock-ups of U.S. ships were part of a new target range developed by the People's Liberation Army.

It wasn't clear from the images how many details had been included in the apparent tar-

gets, although USNI said it had identified features on the destroyer including its funnels and weapons systems.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing Monday that he had no information about the images, saying, "I'm not aware of the situation you mentioned."

China's massive military upgrade has emphasized countering the U.S. and other countries' naval forces.

That includes the development of land, sea and air-launched missiles to repel and

possibly sink opposing vessels, expressed most emphatically by the land-based DF-21D ballistic missile known as the "carrier killer."

Recent months have also seen a substantial increase in Chinese military flights just southwest of Taiwan, the self-governing island republic claimed by Beijing and which it has threatened to annex by force. Washington provides Taiwan with much of its weaponry and U.S. law requires that it ensures the island can defend itself and treats threats to it as matters of "grave concern."

## Feds urge schools to give virus shots, info for kids

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is encouraging local school districts to host clinics to provide COVID-19 vaccinations to kids — and information to parents on the benefits of the shots — as the White House looks to speedily provide vaccines to those ages 5 to 11.

First lady Jill Biden and Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy were set to visit the Franklin Sherman Elementary School in McLean, Va., on Monday to launch a nationwide campaign to promote child vaccinations. The school was the first to administer the polio vaccine in 1954.

The visit comes just days after federal regulators recommended the COVID-19 vaccine for the age group. The White House said Biden will visit pediatric vaccination clinics across the country over the coming weeks to encourage the shots.

At the same time, Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra and Education Secretary Miguel Cardona are sending a letter to school districts across the country calling on them to organize vaccine

clinics for their newly eligible students. The officials are reminding school districts that they can tap into billions of dollars in federal coronavirus relief money to support pediatric vaccination efforts.

The Biden administration is providing local school districts with tools to help schools partner with pharmacies to administer shots. And it's asking schools to share information on the benefits of vaccines and details about the vaccination process with parents, in an effort to combat disinformation surrounding the shots.

The White House is encouraging schools to host community conversations and share fact sheets on the vaccines and is working with the American Academy of Pediatrics to partner local physicians with schools aiming to share science-based information about the shots.

About 28 million kids ages 5 to 11 are newly eligible for shots now that the Pfizer vaccine is approved for the age group. The White House said the federal government has procured enough of the two-dose vaccine for all of them.

## 1st Astroworld lawsuits name Scott and Drake as defendants

Los Angeles Times

The first lawsuits have been filed in the Astroworld music festival tragedy, including one that blames rappers Travis Scott and Drake as well as concert company Live Nation for the stampede that left eight people dead Friday and at least 25 injured.

A Texas attorney on Sunday filed that lawsuit, which also names NRG Stadium agent Harris County Sports & Convention Corp., accusing the defendants of prioritizing "profits over their attendees" during a concert in which a surging crowd killed concertgoers ranging in age from 14 to 27.

"Live musical performances are meant to inspire catharsis, not tragedy," read a statement from lawyer Thomas J. Henry, who is representing concertgoer Kristian Parades of Austin. "Many of these concertgoers were looking forward to this event for months, and they deserved a safe environment in which to have fun and enjoy the evening. Instead, their night was one of fear, injury and death."

The identity of the plaintiff in that suit was revealed in court

documents posted by the Daily Mail.

According to witness accounts, a number of festival attendees struggled to breathe as the crowd began to compress toward the stage during headliner Scott's set. The hip-hop artist, as well as special guest Drake, continued to perform as an ambulance entered the crowd to help concertgoers in distress.

A press release attached to the Sunday complaint said: "By the time Live Nation finally decided to end the performance, 23 people required hospitalization, 11 were in cardiac arrest and more than 300 had to be treated at a 'field hospital' on site."

During the concert, audience members repeatedly shouted, "Stop the show!" to no avail as people collapsed and got trampled on the festival floor.

"There is no excuse for the events that unfolded at NRG Stadium on Friday night," Henry said. "There is every indication that the performers, organizers and venue were not only aware of the hectic crowd, but also that injuries and potential deaths may have occurred. Still, they ... allowed the deadly show to go on."



# German COVID infection rate at new high

Associated Press

BERLIN — Germany's coronavirus infection rate climbed to its highest recorded level yet on Monday as what officials have called a "pandemic of the unvaccinated" gathers pace.

The national disease control center, the Robert Koch Institute, said the country has seen 201.1 new cases per 100,000 residents over the past seven days. That was above the previous record of 197.6 from Dec. 22 last year. While it's still a lower rate than in several other European countries, it has set alarm bells ringing.

The seven-day infection rate

has long ceased to be the only policy yardstick in Germany, with new hospital admissions now an important factor. Those are currently at just under 4 per 100,000 residents over a week — compared with a peak of about 15.5 last Christmas — but officials say hospitals are filling up in badly affected areas.

The disease control center said Monday that 15,513 new COVID-19 cases were reported over the past 24 hours — down from a record 37,120 on Friday, but figures are typically lower after the weekend. Another 33 deaths were recorded,

bringing Germany's total to 96,558.

Germany has struggled to find ways to pep up its much-slowed vaccination campaign. At least 67% of the population of 83 million is fully vaccinated, according to official figures, which authorities say isn't enough. Unlike some other European countries, it has balked at making vaccinations mandatory for any professional group.

As at many times during the pandemic, Germany has a patchwork of regional rules. Most places restrict access to many indoor facilities and

events to people who have been vaccinated, have recovered or been tested — with the latter now being excluded in some areas. Those rules are often enforced laxly.

Rules on whether schoolchildren must wear masks in class vary from state to state.

Free rapid tests for all were scrapped nearly a month ago in an effort to incentivize more people to get vaccinated. There are now widespread calls for them to be reintroduced. And officials now advocate booster vaccinations for everyone who got their initial shots six months ago or more.

## Nicaragua's Ortega seeks reelection after jailing rivals

Associated Press

MANAGUA, Nicaragua — Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega sought a fourth straight term in elections the United States has called a "pantomime" following the jailing of his top rivals and the country's opposition has urged voters to boycott.

Ortega has railed against alleged interference by Washington in Sunday's elections to determine who holds the presidency for the next five years, as well as 90

of the 92 seats in the congress and Nicaragua's representation in the Central American Parliament.

The ruling Sandinista Front and its allies control the congress and all government institutions. Ortega first served as president from 1985 to 1990, before returning to power in 2007. He recently declared his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, his "co-president."

Voting was orderly and closed Sunday evening without reported incidents. Provi-

sional vote totals were expected Monday.

The opposition had called on Nicaraguans to stay home in protest of an electoral process that has been roundly criticized as not credible by foreign powers. In June, police arrested seven potential presidential challengers to Ortega on charges that essentially amount to treason. They remained in detention on election day. Some two dozen other opposition leaders were also swept up ahead of the elections.

## People fleeing Ethiopia allege attacks, forced conscription

Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya — A new round of deadly attacks and forced conscription has begun against ethnic Tigrayans in an area of Ethiopia now controlled by Amhara regional authorities in collaboration with soldiers from neighboring Eritrea, people fleeing over the border to Sudan tell The Associated Press as the yearlong war intensifies.

Three men who fled the western Tigray communities of Adebay and Humera in the past week described warnings from Amhara authorities against supporting the rival Tigray forces who are approaching

Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, to press Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to step aside.

Their threat led Ethiopia's government to declare a state of emergency last week while the United States and other countries urged citizens to leave immediately. U.S. and African Union envoys have been holding urgent talks in Ethiopia in search of a cease-fire in a war that has killed thousands of people after political tensions with the Tigray forces who once dominated the national government turned deadly. The U.N. Security Council was expected to meet Monday.

The new accounts confirm assertions by the U.S. and others that Eritrean soldiers remain in the Tigray region, and they indicate that pressure is growing on Tigrayans of mixed heritage who have tried to live quietly amid what the U.S. has alleged as ethnic cleansing in western Tigray.

As reports grew about the Tigray forces' momentum, Amhara authorities at a public meeting in Adebay on Oct. 29 warned residents against supporting them, two men who fled to Sudan said.

"There are people working for (the Tigray forces). You

should give them to us or we will kill you all together," one who fled, 28-year-old Mawcha Asmelash, recalled authorities saying.

Five days later, he said, Amhara militia attacked. "I saw four people being killed on the run," he said.

He and other men hid in the bush for two days, gathering information from local women and trying to judge whether it was safe to return. But the women estimated scores of men had been killed and residents had been forbidden to bury their bodies. The women urged them to flee.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Girl cut by blade hidden in Halloween candy**

**FL** RIVERVIEW — An 8-year-old girl in Florida bit into her Halloween candy and was cut by a blade hidden in the chocolate, authorities said.

The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office is investigating after the girl's mother called to report the incident. Authorities said a piece of an Exacto knife blade was hidden in the mini chocolate bar. The wrapper was sealed when the girl opened it.

"It is despicable that someone would tamper with a child's Halloween candy for their own cruel enjoyment," Sheriff Chad Chronister said on the department's Facebook page. "We are reminding all parents of the importance of checking over EVERY piece of candy your child received while trick or treating."

**Missing teen saved by using distress signal**

**KY** LONDON — A missing teenage girl from North Carolina was rescued in Kentucky after a driver reported seeing her in another car using hand gestures known on social media as signals of distress, authorities said.

The 16-year-old was a passenger in a silver Toyota car driven by James Herbert Brick, who was arrested and charged with unlawful imprisonment, according to a news release from Laurel County Sheriff John Root.

The witness was behind the car as it traveled down Interstate 75 and called 911. Root said the caller, who wasn't named, advised that the girl used ges-

tures known on the app TikTok to represent domestic violence and a call for help.

As the Toyota continued along the highway, the witness followed and gave the dispatcher updates on its location. Deputies and detectives stopped the car when it exited the highway near London. The sheriff said they learned that the girl was reported missing by her parents in Asheville, N.C.

**State treasurer: \$5.6M in tax refunds unclaimed**

**LA** BATON ROUGE — Louisiana taxpayers haven't cashed more than \$5.6 million in state income tax refunds, and the money has been sent to the state's unclaimed property program.

Treasurer John Schroder said the funds were received from the Department of Revenue and are owed to nearly 22,000 residents and businesses around Louisiana.

"If you haven't checked your name in our database in a while, there's no better time than today. In fact, the amounts received in income tax refunds this year range from a few dollars to up to six figures," Schroder, a Republican, said in a statement.

**Companies team up to give truck to food pantry**

**MS** GREENVILLE — A health care company, a grocery store chain and a food company teamed up to donate a refrigerated truck to a nonprofit group that fights hunger in the impoverished Mississippi Delta.

Hearty Helpings Food Pantry

& Soup Kitchen received the truck. It was donated by the MolinaCares Accord in collaboration with Molina Healthcare of Mississippi, the Delta Division of Kroger grocery stores and Mars Food, the Delta Democrat-Times reported.

The companies said in a joint news release that they will donate about 70,000 meals this year to food banks, including Hearty Helpings.

**Woman charged with pumpkin assault on train**

**NY** MOUNT VERNON — A Bronx woman is due to appear in court this week to face charges she punched a train conductor numerous times and hit her with a pumpkin.

Alexis Adams was charged last month for the alleged attack that occurred on a MetroNorth train on Oct. 11.

According to Metropolitan Transportation Authority police and the Westchester County district attorney's office, the 21-year-old Adams punched the conductor after she was asked to produce a ticket and failed to do so.

Adams allegedly hit the conductor several times in the face and also hit her with the pumpkin, causing injuries that required stitches.

**Middle school students stole teacher's car, cash**

**NC** WINSTON-SALEM — A group of students stole car keys and cash from a North Carolina school teacher's purse before crashing the vehicle they took into a tree, a sheriff's office said.

The reports from the Forsyth

County Sheriff's Office said a suspect took car keys and a purse with cash from the tote bag of a teacher at Wiley Middle School, the Winston-Salem Journal reported.

The sheriff's office said, a person driving the stolen Jeep Cherokee crashed into a tree. The driver fled and three juvenile passengers were taken to the hospital for injuries that were not considered life-threatening, officials said.

School district spokesman Brent Campbell said security and surveillance cameras helped law enforcement identify the students, who will be disciplined according to district policy.

**Moose on the loose herded from campus**

**SD** SIOUX FALLS — A moose on the loose got onto the South Dakota State University football field in Brookings before leaving town.

Campus police said the bull moose appeared to be a year or two old.

Emmett Keyser, the regional supervisor for the Game Fish and Parks office, told KELO-TV that his agency helped the campus police and other law enforcement with herding the moose out of town. But, in apparent impersonation of a running back, "He ran back through our line and into the stadium," Keyser said.

The moose hung around campus for a time until officials were able to herd him west out of town.

While moose are rare in the area, they do appear from time to time.

— From wire reports

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# Topsy-turvy: NFL leaders struggle

Associated Press

First-place teams had a rough Sunday.

Dak Prescott returned to the lineup for Dallas (6-2) and the Cowboys didn't score until Denver led 30-0 in the fourth quarter on the road.

Josh Allen had three turnovers and the Buffalo Bills (5-3) showed no discipline in an embarrassing 9-6 loss at woeful Jacksonville.

Without Aaron Rodgers, the Green Bay Packers (7-2) couldn't muster enough offense to upend Kansas City in rookie Jordan Love's first start.

Coming off an emotional week, the Las Vegas Raiders (5-2) struggled in a 23-16 loss at the Giants.

Other winning teams had a tough day at home. The Saints (5-3) lost to Atlanta in their first game missing Jameis Winston. The Rams (7-2) were routed by the AFC South-leading Titans, who won their first game since losing Derrick Henry. The Bengals (5-4) were blown out by the Browns for their second straight loss after a 5-2 start.

A couple of winning teams struggled to get their victories. The Ravens (6-2) needed overtime to handle the Vikings. The Char-

gers (5-3) beat Philadelphia on a late field goal.

Overall, division leaders were 3-4 and home teams were 5-7. Three clubs favored to win by seven or more points lost outright. Week 9 will serve as a prime example for any coach who wants to issue the "any given Sunday" warning to his players before a game. Of course, they've heard it before.

"It's hard to win football games, no matter who you play," Allen said. "We're all grown men. We all get paid to play this game. They came out. They wanted it more."

The Bills are an enigma. They were the odds-on favorite to win the Super Bowl but couldn't beat a team that had lost 21 of its last 23 games. Their high-powered offense hasn't been sharp in consecutive games, including last week's victory over Miami. Buffalo's loss coupled with Tennessee's win and a loss to the Titans (7-2) last month means the Bills have an uphill battle to get the No. 1 seed in the AFC. They have to hold off New England (5-4) just to win the AFC East.

The Cowboys had won six in a row before the inconsistent Broncos dominated them.

"The message is don't take the cheese,

and frankly we were outcoached, we were outplayed all the way through," Dallas coach Mike McCarthy said. "This is the first time I've felt clearly our energy didn't exceed our opponent. That's disappointing." Heading into the second half, the conference races are wide open.

The Titans are the AFC's frontrunner following their convincing win on the road against Los Angeles. But they still have to play without Henry for the long haul.

Baltimore has overcome a slew of injuries to lead the AFC North. The Ravens have a difficult schedule over the final nine after road games at Miami and Chicago.

The Bills still may have the most talented roster despite their recent struggles. The Chargers, Browns, Raiders and Chiefs also have a shot to be there in late January.

Arizona (8-1) leads the NFC race, but the Cardinals already lost at home to the Packers with Rodgers. Tom Brady and the defending Super Bowl champion Buccaneers (6-2) had a productive bye, seeing three teams ahead of them lose. And, the Cowboys and Rams will bounce back after a loss.

This surely won't be the last topsy-turvy weekend in the NFL this season.

## Chiefs use defense to slip past Rodgers-less Packers

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Kansas City Chiefs probably scrapped whatever defensive game plan they were pondering the moment they learned Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers had tested positive for COVID-19 this week.

There's no way they would have blitzed the crafty MVP the way they did his understudy Sunday.

The new pressure-filled plan worked against Jordan Love, though. The Chiefs brought the heat just about every down, and the Packers were unable to counter it until the fourth quarter. Kansas City hung on for a 13-7 victory that snapped Green Bay's seven-game winning streak.

"I thought our defense did a nice job. We didn't hold back," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said. "Guys played hard and aggress-

sive, and you've seen things happen when teams are favored. You have to bear down every week the best way you can."

Rodgers tested positive for COVID-19 earlier this week, forcing the three-time All-Pro to miss his first game since the 2017 season. Love responded by going 19-for-34 for 190 yards with a touchdown and an interception, both coming in the fourth quarter as the Packers tried to rally from a 13-0 deficit against the defending AFC champs.

Love's touchdown pass to Allen Lazard with 4:49 left gave them a chance. But Patrick Mahomes hit Tyreek Hill on third-and-10 near midfield with less than two minutes left for a first down that allowed Kansas City to run out the clock.

"Aaron's had experience where he can get you out of some situations," Green Bay coach

Matt LaFleur said, "but you know, that's why I think when you have a young quarterback, you have to have the right plan as a coach. ... I think this falls on me not having a good enough plan to go out there against that pressure, especially with a young quarterback."

Patrick Mahomes was just 20-for-37 for 166 yards — his fewest in a full game in his career — along with a touchdown pass to Travis Kelce. And while the Chiefs (5-4) managed just 237 yards of total offense, that was enough to edge above .500.

"I feel like we're close," Mahomes said. "You can see drives here and there where we're the team everybody knows and loves, but you have to consistently do that throughout every single drive in a game. We're just not executing."

The Packers (7-2), who are 6-

12-1 without Rodgers since 2008, only managed 301 yards of offense.

More than any quarterback or offense, though, the difference in the first half was Green Bay's special teams.

Mason Crosby yanked a 40-yard field-goal attempt in the first quarter. He had a 37-yarder blocked in the second period. And when the Packers forced a punt later in the half, one of their downfield blockers accidentally touched the ball with his toe and Kansas City recovered, eventually turning it into a chip-shot field-goal. Green Bay nearly did the same thing when Amari Rodgers muffed another punt.

The officials whiffed on the first-half punt — it took the Chiefs challenging the call for it to be reversed — and referee Shawn Smith had to stop the game numerous times to adjust the clock.



# Larson caps comeback season with title

Associated Press

AVONDALE, Ariz. — Kyle Larson won. No surprise, right? He was, after all, the overwhelming 2-1 betting favorite to win NASCAR's season-ending championship race.

Suspended nearly all of last season for using a racial slur, Larson closed his comeback season in NASCAR with his first championship Sunday with a title-winning victory at Phoenix Raceway.

Larson was in tears during his cooldown laps as he reflected on his rebuild from out-of-work NASCAR driver to Cup champion.

"Eighteen months ago, I didn't even think I'd be in a Cup car again. Strapping in for the Daytona 500 didn't even seem real, let alone winning the championship," Larson said. "It's definitely been a journey, a rollercoaster. I'm very thankful for my second chance and every opportunity I've been given in these last 18 months. Life's a crazy thing. Just stay positive through it."

Larson led seven times for a race-high 108 laps but was running fourth, last among the title contenders, as teammates Martin Truex Jr. and Denny Hamlin controlled the championship late in a pair of Toyotas.

Then a caution reset everything.

Because he won the pole Saturday in qualifying, Larson had the first stall on pit road and the shortest sprint back onto the track of the four title contenders. He silently prayed for a flawless service call from his Hendrick Motorsports crew to get the No. 5 Chevrolet back on track ahead of his three

title rivals.

Wow, did the No. 5 team deliver.

Larson's crew performed its second-fastest stop of the season — a span that stretches 38 races — and Larson went from last among the final four to first.

"I knew the only way we were going to pull it off is if our pit crew got us off as a leader, and damn, they did. That was just crazy," Larson said. "Those guys nailed the pit stop."

Larson controlled the restart with 25 laps remaining, quickly cleared Truex, then held off several of Truex's challenges. There was no stopping Larson, just as he's been impossible to stop all season, and he drove to his 10th Cup victory of the year.

He beat Truex to the finish line by an easy .398 seconds.

"There were so many points in this race where I did not think we were going to win," Larson said. "Without my pit crew on that last stop, we would not be standing right here. They are the true winners of this race. They are true champions."

"I'm just blessed to be a part of this group. Every single man or person, man and woman at Hendrick Motorsports, this win is for all of us, and every one of you. This is unbelievable. I'm speechless."

Truex, the 2017 champion, finished second and was followed by Hamlin, his Joe Gibbs Racing teammate. Hamlin is 0-for-5 in championship finales and was the only driver among the final four contenders who did not lead a lap Sunday.

Truex has finished second in the championship standings three times in the four seasons since his 2017 title.

"Ultimately, we needed to beat him off pit road. It's unfortunate, but we win and lose as a team," Truex said. "That's three times we've been second, and that sucks. Second hurts, I'm not going to lie, especially with the car we had and the job the guys did."

Hamlin, who raced Larson all season for the regular-season title that ultimately went to Larson, has firmly maintained that Larson should be the champion. But it didn't soften the blow of another title defeat for the three-time Daytona 500 winner.

"Any time you can win 10 races in a year, you're absolutely a deserving champion," Hamlin said. "They did a great job on the last pit stop and got him out there, and he just set sail after that. Proud of my team ... just a really good year. A really, really good year, and things just didn't pan out."

Chase Elliott, the reigning champion and NASCAR's most popular driver, led 94 laps but finished fourth.

"I was really proud of our group. I thought we brought a really good car ... just didn't work out," Elliott said. "But look, proud of our team, a lot to build on, and also congrats to Kyle ... very, very deserving champions, and glad to see Kyle have success."

"When you're a good driver and a good person and you surround yourself with good people, success is warranted. It's good to see that."

## DeBrincat scores in OT to lift Chicago past Nashville

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Alex DeBrincat scored 37 seconds into overtime to give the Chicago Blackhawks a 2-1 win over the Nashville Predators on Sunday night in Derek King's NHL coaching debut.

DeBrincat finished a 2-on-1 break and give-and-go with Patrick Kane to lift the Blackhawks to just their second win. DeBrincat got a return pass from Kane and popped his seventh goal past Juuse Saros from the left side of the net.

After scoring, DeBrincat scooped the puck from the back of the net and presented it to

King in the dressing room. The 54-year-old King was promoted from the franchise's top minor league club, Rockford of the AHL, to Chicago's interim coach after Jeremy Colliton was fired on Saturday following a 1-9-2 start.

King started his postgame press conference by saying, "I'm not going to take my mask off because I'm smiling too much. Got to be humble."

But then King removed his mask and confessed he wasn't as nervous as he thought he might be in his NHL coaching debut.

"The message was just play

the game right and don't cheat it," King said. "Stay loose and let's have fun with this."

The Blackhawks responded with one of their most competitive games of the season after a 5-1 loss at Winnipeg on Friday that seemed to seal Colliton's fate.

**Red Wings 5, Golden Knights 2:** Pius Suter and Tyler Bertuzzi each had a goal and an assist, and host Detroit beat Vegas.

After Nicolas Roy gave the Golden Knights the lead 3:48 into the game with his second of the season, the Red Wings scored the next four goals to take control.

**Wild 5, Islanders 2:** Brandon Duhaime scored the go-ahead goal midway through the third period about two minutes after Ryan Hartman tied the game for Minnesota, and the host Wild registered another comeback win.

**Ducks 4, Blues 1:** Troy Terry and Benoit-Oliver Groulx each had a goal and an assist, and John Gibson stopped 34 shots to lead host Anaheim over St. Louis.

**Canucks 6, Stars 3:** J.T. Miller had two power-play goals and host Vancouver scored four times in the second period to beat Dallas.

# Nets beat Raptors for 5th straight win

Associated Press

TORONTO — Kevin Durant had 31 points, James Harden scored 16 of his 28 points in the fourth quarter and the Brooklyn Nets won their fifth straight game, beating the Toronto Raptors 116-103 on Sunday.

"Our defense was there when we needed it to be," Durant said. "We got stops and made shots."

Harden narrowly missed his second straight triple-double, finishing with 10 rebounds and eight assists.

"When he's at that level, he makes us go," Brooklyn's Blake Griffin said about Harden. "We, as a team, can go to a different level."

Harden missed his first seven shots from beyond the arc before connecting with 4:34 left to play the fourth, extending a seven-point Nets lead to double digits. He added two more from distance in the final quarter.

"James was special there in the fourth," Durant said.

Griffin had 14 points and 11 rebounds, and Patty Mills scored 13 points to help Steve Nash earn the victory in his first game in his home country as an NBA head coach.

"That means a lot," Nash said. "This is a very special place for me. Not only Canada, but Toronto. I've spent so much of my time here, I have so many close friends, relation-

ships, and memories in this city. For me, this is definitely a sweet win."

Durant reached 20 points for the 10th straight game, extending both his career-best streak to begin a season and the Nets' record for 20-point games at the start of a season.

"Like we said since Day 1, he's been unbelievable this season at both ends of the floor, rebounding, scoring, facilitating" Nash said.

Durant was playing in Toronto for the first time since tearing his left Achilles tendon while playing for Golden State in Game 5 of the 2019 NBA Finals.

"The last time I was here was one of my lowest moments as a basketball player," Durant said. "It's good to come back here playing and see the fans again."

The 11-time All-Star shot 11 for 18, going 3-for-6 from three-point range, and 6-for-6 at the free throw line. He had seven rebounds and seven assists.

Fred VanVleet scored 21 points, OG Anunoby had 16 and Gary Trent Jr. scored 15 points for the Raptors, who have lost two straight after winning the previous five.

Toronto (7-for-25) matched its season-low with seven made three-pointers. The Raptors also had seven in their season-opening loss to Washington.

Toronto forward Pascal Siakam made his first start of the season after missing the first 10 games because of left shoulder surgery. Siakam scored 15 points in 25 minutes. He shot 5 for 12.

"My legs were heavy," Siakam said. "I was out of breath after about three minutes."

Toronto led 60-53 at halftime, but Brooklyn reclaimed the lead with a 9-0 run to begin the third that was capped by a 3-pointer from Griffin. Durant scored 13 points in the quarter and Griffin had seven as the Nets took an 88-77 lead to the fourth.

## Tip-ins

**Nets:** F James Johnson (left knee) was inactive. ... The Nets won consecutive games against Toronto for the first time since February and April, 2015.... Griffin said he expects to play in the second half of Brooklyn's back-to-back at Chicago tomorrow night.

**Raptors:** Siakam replaced Precious Achiuwa in the starting lineup. ... C Khem Birch (right knee) was inactive. ... Toronto shot 2 for 11 from 3-point range in the first. ... For the second straight game, the Raptors didn't attempt a free throw in the first quarter. ... Toronto waived F Sam Dekker Saturday. ... Rookie Dalano Banton celebrated his 22nd birthday.

# Beal scores 30, helps Wizards end skid vs. Bucks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Bradley Beal scored 30 points and the Washington Wizards beat the Milwaukee Bucks 101-94 on Sunday.

Kyle Kuzma added 15 points and 10 rebounds to help the Wizards snap an eight-game losing streak in the series with the Bucks. Montrezl Harrell also had 15 points.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 29 points and 18 rebounds for defending champion Milwaukee, which has lost five of six to drop to 4-6.

"We made it tough on them," Beal said after the Wizards limited the Bucks to 39% shooting. "I feel like I played a playoff game tonight."

**Warriors 120, Rockets 107:** Jordan Poole scored 15 of his 25

points in the first quarter and host Golden State beat Houston.

Stephen Curry added 20 points and three steals to help the NBA-leading Warriors improve to 8-1 with their fourth victory in a row.

Jae'Sean Tate led the Rockets with 21 points and 10 rebounds. They have lost eight straight and are tied with New Orleans at an NBA-worst 1-0.

**Clippers 120, Hornets 106:** Paul George scored 20 points, Reggie Jackson added 19 and host Los Angeles beat Charlotte for its fourth straight victory.

Luke Kennard had 18 points for the Clippers, and Terance Mann finished with 17 points and 10 rebounds.

LaMelo Ball, from nearby Chino Hills, had 21 points for the Hornets in their fourth straight

loss. Miles Bridges also had 21 points for Charlotte.

**Cavaliers 126, Knicks 109:** Ricky Rubio scored a career-high 37 to help Cleveland win at New York.

The Cavs have won four in a row to improve to 7-4. Evan Mobley added 26 points, Jarrett Allen had 18 and Darius Garland 16. Rubio's previous career high was 34 with Utah against San Antonio in 2018.

Julius Randle led the Knicks with 19 points.

**Magic 107, Jazz 100:** Cole Anthony scored 10 of his season-best 33 points in the fourth quarter and keyed a game-closing 24-11 run in host Orlando's victory over Utah.

Wendell Carter Jr. added a season-best 22 points and 15 rebounds.

Donovan Mitchell scored 21 points for the Jazz. Rudy Gobert had 21 points and 15 rebounds.

**Thunder 99, Spurs 94:** Mike Muscala scored 20 points in 14 minutes and host Oklahoma City rallied to beat San Antonio.

Muscala made 5 of 6 field goals and 7 of 9 free throws in one of the most productive offensive games of his career. Keldon Johnson scored 22 points for the Spurs.

**Pacers 94, Kings 91:** Caris LeVert scored 22 points and visiting Indiana held off Sacramento after blowing a 15-point lead. Domantas Sabonis had 17 points and 10 rebounds to help the Pacers to their first win in Sacramento since 2018. T.J. McConnell added 17 point.

Harrison Barnes scored 22 points for the Kings.