

USMC vaccine compliance may be worst

The Washington Post

Up to 10,000 active-duty Marines will not be fully vaccinated against the coronavirus when their deadline arrives in coming days, a trajectory expected to yield the U.S. military's worst immunization rate.

While 94% of Marine Corps personnel have met the vaccination requirement or are on a path to do so, according to the latest official data, it is too late for the remainder to begin a regimen and complete it by the service's Nov. 28 deadline. Within an institution built upon the belief that orders are to be obeyed and one that brands itself the nation's premier crisis-response force, it is a vexing outcome.

The holdouts will join approximately 9,600 Air Force personnel who have sought an exemption on medical or religious grounds, did not report their status or outright refused the vaccine, causing a dilemma for commanders tasked with maintaining combat-ready forces — and marking the

latest showdown over President Joe Biden's authority to impose vaccination as a condition of continued government service.

"Marines know they're an expeditionary force, and pride themselves on discipline and being first to fight," said David Lapan, a retired Marine Corps officer and former communications chief for the service. Leadership, he said, should be alarmed that the Marine Corps ethos of always being ready for the next mission appears to be tarnished in this case. "Why," Lapan asked, "did they decide not to follow a direct order?"

Answering that question will be essential, he added, "if this is somehow indicative of a problem" that could arise again in the future.

The Marine Corps made no secret it has struggled with vaccine hesitancy in the ranks. Late last month, officials issued an ultimatum: get vaccinated, apply for an exemption or get kicked out.

Then, as the cutoff to be in compliance

drew near, the Marines' top general, Commandant David H. Berger, and his senior enlisted adviser, Sgt. Maj. Troy E. Black, distributed a video message to the force imploring those who had not been vaccinated to get it done. They appealed to Marines' sense of fidelity and calmly explained that the Marine Corps would be less capable unless everyone met the requirement.

"When something bad happens around the world and the president says, 'I need to know how long it's going to take to get Marines there,' it's too late then to get vaccinated," Berger said in the video.

"It's challenging for us to be able to continue the mission," Black added, "if we're not ready to go."

Berger spoke last: "We need every single Marine in the unit to be vaccinated. We don't have extra Marines. We're a pretty small force, and we have to make sure that everybody on the team is ready to go all the time. That's our job."

Army outlines consequences for those refusing vaccine

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

The Army won't promote or reenlist troops who refuse the coronavirus vaccine and who haven't requested an exemption, according to a memo from the service's top civilian leader.

The new rules apply to active-duty, Reserve and National Guard troops, including those in at least one state where the governor doesn't require the vaccine.

Army Secretary Christine Wormuth in a Nov. 16 memo lays out what will happen if soldiers refuse the vaccine and don't have an exemption request pending. They will have their records flagged the day they make their final vaccine refusal, after a meeting with a medical professional and a second order to get vaccinated.

"I authorize commanders to impose bars to continued Service ... for all Soldiers who refuse the mandatory vaccination order without an approved exemption or a pending exemption request," Wormuth wrote in the memo.

A soldier will remain flagged until they are fully vaccinated, receive an approved medical or administrative exemption or is separated from the Army, according to the memo.

"Favorable personnel actions are suspended for flagged Soldiers ... including, but not limited to, reenlistment, reassignment, promotion, appearance before a semi-centralized promotion board, issuance of awards and decorations, attendance at military or civilian schools, application for or use of tuition assistance, payment of enlistment bo-

nus or selective reenlistment bonus, or assumption of command," Wormuth said in the memo.

It's unclear whether the Pentagon can force Guardsmen, who serve under both federal and state control, to be vaccinated if the governors they serve do not require a vaccine.

Oklahoma's adjutant general, Brig. Gen. Thomas Mancino, on behalf of Gov. Kevin Stitt announced Nov. 11 that the state's Guardsmen are not required to get vaccinated. In response, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby at a Nov. 15 news briefing said Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin "has the authority to require these vaccines for all members of the force, including the National Guard," as a readiness issue.

The issue of whether state governors or federal officials have

ultimate authority over the National Guard will likely be determined in court, Eugene Fidell, a military law professor at the New York University School of Law told Defense One for a Nov. 18 report.

More than 1.5 million service members are fully vaccinated with another 322,000 partially vaccinated, according to the Defense Department's website.

About 77% of the Army soldiers — active duty, Reserve, and Guard — has received at least one shot, and 72% are completely vaccinated, according to data provided by the Army to Defense One.

Only 51.84% of the Army National Guard is fully vaccinated and 60.72% has received at least one dose, according to data provided to Defense One by the National Guard.

Supply chain woes felt at overseas commissaries

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Some commissary and exchange stores at U.S. bases overseas may be unable to keep certain items in stock during the holiday season because of supply chain delays affecting retailers worldwide, store officials said.

“Right now, the flow of products to our stores overseas is below preferred levels but is flowing,” said Kevin Robinson, a Defense Commissary Agency spokesman. “Our customers will see some holes on shelves as we continue to work with our distributors to get the products we need, especially to our stores in Europe and the Pacific.”

Manufacturer cuts, distributor labor and driver shortages, shipping delays and port congestion have placed a strain on

DECA’s overseas distribution centers “to receive what we ordered and on schedule,” Robinson said in a statement Friday.

Robinson didn’t specify which products are in short supply. But the Wiesbaden, Germany, commissary on Hainerberg told customers last week that it was temporarily out of some chilled items, such as lactose-free and almond milks, cheese, lunch and breakfast meats, sour cream, cream cheese, non-dairy creamers, canned biscuits, butter and yogurt. Milk and egg supplies are locally sourced and unaffected, the commissary said.

Additional deliveries were expected early this week, a garrison Facebook post said Thursday.

Some dairy products were being restocked Monday after-

noon, according to one customer.

Global supply chain problems brought on by the pandemic have been affecting retailers worldwide for months. Those challenges include container shortages, coronavirus-related factory shutdowns, port congestion and capacity limitations, driver availability as well as limited truck and rail capacity, said Chris Ward, a spokesman for the Army and Air Force Exchange Service at the company’s headquarters in Dallas.

Electronics, athletic footwear, men’s and women’s clothing, appliances and furniture stocks have also been affected, Ward said in a statement Friday.

Ward said the agency is working with manufacturers and suppliers to prioritize support of the military community.

He said the problems have delayed shipments to exchange stores by up to one week, and he advised customers to shop early for the holidays.

DECA is working closely with senior leaders at each location “to overcome any challenges that might impact the timely delivery of products to stores,” Robinson said. The agency prioritizes shipments to overseas and remote locations within the United States, and has expedited high-demand items to overseas, he added.

“We want our customers to know we are doing everything we can, and more, to get the products they need onto their store shelves — especially to our overseas commissaries,” he said. “If they happen to see empty shelves in the store, please be patient — the store will be restocked often the very next day.”

Army bases in Europe defer most booster shots until '22

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — U.S. Army bases in Europe will defer most COVID-19 booster shots until early 2022 as the service instead prioritizes unvaccinated personnel and high-risk people.

In a statement Monday, Army health officials in Europe said booster shots will be given in the near term to seniors 65 and older, those at risk of serious illness and mission-essential workers. Immunizing unvaccinated service members and children is also part of the revised focus, the statement said.

Gino Mattorano, a spokesman for the Army’s Regional Health Command Europe, said that “very early in the new year,” all eligible people 18 and older are ex-

pected to be able to receive boosters at Army medical facilities.

The Army’s statement comes amid federal guidelines announced Friday recommending COVID-19 booster shots for adults who were fully vaccinated with the Pfizer or Moderna shots at least six months ago.

Health officials are increasingly concerned about a surge in COVID-19 as vaccine effectiveness wanes and holiday travel, parties and family gatherings make people more susceptible to infection.

While the Defense Department has mandated that military members and civilian workers must be fully vaccinated, boosters remain optional. Even so, demand for the shots appears to be high at some U.S. military hospitals in Europe, including in Germany and Italy.

More than 90% of federal force follows mandate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More than 90% of federal workers received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine by Monday’s deadline set by President Joe Biden.

Biden announced in September that more than 3.5 million federal workers were required to undergo vaccination, with no option to get regularly tested instead, unless they secured an approved medical or religious exemption. A U.S. official said the vast majority of federal workers are fully vaccinated, and that a smaller number have pending or approved exceptions to the mandate.

In all, more than 95% of federal workers are in compliance with the Biden mandate, the official said, either by being vacci-

nated or having requested an exemption. Workers who are not in compliance are set to begin a “counseling” process that could ultimately result in their termination if they don’t get a shot or secure an approved exception to vaccination.

The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the statistics because the official wasn’t authorized to speak on the record before their official release later Monday.

Beyond the federal worker rule, the Biden administration is looking to compel large businesses to institute vaccinate-or-testing requirements that would cover more than 84 million workers, though plans for January enforcement have been on hold pending litigation.

Xi: China will not seek power over Southeast Asia

Associated Press

BEIJING — Chinese leader Xi Jinping said Monday that his country will not seek dominance over Southeast Asia or bully its smaller neighbors, amid ongoing friction over the South China Sea.

Xi made the remarks during a virtual conference with the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, held to mark the 30th anniversary of relations between China and the grouping.

Two diplomats said ASEAN member Myanmar was not represented at Monday's meeting after its military-installed government refused to allow an ASEAN envoy to meet with ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other arrested politicians. Military ruler Gen. Min Aung Hlaing was also barred from representing his country at the last ASEAN summit.

China has repeatedly sought to overcome concerns about its rising power and influence in the region, particularly its claim to virtually the entire South China Sea that overlaps the claims of ASEAN members Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei and the Philippines.

"China resolutely opposes hegemonism and power politics, wishes to maintain friendly relations with its neighbors and jointly nurture lasting peace in the region and absolutely will not seek hegemony or, even less, bully the small," Xi said, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Xi's remarks came days after Chinese coast guard ships blocked and sprayed a powerful stream of water at two Philippine boats carrying supplies to troops at a disputed South China Sea shoal and forced them to turn back.

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte highlighted the incident in his remarks at the conference, referring to the shoal by its Philippine name.

"We abhor the recent event in the Ayungin Shoal and view with grave concern other similar developments," Duterte said, according to a statement from his office.

"This does not speak well of the relations between our nations and our partnership."

Duterte also called on China to respect the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which establishes maritime entitlements and sovereign rights over maritime zones, along with a 2016 Hague arbitration ruling that mostly invalidated China's South China Sea claims. China has refused to recognize the ruling.

Yokosuka locals, sailors restart 'Honch' cleanup

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA, Japan — A monthly tradition that brings sailors and Yokosuka community members together to clean up a popular nightlife district resumed Friday for the first time since summer.

The city's Honcho district — "The Honch" to American sailors near Yokosuka Naval Base — typically draws a bustling weekend crowd thanks to its high density of bars and late-night food options.

On Friday night, however, a different group roamed the streets.

Around 40 people, including representatives from the base, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force, the local government and a plethora of volunteer and neighborhood organizations, gathered for the cleanup.

Over two hours, the group walked about 2 miles from Shiori Station to Yokosuka-Chuo Station, picking up beer cans, cigarette butts and plastic food wrappers as they went.

Aside from cleaning up the neighborhood, the event allows sailors and locals to get to know each other a little better, base commander Capt. Rich Jarrett told *Stars and Stripes*.

"This is a total community effort," he said during the event. "It's a real opportunity to integrate a lot of different people."

And it gave Jarrett an opportunity to keep an eye on sailors who are out on the town. Over the course of the night, he chided several for not wearing their masks, a requirement when off base.

Typically held at the end of every month, the Honch cleanup has been on hold since July due to local restrictions and concerns related to the coronavirus pandemic. However, with confirmed case numbers on and off the base nearly non-existent, Jarrett said the community is comfortable with it once again.

"This is a tradition in Yokosuka," he said, "and we're just really glad to see old friends."

Friday's cleanup was the second for Petty Officer 1st Class Freddy Pena, a culinary specialist from Los Angeles, but he said it's already had a big impact on him.

"For me, it's a great opportunity to join the community and be a part of their traditions," Pena said. "For us, being here and being a part of this makes us feel like we're one big community instead of being separated by the gate."

USS Ronald Reagan sailor found dead at US naval base in Japan

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A sailor assigned to the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan was found dead Friday morning at the naval base, the carrier's homeport, according to Navy officials.

A spokesman for the Reagan identified the sailor as Seaman Brandon Forbes, 20, of Maple Heights, Ohio, a machinist's mate fireman assigned to the Reagan's nuclear reactor department.

Forbes had failed to report for duty and was considered absent without authorization for several days prior to Friday, according to an email Monday to *Stars and Stripes* from spokeswoman Lt. Cmdr. Dawn Stankus.

Someone phoned the Naval Criminal Investigative Service about the body's location,

according to Stankus. She declined to identify the caller or where Forbes' body was discovered or at what time.

Investigators discovered no immediate evidence of foul play, but NCIS remains "heavily involved and invested in the situation," according to Stankus.

"Our deepest condolences go out to the family and friends of Machinist's Mate Fireman Brandon Forbes," the Reagan's commander, Capt. Fred Goldhammer said, in a statement provided by Stankus. "He was an energetic young man who was dedicated to his duties and his shipmates onboard Ronald Reagan. The circumstances surrounding this unfortunate loss of life remain under investigation at this time. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Brandon's family as we all grapple with this tragedy."

SUV hits Wis. parade; at least 5 dead, 40 hurt

Associated Press

WAUKESHA, Wis. — Investigators are looking into whether the SUV driver who plowed through a Christmas parade in suburban Milwaukee, killing at least five people and injuring more than 40, was fleeing a crime, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press.

The joyous scene of marching bands and children dancing in Santa hats and waving pom-poms turned deadly in an instant on Sunday, giving way to screams and scenes of crumpled bodies as the SUV sped through barricades and struck dancers, musicians and others. Members of a “Dancing Gran-nies” club were among those killed.

At least nine patients — most of them children — were listed

in critical condition Monday at two hospitals, and seven others were reported in serious condition.

One person was taken into custody after a Waukesha police officer opened fire to try to stop the vehicle, authorities said.

Two law enforcement officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly, identified the person as 39-year-old Darrell Brooks.

Investigators were questioning him about an earlier crime, which one of the officials described as an argument involving a knife. The official cautioned the investigation was still in the early stages.

Online court records showed

that a person named Darrell Brooks Jr., with a birthdate making him 39, has two open criminal cases in Milwaukee County. In one case, filed Nov. 5, he is charged with resisting or obstructing an officer, reckless endangering, disorderly conduct, bail jumping and battery. Records show a \$1,000 cash bond was posted on Friday.

In the other case, filed in July 2020, Brooks is charged with reckless endangering and illegal possession of a firearm.

The Milwaukee County district’s attorney office emailed reporters copies of the criminal complaints in both of those cases. In the more recent one, a woman told police that Brooks deliberately ran her over with his vehicle in a gas station parking lot after a fight. She was hos-

pitalized for her injuries.

The district attorney’s office did not immediately respond to questions about whether the Brooks in custody was the same one named in the two complaints.

Eighteen children ages 3 to 16 were brought to Children’s Wisconsin Hospital, including three sets of siblings, said Dr. Amy Drendel, medical director of the emergency department. They suffered injuries ranging from scrapes on their faces to broken bones and serious head injuries, she said. Six were listed in critical condition.

“This is unique and truly demonstrates the devastating effects of this on our community,” said Dr. Michael Meyer, head of the hospital’s pediatric intensive care unit.

‘Bitcoin City’ in El Salvador to be fueled by cryptocurrency

Associated Press

LA LIBERTAD, El Salvador — In a rock concert-like atmosphere, El Salvador President Nayib Bukele announced that his government will build an oceanside “Bitcoin City” at the base of a volcano.

Bukele used a gathering of Bitcoin enthusiasts Saturday night to launch his latest idea, much as he used at an earlier Bitcoin conference in Miami to announce in a video message that El Salvador would be the first country to make the cryptocurrency legal tender.

A bond offering would happen in 2022 entirely in Bitcoin, Bukele said, wearing his signature backward baseball cap. And 60 days after financing was ready, construction would begin.

The city will be built near the Conchagua volcano to take advantage of geothermal energy to power both the city and Bitcoin mining — the energy-intensive solving of complex mathematical calculations day and night to

verify currency transactions.

The government is already running a pilot Bitcoin mining venture at another geothermal power plant beside the Tecapa volcano.

The oceanside Conchagua volcano sits in southeastern El Salvador on the Gulf of Fonseca.

The government will provide land and infrastructure and work to attract investors.

The only tax collected there will be the value-added tax, half of which will be used to pay the municipal bonds and the rest for municipal infrastructure and maintenance. Bukele said there would be no property, income or municipal taxes, and the city would have zero carbon dioxide emissions.

The city would be built with attracting foreign investment in mind. There would be residential areas, malls, restaurants and a port, Bukele said. The president talked of digital education, technology and sustainable public transportation.

Kidnappers release 2 out of 17 missionaries abducted in Haiti

Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Two of 17 members of a missionary group who were kidnapped more than a month ago are safe and “in good spirits” after being freed in Haiti, their U.S.-based church organization announced.

Christian Aid Ministries issued a statement Sunday saying it could not give the names of those released, why they were freed or other information.

“While we rejoice at this release, our hearts are with the 15 people who are still being held,” the Berlin, Ohio-based group said.

The missionaries were kidnapped by the 400 Mawozo gang on Oct. 16. There are five children in the group of 16 U.S. citizens and one Canadian, including an 8-month-old. Their Haitian driver also was abducted, according to a local human rights organization.

The leader of the 400 Mawozo gang has threatened to kill the hostages unless his demands are met. Authorities have said the

gang was demanding \$1 million per person, although it wasn’t immediately clear that included the children in the group.

The spokesman for Haiti’s National Police, Gary Desrosiers, confirmed to The Associated Press that two hostages were released Sunday.

The FBI, which is helping Haitian authorities recover the captives, declined to comment.

The release comes as Haiti struggles with a spike in gang-related violence and kidnappings, with the U.S. government recently urging its citizens to leave Haiti amid deepening insecurity and a severe lack of fuel blamed on gangs blocking gas distribution terminals. On Friday, Canada announced it was pulling all but essential personnel from its embassy.

The fuel shortage has forced hospitals to turn away patients and paralyzed public transportation, with some schools closing and businesses shortening their work hours.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

6 arrested after thieves target high-end stores

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Several high-end stores in San Francisco's Union Square were broken into late Friday by a large group of people who smashed windows, stole merchandise and then ran to waiting cars, police said.

Louis Vuitton, Fendi, Yves Saint Laurent, Burberry and Dolce & Gabbana were all targeted, KTVU-TV reported.

San Francisco Police Officer Robert Rueca said in a statement posted on social media that officers responded to reports of possible looting and vandalism at Union Square stores Friday night and arrested several people.

Supervisor Aaron Peskin, who represents the area, told the television station that at least six suspects were arrested.

Ex-girlfriend who told on bomber sues for reward

TN NASHVILLE — The ex-girlfriend of the man who detonated an explosive in downtown Nashville last Christmas has filed a lawsuit, saying she should receive \$284,000 in rewards offered after the blast.

Pamela Perry filed suit Friday in Davidson County Chancery Court seeking the reward because she came forward "at great personal risk to aid law enforcement in identifying" Anthony Warner as the bomber, news outlets reported.

After the blast, Camping World CEO Marcus Lemonis offered a \$250,000 reward and Nashville Convention and Visitors Corp. offered \$34,500 to anyone who came forward with

information identifying the bomber.

A spokesperson for Lemonis told WTVF that the reward was for information leading to the "capture and conviction" of the person responsible. Warner died in the blast, so he was neither captured nor convicted.

Hunters see purple as owners block off homes

ME BANGOR — More Maine hunters are seeing purple as property owners use the color to mark land that is off limits to hunting without first obtaining permission.

Purple paint can be used on trees, rocks or fence posts as an alternative to nailing a sign on a tree to let others know that no hunting is allowed without advanced permission, said Mark Latti of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

The state's "purple paint law" has been around since 2011, but it's being used more and more with each passing year.

The marking is a single vertical stripe of purple paint. Hardware stores sell special paint for use in marking properties.

State looks to return 11 Purple Hearts to owners

IL SPRINGFIELD — The state of Illinois wants the public's help to return nearly a dozen Purple Heart medals to their rightful owners.

Illinois Treasurer Michael Frerichs said the 11 medals each were left in a bank safe deposit box that went untouched for years. The treasurer's office received them as part of the office's unclaimed property program after the owners could not be

found.

Frerichs' office released a list Thursday of the last names associated with the safe deposit box, the date in which the medal was recorded with the state treasurer's office and the location of the bank. They include multiple banks across Illinois and one in Portland, Ore.

Frerichs asked anyone who may have a lead on locating a veteran or his or her family to contact his office.

Police: Man set self on fire, walked into store

NJ ATLANTIC CITY — A New Jersey man set himself on fire and then entered a gas station convenience store, starting small fires before the flames were doused and he was taken to a hospital with serious injuries, authorities said.

Atlantic City police said the 24-year-old Somers Point man doused himself with rubbing alcohol and used a lighter to set himself on fire before going into the store at the Gulf Gas Station just after midnight Friday.

Police said "multiple small fires" were started before the man went out. An attendant from the gas station used a fire extinguisher to put the flames out. The man was transported to Atlantic-Care Regional Medical Center with "serious, life-threatening injuries," police said.

Pearl Harbor exhibit to open at WWII Museum

LA NEW ORLEANS — A new exhibit at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans considers how the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was and is remembered.

The exhibit is part of the museum's commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the attack, which took place on Dec. 7, 1941. Japanese planes destroyed or damaged 19 U.S. warships and 300 aircraft in less than 90 minutes, killing more than 2,400 people.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt described it the next day as "a day that will live in infamy." The exhibit, which opened Tuesday and runs through June 26, is titled "Infamy: Pearl Harbor Remembered."

The museum will also hold a ceremony on Dec. 7, and will host two "electronic field trips" for students.

Man gets 5 years in jail commuter pass scam

MA BOSTON — A Massachusetts man who bought more than \$150,000 worth of commuter rail passes using stolen credit card information, and then sold the passes at below face value, has been sentenced to five years in prison.

Kokou Kuakumensah, 31, of Worcester, used other people's credit card accounts to fraudulently purchase Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority commuter rail passes at fare kiosks from about January 2019 until March 2020, federal prosecutors in Boston said Friday.

He then resold the illegally obtained passes for less than their face value in a variety of ways, including online and at MBTA stations, prosecutors said.

In addition to the prison time, Kuakumensah was also ordered to pay more than \$157,000 in restitution.

— From wire reports

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Late-blooming NFL teams finding stride

Associated Press

Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs are back in a familiar spot. Same for Bill Belichick and the New England Patriots.

The Chiefs and Patriots have surged to first place in their respective divisions with monthlong winning streaks. The Colts, 49ers and Eagles have also turned things around in November.

In the NFL's longest season, counting teams out before Halloween was premature.

The Chiefs beat Dallas 19-9 on Sunday for their fourth straight victory since a 27-3 loss to Tennessee on Oct. 24. They now lead the jumbled AFC West by a half-game over the Chargers (6-4) and should be favorites to win their sixth straight division title.

Mahomes had a career-low passer rating against the Titans and some people were questioning if the 26-year-old had already played his best football in his first four seasons when he won an NFL MVP award and a Super Bowl MVP trophy in consecutive years.

Since then, Mahomes has sev-

en touchdown passes and only two interceptions during Kansas City's four-game winning streak that has been fueled by a suddenly stingy defense that has allowed just 11.8 points per game in that span. The unit allowed just three field goals to Dak Prescott and the league's top-ranked offense.

"Since the second half of the Tennessee game, those guys have been playing better," Mahomes said of the defense. "It got lost because the offense wasn't playing very well. We were winning games because of our defense and people were so used to our offense going out and putting up these numbers. But every weekend I was right here at the podium saying don't lose track of how good our defense is playing. To go up against an offense like the (Cowboys) that has put up so many yards and scores, and shut it down, that's impressive."

If Kansas City's improved defense continues to play well, Mahomes and the Chiefs could be playing in the Super Bowl for the third year in a row.

One of the top teams standing in their way will be the Patriots,

a scenario nobody could've envisioned when New England opened the season 2-4. Back then, it seemed the Patriots' wild spending frenzy in free agency was wasted money. But New England kicked off Week 11 with a 25-0 win at Atlanta on Thursday night. The Pats (7-4) have won five in a row behind a strong defense and solid play from rookie quarterback Mac Jones. After a rare losing season, they're back leading the AFC East, a division New England owned for two decades before Tom Brady left for Tampa Bay.

The Colts started 0-3 with new quarterback Carson Wentz coming over from Philadelphia after a dismal season with the Eagles that looked like it would carry over to his new home. But Wentz has been steady — 18 touchdowns, 3 picks — and Indianapolis has won six of the last eight games. Jonathan Taylor was spectacular in a dominant 41-15 win at Buffalo on Sunday, scoring five TDs. At 6-5, Indianapolis is back in the race.

The 49ers were 2-4 after losing four in a row and many were wondering when coach Kyle

Shanahan would bench Jimmy Garoppolo for rookie Trey Lance. But Shanahan stuck with Garoppolo after the worst game of his career in a 30-18 loss to the Colts and the veteran has responded with a string of strong performances. Garoppolo has posted a passer rating over 100 in four straight games, leading San Francisco to three wins. After a rout over the Rams on Monday night, the Niners traveled cross-country and defeated Jacksonville soundly 30-10 on Sunday.

The 49ers are one of three teams tied at 5-5 vying for wildcard spots that should come down to the final week.

A month ago, half the city of Philadelphia wanted rookie coach Nick Sirianni fired for using a flower analogy to motivate his 2-5 team. Riding the legs of Jalen Hurts and a commitment to the run, the Eagles (5-6) have won three of four, including a 40-29 victory over New Orleans on Sunday. With a favorable schedule down the stretch, the Eagles have a real shot to make a playoff push.

For some teams, it takes more time to bloom.

Vikings outlast Rodgers, Packers on late field goal

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Much to coach Mike Zimmer's consternation, the Minnesota Vikings have made quite the habit of these white-knuckle, high-stress finishes.

All that experience must be paying off. They deftly followed the winning formula for beating Green Bay by making sure Aaron Rodgers was on the sideline at the end and not on the field.

Greg Joseph made a 29-yard field goal as time expired to give the Vikings a 34-31 victory over the Packers in a classic back-and-forth with their division rival and longtime nemesis.

"You know how they say, 'Sunday is fun day?' It's not, at all," an exhausted Zimmer said after the game was decided on the final snap for a sixth time in 10 games. Minnesota (5-5) has won three and lost three of those.

The only team in the NFL this year to hold

a lead of seven or more points in every game, all but one of the team's games have been decided by one score. Kirk Cousins passed for 341 yards and three touchdowns to help the Vikings stay a step ahead of Rodgers for most of the afternoon.

Rodgers threw four touchdown passes, all on Green Bay's final four full possessions, excluding a kneel-down to end the first half. All of those drives covered 74 yards or more.

Rodgers finished 23-for-33 for a season-high 385 yards for the Packers (8-3). After missing time earlier to COVID-19, Rodgers was unable to practice much this week because of a toe injury.

Justin Jefferson had eight receptions for 169 yards and two scores for Minnesota, including a third-down catch against rookie Eric Stokes that Cousins delivered for a 23-yard touchdown while being decked on a

blitz by Darnell Savage. Dalvin Cook ran in the 2-point conversion to make up for an earlier missed extra point by Joseph.

On the next play from scrimmage, Rodgers threw a rainbow to Marquez Valdes-Scantling, who blew past safety Xavier Woods for a 75-yard score to tie the game just before the two-minute warning.

When the Vikings regained the ball, Cousins nearly cost himself the comeback by slightly underthrowing Jefferson, whom Savage darted in front of to intercept the ball. He bobbled it on the way down, though, and a replay review overturned the call.

Cousins then went 3-for-3 for 51 yards on the next three snaps, and Cook — who rushed for 86 yards and a touchdown — ran for one more first down. Then Minnesota knelt down twice to set up the final kick by Joseph.

Rangers stun Sabres with late goal

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Defenseman Ryan Lindgren barely beat the third-period buzzer to lift the New York Rangers to a 5-4 victory over the Buffalo Sabres on Sunday night and extend their home winning streak to five games.

Lindgren stunned Sabres netminder Aaron Dell by taking a pass from Mika Zibanejad and rifling the puck into the net for his second goal of the season at 19:59. Adam Fox had passed the puck to Zibanejad after it emerged from a scrum in the corner as the final seconds ticked away.

"It seemed like there was a battle in the corner and the puck got to Foxy who kicked it out to Mika and obviously a great play by him," the 23-year-old Lindgren said. "It was a great win."

Lindgren's heroics came after the teams scored three goals each in a wild second period, including four goals in an 82-second span.

Chris Kreider, Jacob Trouba, Kaapo Kakko and K'Andre Miller all scored for the Rangers. Alexander Georgiev had 14 saves, and was replaced by Igor Shesterkin, who had four saves in the third.

The Sabres have lost eight of their last 10

games. Rasmus Asplund, Vinnie Hinostroza, Tage Thompson and Rasmus Dahlin all scored for Buffalo, and Dell had 31 saves.

Lightning 5, Wild 4 (SO): Steven Stamkos scored the lone shootout goal while Brian Elliott stopped three shootout shots to give host Tampa Bay a win over Minnesota after blowing a late two-goal lead.

Minnesota rallied in the third period to tie it at 4 on two empty-net goals by Kevin Fiala and Joel Eriksson Ek over a 2:09 stretch. But the Wild couldn't score in overtime during a power play that lasted about a minute and half.

Tampa Bay also got two goals from Anthony Cirelli and one each from Pat Maroon and Alex Barré-Boulet. Elliott made 28 saves in regulation.

Coyotes 2, Kings 1 (OT): Kyle Capobianco scored with 1:34 remaining in overtime, Karel Vejmelka stopped 37 shots for his first career win and visiting Arizona defeated Los Angeles.

Travis Boyd had a goal and an assist for the Coyotes, who have won consecutive games for the first time this season.

Brendan Lemieux scored for the Kings, who have lost four straight following a seven-game winning streak.

Blackhawks 1, Canucks 0: Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 40 shots in his first shutout of the season to give visiting Chicago a win over Vancouver.

Brandon Hagel scored the game's lone goal with a third-period tip-in, while Fleury earned his 68th career shutout and improved his recent record against Vancouver to 13-0-2.

Kraken 5, Capitals 2: Jaden Schwartz had a goal and three assists and host Seattle beat Washington to snap a six-game losing streak.

Alex Ovechkin scored his 15th goal of the season and Vitek Vanecek had 26 saves for the Capitals, who hadn't lost since Nov. 6.

Flames 4, Bruins 0: Former Bruins goalie Dan Vladar stopped 27 shots for his second career shutout, Andrew Mangiapane scored a short-handed goal early in the third period, and visiting Calgary beat Boston for its seventh shutout in 19 games.

Maple Leafs 3, Islanders 0: Mitch Marner scored twice and Joseph Woll stopped 20 shots for his first career shutout as visiting Toronto beat New York.

Ondrej Kase also scored as Toronto improved to 11-2 in their past 13 games in the opener of a four-game road trip.

Tough Arizona defense throttles No. 4 Michigan

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Christian Koloko's mother flew from Cameroon to see her son play for Arizona for the first time. He didn't disappoint, dominating at both ends.

His team looked pretty good, too, dominating No. 4 Michigan 80-62 Sunday night in the Roman Main Event.

Koloko finished with 22 points, seven rebounds and four blocked shots, pointing to his mother after being presented the title belt as tournament MVP.

"She doesn't know much about basketball," Koloko said. "I remember after the last game, she said we missed a lot of goals. I was like no, we call those free throws, which was kind of funny. I'm going to go talk to her after this."

The Wildcats (5-0) had to grind out a win over Wichita State on Friday in their first true test of the

season. They put together an impressive all-around performance Sunday in another measuring-stick game, leaving a top-five team in the desert dust.

Arizona was active defensively all night and used its free-flowing movement on offense to set up easy shots. The Wildcats made just 4 of 21 from the three-point line, but hit 64% of its two-point shots, including several alley-oops or point-blank baskets off penetration.

Benedict Mathurin added 16 points for Arizona, which had a 54-30 advantage in the paint.

No. 6 Purdue 80, No. 5 Villanova 74: Zach Edey scored 21 points and the Boilermakers overcame an 11-point second-half deficit to beat the Wildcats and win the Hall of Fame Tip-Off Tournament at Uncasville, Conn.

Caleb Furst and Isaiah Thomp-

son each added 12 points for Purdue (5-0), which dominated underneath, outscoring Villanova 38-18 in the paint and outrebounding them 38-26.

Justin Moore had 19 points, Caleb Daniels added 17 and Collin Gillespie had 14 for Villanova (3-2).

The Wildcats led 33-31 at half-time, scored the first five points in the second half and were up 57-46 after a three-pointer by Daniels.

But Purdue outscored the Wildcats 34-17 over the last nine minutes.

No. 17 Tennessee 89, No. 18 North Carolina 72: Freshman Zakai Zeigler scored 18 points to lead the Vols over the Tar Heels in the consolation game of the Hall of Fame Tip-Off tournament.

Santiago Vescovi added 17 points and nine rebounds for Ten-

nessee (3-1), which bounced back from a 71-53 loss to Villanova on Saturday.

Brady Manek hit six three-pointers and scored 24 points for North Carolina (3-2), which fell to Purdue in Saturday's opening round. Armando Bacot had 16 points and 12 rebounds.

No. 22 St. Bonaventure 70, Marquette 54: Jaren Holmes had 19 points and a career-high 13 rebounds, Osun Osunniyi added 16 points and 11 rebounds and the Bonnies beat the Golden Eagles to win the Charleston Classic in Charleston, S.C..

Osunniyi — who went into the game as the NCAA's active leader in blocks per game (2.73) and had four on Sunday — made eight of 10 from the field.

Marquette missed its first nine field-goal attempts in the second half.

James ejected, Lakers top Pistons

Associated Press

DETROIT — LeBron James was ejected for drawing blood from Isaiah Stewart's face, sending the superstar to the locker room early in the third quarter and leaving his teammates to pick up the slack.

Anthony Davis and Russell Westbrook did that in a big way.

Davis had 30 points, 10 rebounds and two big blocked shots late on rookie Cade Cunningham. Westbrook contributed 26 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds, leading the Los Angeles Lakers to a 121-116 comeback victory over the Detroit Pistons on Sunday night.

"Everybody's level went up when LB came out," Davis said.

The 20-year-old Cunningham, the No. 1 overall pick in the draft, had 13 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists to become the youngest player in franchise history with a triple-double.

James' Flagrant 2 foul ended his night after his left elbow and hand appeared to make contact with Stewart's face when they were tangled up while boxing out for a rebound.

Detroit's center, who was called for a foul before James hit him, had to be held back more than once to keep him separated from the NBA superstar and was also ejected.

"I don't think he should be facing anything from the league," Pistons coach Dwane Casey said. "He didn't get off the

floor in time, and the league will have to decide about that, and I thought that was why he was ejected from the game."

Westbrook was assessed a technical after the officials reviewed the play and the fallout from it, determining he was an "escalator," while there was pushing, shoving and trash talking.

All parties were relieved that an all-out melee wasn't witnessed as it was on Nov. 19, 2004, when Detroit and the Indiana Pacers had a brawl that spilled into the stands.

Davis praised players, coaches and security for keeping the peace.

"Everybody did a great job trying to de-escalate the situation," he said. "You never want it to get to that point like 17 years ago."

After calm was restored on Sunday night, the Pistons closed the third quarter strong and led 99-84 entering the fourth.

"Up and until that point, we're still trying to figure each other out," Los Angeles coach Frank Vogel said.

Westbrook and Davis both scored in double figures in the final quarter, leading a rally that gave the Lakers a win to reach .500 this season.

Detroit had the ball with 5.9 seconds left and the chance to potentially tie the game, but Hamidou Diallo turned the ball over.

"We had 27 assists going into the fourth quarter, which put us in a position to win, but we stopped moving the ball," Casey said.

"We didn't have a single assist in the fourth quarter."

James had 10 points and five assists in his second game back in the lineup. After missing eight games with an abdominal strain, he played Friday night in a 130-108 loss at Boston.

"Everyone in the league knows LeBron isn't a dirty guy," Davis said. "As soon as he did it, he looked back and told him, 'My bad.'"

The closer

Westbrook had 15 points, six assists and five rebounds in the fourth quarter.

"His offensive determination to attack was something that was very welcome and hopefully is a momentum-builder for him as well," Vogel said.

Tip-ins

Lakers: Carmelo Anthony scored 18 points. ... Dwight Howard had 13 points, making a career-high two three-pointers. ... Los Angeles will host Detroit next Sunday night.

Pistons: Diallo had 17 points and Frank Jackson had 15 points. ... Guard Killian Hayes missed the game with a thumb injury. ... Cunningham joined Hall of Famers Grant Hill and Dave DeBusschere as Detroit rookies to have a triple-double in their first 11 games with the franchise.

Suns beat Nuggets for 12th straight win

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Cam Johnson scored a career-high 22 points, Deandre Ayton added 21 and the fast-starting Phoenix Suns beat the Denver Nuggets 126-97 Sunday for their 12th straight victory.

The Suns scored 48 points in the first quarter for a 20-point lead, shooting 17 of 22 (77.3%) from the field, including 7 of 8 from three-point range.

Johnson, Devin Booker and Jae Crowder all hit two three-pointers during the early run. Phoenix hasn't lost since Oct. 27 against Sacramento when Harrison Barnes made a three-pointer at the buzzer. It's the longest winning streak for the

franchise since they won 17 straight during the 2006-07 season.

"The way we moved the ball in the first quarter — shooting and passing and recognizing what they were doing in their coverages — it was good to see," Suns coach Monty Williams said.

Nuggets star forward Nikola Jokic missed his second straight game with a sprained right wrist. Denver has lost four straight to fall to 9-8.

Warriors 119, Raptors 104: Jordan Poole had his second straight 30-point performance with 33, Andrew Wiggins added 32 points and seven rebounds and NBA-leading Gold-

en State beat visiting Toronto to improve to 15-2.

Poole shot 10 for 13 and made eight three-pointers. Stephen Curry had 12 points and eight assists after sitting out at Detroit on Friday night to rest his sore hip.

Pascal Siakam scored 21 points for the Raptors.

Clippers 97, Mavericks 91: Paul George scored 12 of his 29 points in the third quarter and host Los Angeles beat Dallas to end a two-game skid.

Reggie Jackson scored eight of his 23 points in the third, when the Clippers turned a one-point deficit into a nine-point lead.

Kristaps Porzingis had 25

points and eight rebounds for the Mavs.

With Luka Doncic out with a sprained left knee and ankle, Dallas has dropped three straight — the first two in Phoenix — to open a four-game trip.

Bulls 109, Knicks 103: DeMar DeRozan scored 31 points, Zach LaVine added 21 and host Chicago rallied in the fourth quarter to beat New York.

Coby White scored 10 of his 14 points in the fourth quarter to help the Bulls win their second straight and fourth in five games.

Julius Randle had 34 points on 13-for-18 shooting for New York.