

Hamas frees third group of hostages

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — The fragile cease-fire between Israel and Hamas was back on track Sunday as the militants freed 17 more hostages, including 14 Israelis, in a third set of releases under a four-day cease-fire deal.

Red Cross representatives transferred the hostages out of Gaza. Some were handed over directly to Israel, while others left through Egypt. Israel's army said one was airlifted directly to an Israeli hospital.

The Israeli hostages ranged in age from 4 to 84 and included Abigail Edan, a 4-year-old girl whose parents were killed in the Hamas attack that started the war on Oct. 7. In all, nine children ages 17 and younger were on the list, according to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office.

Separately, Hamas said it had

released one of the Russian hostages it was holding, "in response to the efforts of Russian President Vladimir Putin" and as a show of appreciation for Moscow's position on the war. Israeli army radio had reported that it was an Israeli-Russian dual national.

Israel was to free 39 Palestinian prisoners later Sunday as part of the deal. A fourth exchange is expected on Monday — the last day of the cease-fire during which a total of 50 hostages and 150 Palestinian prisoners are to be freed. All are women and minors.

International mediators led by the U.S. and Qatar are trying to extend the cease-fire.

Ahead of the latest release, Netanyahu visited the Gaza Strip, where he spoke with troops.

"We are making every effort to return our hostages, and at

the end of the day we will return every one," he said, adding that "we are continuing until the end, until victory. Nothing will stop us." It was not immediately clear where he went inside Gaza.

In a separate development, Hamas announced that one of its top commanders had been killed, without saying when or how. Israel's military confirmed it.

The cease-fire agreement has brought the first significant pause in seven weeks of war, marked by the deadliest Israeli-Palestinian violence in decades and vast destruction and displacement across the Gaza Strip.

Hamas and other militant groups seized around 240 people during the rampage across southern Israel that ignited the war.

Pressure from hostages' fam-

ilies has sharpened the dilemma facing Israel's leaders, who seek to eliminate Hamas as a military and governing power while returning all the captives.

The war has claimed the lives of more than 1,200 Israelis, mostly civilians killed by Hamas in the initial attack.

More than 13,300 Palestinians have been killed, roughly two thirds of them women and minors, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza.

The cease-fire, which began Friday, was brokered by Qatar and Egypt and the United States. Israel has said the truce can be extended by an extra day for every additional 10 hostages freed, but has vowed to quickly resume its offensive once it ends. Sullivan said the U.S. is working "with all sides on the possibility that this deal gets extended to additional hostages beyond the initial 50."

China says US is 'militarizing' South China Sea

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

Beijing claims the United States is pursuing a "hegemony" in the South China Sea after a Navy guided-missile destroyer steamed near a chain of islands there to dispute what it views as unlawful restrictions.

The Hawaii-based USS Hopper sailed near the Paracel Islands to assert "navigational rights and freedoms," the U.S. 7th Fleet announced Sunday in a news release.

China responded by calling the U.S. a "security risk creator" and said the operation was "ironclad evidence that it is pursuing 'navigational hegemony' and 'militarization of the South China Sea,'" Chinese air force Col. Tian Junli, Southern Theater Command spokesman, said in a news release.

Beijing organized ships and aircraft to "track, monitor and warn away" the Hop-

per, he said.

The Paracels, a chain of reefs, shoals and islands about 350 miles south of mainland China and 300 miles east of Vietnam, is claimed in its entirety by China, Vietnam and Taiwan. Beijing, however, maintains about 20 outposts in the islands, according to the CIA's World Factbook website.

The Navy routinely operates near the Paracels and the Spratly Islands, another contested island chain in the South China Sea, to protest restrictions on innocent passage. In the Paracels, all three claimants require either permission or advance notice before a military vessel travels through the area, 7th Fleet said in the news release.

"By engaging in innocent passage without giving prior notification to or asking permission from any of the claimants, the United States challenged these unlawful re-

strictions imposed by [China], Taiwan, and Vietnam," 7th Fleet spokeswoman Lt. Kristina Wiedemann wrote in the news release. "The United States demonstrated that innocent passage is not subject to such restrictions."

The 7th Fleet did not immediately respond to an email request for additional information Sunday.

Another destroyer, the USS Dewey, cruised within 12 nautical miles of outposts in the Spratlys on Nov. 3 as part of a "routine and peaceful exercise of rights and freedoms," 7th Fleet spokesman Lt. Luka Bakic said at the time.

Restrictions on innocent passage violate the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, an international agreement that generally governs both civil and military maritime activities.

US Marines join Finnish-led drills in Baltic

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Marines are among more than 4,000 allied personnel participating in a Finland-led military exercise that is drawing Russian concerns over NATO's growing might in the Baltic Sea.

Freezing Winds 23 is the first major maritime exercise led by Finland since it joined NATO in April, the Finnish navy said in a statement earlier this month.

The exercise takes place in the Gulf of Finland and Archipelago Sea.

Former Russian deputy foreign minister Sergey Ordzhonikidze on Thursday said the exercise could serve as practice for Finland taking over Russian islands in the Baltic should a conflict arise, according to the state-

controlled Tass agency, which cited the newspaper Izvestia.

Finland's NATO membership makes a potential naval blockade of Kaliningrad a possibility, according to the Tass report. Any blockade would involve control of the islands, the report stated.

The exclave of Kaliningrad has long been viewed as key to Russia's strategy in the event of conflict with NATO nations.

The nearby Baltic nations, each of which were annexed by the Soviet Union during World War II, have long been wary of Russia's intentions. That wariness has grown since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year. However, reinforcing the war in Ukraine has also thinned Russia's defenses in the Baltic region, according to security analy-

sts.

When asked about the Russian comments on Friday, the Finnish navy said the exercise is defensive in nature and similar to last year's drills.

Freezing Winds includes Marines assigned to Marine Rotational Force-Europe and U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa. The exercise includes mine countermeasures and explosive ordnance disposal, among other objectives, according to the Nov. 15 statement.

The drills are "a demonstration of NATO's interest in and commitment to the protection of underwater infrastructure," Finnish navy Capt. Juhapekka Rautava, commander of the exercise, said in the statement.

High profile incidents, such as

the sabotage of the Nord Stream natural gas pipeline last year, have demonstrated the vulnerability of underwater communications and energy lines in the Baltic Sea.

No U.S. ships were among the 30 vessels taking part in the exercise, which includes Sweden, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the U.K. and Poland.

But F/A-18 Hornets assigned to Marine All Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 224 were among participating aircraft, the Finnish navy said.

Other participating U.S. units include Combat Logistics Battalion 6, Combat Logistics Regiment 2, 2nd Marine Logistics Group and Marine Air Control Squadron 2, according to the Defense Department's media website.

Rotational force Marines begin drills in Indonesia

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A relatively new Marine Corps rotational force is practicing coastal defense in Indonesia, the latest sign of strengthening ties between the United States and this predominantly Muslim nation bordering the contested South China Sea.

The Keris Marine exercise, now in its second year, involves about 150 members of Marine Rotational Force-Southeast Asia and 150 Indonesian marines training on the island of West Java, the Marines said in a statement Thursday. The drills began that day and run through Dec. 11.

The exercise offers "a pivotal opportunity for Marine Rotational Force-Southeast Asia as we immerse ourselves in jungle warfare training in Indonesia," the rotation's commander, Col. Thomas Siverts, said in the statement.

"This is more than a training

opportunity; it's a chance to strengthen our relationship with the Indonesian Marines and enhance our mutual capabilities."

The rotational force participated in the inaugural Keris Marine exercise in Indonesia last year.

Sofar this year, the unit's members have trained in the Philippines and Malaysia.

Indonesia's Natuna Islands, northeast of Singapore, are near parts of the South China Sea claimed by China. Indonesian fishermen have reported intimidation by Chinese coast guard vessels in recent years.

The Keris Marine training includes coastal defense, joint fires, rocket artillery and small drones. The Marines will engage with local communities and swap knowledge, according to the Marine statement. The drills will conclude with platoon-level infantry rehearsals.

Data recorder recovered from P-8A that overshot runway

Associated Press

KANEHOHE, Hawaii — The flight data recorder of a large U.S. Navy plane that overshot a runway and ended up in the water near Honolulu last week has been recovered as the military continues to plan for the aircraft's removal.

The Navy's Aircraft Mishap Board is investigating on scene at Marine Corps Base Hawaii in Kaneohe Bay, trying to determine the cause of the accident and any contributing factors, the Navy said Friday in a statement.

Sailors from a mobile diving and salvage unit retrieved the data recorder Thursday and conducted a hydrographic survey to assess the P-8A plane's structural integrity. The survey also assessed the coral and marine environment around the plane, which will aid them in minimizing impact during its removal, the Navy said.

Kaneohe Bay residents have

expressed concerns about possible coral reef damage and other potential harm from fuel or other chemicals in the area, which is about 1.5 miles from an ancient fishing point.

The Navy said it has put primary and secondary containment booms around the airplane, along with other absorbent materials. Specially trained personnel are monitoring the area 24 hours a day.

There were no injuries to the nine people aboard the plane during last Monday's accident.

The plane belongs to the Skinny Dragons of Patrol Squadron 4, stationed at Whidbey Island in Washington state. Patrol squadrons were once based at Kaneohe Bay but now deploy to Hawaii on a rotating basis.

Another crew from Washington state, the VP-40 Fighting Marlins, arrived Thursday to assume homeland defense coverage, the Navy said.

Black Friday shoppers set online record

Bloomberg News

Black Friday shoppers spent a record \$9.8 billion online in the United States, Adobe Analytics reported, offering a positive sign for retailers facing lackluster sales forecasts for the holiday season.

Demand for electronics, smartwatches, TVs and audio equipment helped boost the day's online sales by 7.5% compared with last year. Consumers extended their budgets by leaning on buy-now, pay-later op-

tions, which climbed by 72% from the week before Thanksgiving.

The uptick marks a recovery from last year's holiday season, when high inflation hit consumers' pockets and retailers discounted heavily to get rid of bloated inventory. This year, holiday shopping is a bellwether for U.S. consumer resilience as pandemic-era savings dwindle and interest rates remain at a more than 20-year high.

U.S. online sales grew 9% year-

in-year in a separate Salesforce Inc. gauge, driven by footwear, sporting goods, health and beauty. Clothing, home and beauty showed the biggest discounts.

Online sales for the days leading up to Cyber Monday on Nov. 27 can give companies an early sense of holiday-season performance as they await slower brick-and-mortar data.

Yet initial forecasts for November and December point to dismal sales growth.

In the U.S., Salesforce predic-

ted online sales would grow 1% during that period compared to 2022, the slowest pace in at least five years. Adobe expects revenue to grow 4.8%, far behind the pre-pandemic average annual rate of 13%. The two companies analyze different transactions, which accounts for the variation in numbers.

Canada-based e-commerce marketplace Shopify Inc. said global Black Friday sales rose 22%, led by clothing, personal care and jewelry.

Rep. Santos says he expects to be kicked out of Congress

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Rep. George Santos said he expects to be expelled from Congress following a scathing report by the House Ethics Committee that found substantial evidence of law-breaking by the New York Republican.

In a defiant speech Friday sprinkled with taunts and obscenities aimed at his congressional colleagues, Santos insisted he was "not going anywhere." But he acknowledged that his time as a member of Congress, at least, may soon be coming to an end.

"I know I'm going to get expelled when this expulsion resolution goes to the floor," he said Friday night during a conversation on X Spaces. "I've done the math over and over, and it doesn't look really good."

The comments came one week after the Republican chairman of the House Ethics Committee, Michael Guest, introduced a resolution to expel Santos once the body returns from Thanksgiving break.

While Santos has survived two expulsion votes, many of his colleagues who formerly opposed the effort have said they now support it, citing the findings of the committee's investigation into a

wide range of alleged misconduct by Santos.

The report found Santos used campaign funds for personal purposes, such as purchases at luxury retailers and adult content websites, then caused the campaign to file false or incomplete reports.

"Representative Santos sought to fraudulently exploit every aspect of his House candidacy for his own personal financial profit," investigators wrote. They noted that he did not cooperate with the report and repeatedly "evaded" straightforward requests for information. On Friday, Santos said he did not want to address the specifics of the report, which he claimed were "slandering" and "designed to force me out of my seat." Any defense of his conduct, he said, could be used against him in the ongoing criminal case brought by federal prosecutors.

His decision not to seek reelection, he said, was not because of external pressure, but due to his frustration with the "sheer arrogance" of his colleagues.

"These people need to understand it's done when I say it's done, when I want it to be done, not when they want it to be done," he added. "That's kind of where we are there."

Victims in bridge crash at Niagara Falls ID'd as couple

Associated Press

NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y. — The two people killed when their car crashed into a border checkpoint in Niagara Falls and exploded in a fiery wreck were identified Friday as a western New York husband and wife whose family owns a lumber business and several hardware stores in the Buffalo area.

The Niagara Falls Police Department named the couple as Kurt P. Villani and Monica Villani, both 53, of Grand Island, N.Y., a leafy Buffalo suburb close to the falls.

Online business records and the company website indicate the victims' family owns Gui's Lumber and seven Ace Hardware locations in western New York, his family operating the business since the mid-1980s.

"We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all that extended prayers, condolences and well wishes," the families and the lumber company said in a joint statement released by the Erie County Sheriff's Office on Friday. "At this point, we are requesting privacy so we may begin the process of healing."

Authorities have not yet released details on what exactly led to the couple's crash Wednesday at the Rainbow Bridge, where

their car raced through an intersection, hit a low median and was launched through the air before slamming into a row of security booths and bursting into flames.

The wreck prompted widespread concern on both sides of the border, as video and images of what appeared to be the aftermath of an explosion began to circulate online and officials closed the bridge and three other crossings in the area. Authorities investigated for several hours before the FBI's Buffalo office said it found no signs the incident was a terror attack and turned the case over to local police as a traffic investigation.

The Niagara Falls Police Department has said the investigation will take time to complete given the complexity of the crash. The agency issued a statement Friday that named the victims but contained no other details.

"The City of Niagara Falls would like to extend our sincere condolences to the families as they deal with this tragedy," the statement read.

The safety measures tied up traffic at a nearby airport in Buffalo and elsewhere on one of the busiest U.S. travel days of the year, ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday. The bridges were later reopened.

Russia says it stopped massive Ukraine drone attack on Moscow

Associated Press

Ukraine overnight tried to attack Moscow with dozens of drones, Russian authorities said Sunday, just a day after Ukrainian officials reported that Russia had launched its most intense drone attack on Kyiv since the beginning of its full-scale war in 2022.

Russian air defenses brought down at least 24 drones over the Moscow region — which surrounds but does not include the capital — and four other provinces to the south and west, the Russian Defense Ministry and Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyenin reported in a series of Telegram updates. Neither referenced any casualties.

Andrei Vorobyev, governor of the Moscow region, wrote on Telegram that the drone strikes damaged three unspecified buildings there, adding that no one was hurt.

One drone crashed into a 12-story apartment block in the western Russian city of Tula, about 113 miles south of Moscow, lightly wounding one resi-

dent and causing limited damage, local Gov. Aleksei Dyumin wrote Sunday morning on Telegram.

Moscow's Vnukovo and Domodedovo airports also briefly shut down because of the drone attack, according to Russia's state-run news agency Tass. Both appeared to have resumed normal operation by 6 a.m. local time, according to data from international flight tracking portals.

Russian Telegram channels speculated that Ukrainian forces had deployed a previously unseen type of drone in the purported strike, pointing out some similarities to the Iranian-made weapons Moscow routinely employs in its attacks on Ukraine.

The Russian capital has come under attack from drones regularly since May, with Russian officials blaming Ukraine. Military analysts commented at the time that the early attacks deployed Ukrainian locally made drones, which could not carry as heavy a payload as the Iranian-made Shaheds

used by Russia.

As of late morning Sunday, Ukrainian officials did not acknowledge or comment on the strikes, which came a day after Russia targeted the Ukrainian capital with over 60 Shahed drones.

At least five civilians were wounded in the hourslong assault, which saw several buildings damaged by falling debris from downed drones, including a kindergarten. The wounded included an 11-year-old child, according to Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko.

The Ukrainian air force said early Sunday that it had brought down eight of nine Shahed drones fired overnight by Russian forces.

Also on Sunday morning, the Russian Defense Ministry reported that two Soviet-made S-200 rockets fired by Kyiv were shot down over the sea of Azov, which stretches between Crimea and Ukraine's Russian-occupied southeastern coast.

There were no reports of casualties, and no comment from officials in Kyiv.

Curfew set for Sierra Leone after shootings

Associated Press

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone — Sierra Leone's President Julius Maada Bio declared a nationwide curfew Sunday after fighter gunmen attacked the military's main and largest barracks in the West African nation's capital, raising fears of a breakdown of order amid a surge of coups in the region.

The unidentified gunmen attacked the military armory within the Wilberforce barracks in the capital, Freetown, early morning, Bio said in a statement posted on X, formerly known as Twitter, adding that they were driven back by security forces and "calm has been restored."

"As the combined team of our Security Forces continue to root out the remnant of the fleeing renegades, a nationwide curfew has been declared and citizens are encouraged to stay indoors," he wrote.

The country's Ministry of Information and Education also said in a statement the government and security forces are "in control" of the situation.

No details have been immediately given about the gunmen or the reason for the attack.

Videos online, that went viral, reportedly showed soldiers patrolling Freetown's empty streets and captured the loud blasts of gunshots.

West Africa's regional economic bloc of ECOWAS — of which Sierra Leone is a member — described the incident as a plot "to acquire arms and disturb the peace and constitutional order" in the country.

"ECOWAS reiterates its zero tolerance for unconstitutional change of government," the bloc said in a statement.

South Korea, Japan, China agree to resume trilateral leaders summit

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — Meeting for the first time in about four years, the top diplomats from South Korea, Japan and China agreed Sunday to revive cooperation among the Asian neighbors and resume their leaders' trilateral summit — but without any specific timing.

Closely linked economically and culturally with one another, the three countries together account for about 25% of the global gross domestic product. But efforts to boost cooperation have often hit a snag because of a mix of issues including historical disputes stemming from Japan's wartime aggression and the strategic competition between China and the United States.

"We three ministers agreed to restore and

normalize three-nation cooperation at an early date," South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin said after his meeting with Japan's Yoko Kamikawa and China's Wang Yi in Busan, South Korea.

Park said the three ministers affirmed an earlier agreement by lower-level officials to restart the summit "at the earliest mutually convenient time" and agreed to expedite preparations for the meeting. Kamikawa separately said the ministers agreed to speed up their work to achieve the summit "at an early and appropriate timing."

The lack of an agreement on the timing would suggest the gathering won't likely happen this year, observers have said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Track coach pleads guilty in nude photos case

MA BOSTON — A former college track and field coach accused of setting up sham social media and email accounts in an attempt to trick women into sending him nude or semi-nude photos of themselves pleaded guilty in federal court, prosecutors said last week.

Steve Waithe, 30, of Chicago, pleaded guilty to 12 counts of wire fraud, one count of conspiracy to commit computer fraud and one count of computer fraud, prosecutors said. Waithe also pleaded guilty to cyberstalking one victim, as well as by hacking her Snapchat account, prosecutors said.

Waithe has worked as a track and field coach at academic institutions, including Northeastern University, Penn State University, Illinois Institute of Technology, University of Tennessee and Concordia University Chicago.

1 vote divides candidates after 43,000 ballots cast

LA BATON ROUGE — In the northwest corner of Louisiana, John Nickelson, the Republican candidate for Caddo Parish sheriff, demanded a recount after losing by a single vote in last week's election where more than 43,000 people cast ballots.

The tight race shines a spotlight on Louisiana's recount process and its outdated voting machines, which do not produce an auditable paper trail that experts say is critical to ensuring election results are accurate.

States' recount abilities have proven to be exceedingly important, especially following the 2020 presidential election.

Henry Whitehorn, the Democrat who won the sheriff runoff, did not immediately respond to an email requesting comment.

Suspended priest married teen he fled to Italy with

AL MOBILE — State records show that a suspended Alabama priest recently married the 18-year-old woman he fled to Italy with this summer, and an archbishop said that he expects the Vatican to pursue the man's official dismissal from the priesthood.

A marriage certificate filed last week in Mobile County shows that Alex Crow, a 30-year-old Catholic priest in south Alabama, married the 18-year-old. Crow left the country in late July with the teen, who is a recent graduate of McGill-Toolen High School. Crow was not an employee at the school but visited theology classes there, news outlets reported. The marriage certificate indicates the woman turned 18 in June.

Archbishop Thomas J. Rodi announced in July that he had suspended Crow and forbidden him from acting, dressing, or presenting himself as a priest. Rodi later said he saw no way for Crow to return to the priesthood.

Judge: Gun law violates state constitution

OR PORTLAND — A voter-approved Oregon gun control law violates the state constitution, a judge

ruled Tuesday, continuing to block it from taking effect and casting fresh doubt over the future of the embattled measure.

The law, one of the toughest in the nation, was among the first gun restrictions to be passed after a major U.S. Supreme Court ruling last year changed the guidance judges are expected to follow when considering Second Amendment cases. The decision was handed down by Circuit Court Judge Robert S. Raschio.

The law requires people to undergo a criminal background check and complete a gun safety training course in order to obtain a permit to buy a firearm. It also bans high-capacity magazines.

Suspect ID'd because of his colorful underwear

NY NEW YORK — A pair of multicolored briefs peeking out above a robbery suspect's low-slung trousers helped police arrest him more than a year later, federal authorities in New York said last week.

The robbery happened at a tobacco shop in Queens on Sept. 14, 2022. Three masked men got out of a Mazda and entered the store, according to a complaint filed in federal court last week.

Two of the men pointed guns at employees and customers while the third emptied the cash register and grabbed merchandise and employees' cellphones, the complaint said.

Surveillance videos that were disseminated through the media showed the third robber wearing brightly colored briefs with a large letter R in white and

the year 1990 in yellow.

A tipster passed along the Instagram handle of the suspect with the colorful underwear, the complaint said. The caller also told police that the robbers had tried to sell their stolen merchandise at another Queens location.

Lottery winner sues, says woman blabbed to kin

ME LEBANON — A Maine man who won a lottery has filed a federal lawsuit against the mother of his child in an attempt to keep his identity concealed.

The man won a \$1.35 million Mega Millions jackpot earlier this year after purchasing a lottery ticket at a gas station in Lebanon. He has sued his child's mother in U.S. District Court in Portland with a complaint that she violated a nondisclosure agreement by "directly or indirectly disclosing protected subject matter" about his winnings, court papers state.

The court papers state that the defendant disclosed the information to the winner's father and stepmother. Both the winner and the defendant in the case are identified only by pseudonyms.

Court filings state that the winner lives in Maine and the defendant lives in Massachusetts.

The complaint states that the winner and the defendant entered into the nondisclosure agreement shortly after the purchase of the winning ticket. The lawsuit states that the winner is seeking an injunction from a judge and at least \$100,000 in damages.

— From wire reports



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There are likely no back doors into CFP

Associated Press

The back door to the College Football playoff is unlikely to be open for Ohio State or anybody else next weekend.

A season defined by almost-upsets and favorites finding a way continued during rivalry week with CFP contenders withstanding unranked in-state foes Saturday.

No. 1 Georgia had to work harder than it has in years to beat Georgia Tech and complete a third straight perfect regular season.

No. 5 Florida State erased a double-digit deficit to beat Florida in its first full game without injured star quarterback Jordan Travis.

No. 4 Washington and Michael Penix Jr. used a bold fourth-and-1 play call and walk-off field goal to beat Washington State in the Apple Cup and stay unbeaten heading into the Pac-12 title game.

That was easy compared with what No. 8 Alabama needed to escape Auburn at Jordan-Hare Stadium. Jalen Milroe and Isaiah Bond connected for a

touchdown in the final minute on fourth-and-goal ... from the 31. And the Crimson Tide stayed in CFP contention as they prepare for the Southeastern Conference championship game against Georgia.

As for the second-ranked Buckeyes, it was another painful end to the regular season. No. 3 Michigan, without coach Jim Harbaugh (or Connor Stalions) on the sideline, beat Ohio State for the third straight year.

Michigan's players, acting head coach Sherrone Moore and athletic director Warde Manuel all refused to bite when asked if the victory validated three years of victories that some believe are tainted. The program is facing allegations of in-person scouting and sign-stealing that have led to an NCAA investigation and a three-game suspension of Harbaugh by the Big Ten.

"I think it proves that this team is a great team," Manuel said. "And they can play through the adversity of their coach being suspended. Just really proud of their effort, the way they stick together. They're passionate to

play for each other. It's just remarkable."

Michigan turning getting caught cheating into overcoming adversity understandably feeds the ire of many fans. The Wolverines are a victory over No. 20 Iowa in the Big Ten championship game away from a third straight playoff appearance.

J.J. McCarthy and crew will wear the villains' black hats into the postseason and don't seem worried at all about your finger wags and eye rolls.

"We only care about us," McCarthy said.

With only the worst offense in the Power Five standing in the way, if you're looking for a championship week upset, Indianapolis is probably not the spot.

Upsets have been hard to find this season. That's how you get five unbeaten Power Five teams heading into rivalry weekend. Michigan-Ohio State narrowed it to four.

Washington has dodged the upset bug over the back half of the season more than any of the unbeaten, but the Huskies managed to stay that way long enough

to give the Pac-12 something it has never had: a championship game with two legitimate CFP contenders.

Washington (12-0) and No. 6 Oregon (11-1) have taken different paths to their rematch in Las Vegas on Friday night.

The Huskies have lived on the edge since beating the Ducks, winning six straight games by 10 points or fewer. The Ducks' last six victories have been by an average of 26 points, with no one-possession games. Huskies-Ducks II could break the Pac-12's playoff drought right before the conference falls apart.

Alabama (11-1) has been a work in progress all season, but that has still been good enough to give the Crimson Tide a chance to make the CFP for the eighth time in 10 seasons of the four-team format.

A Tide team that needed a small miracle to beat an Auburn squad that just a week ago was pounded at home by New Mexico State didn't look like a serious threat to derail two-time defending champion Georgia in Atlanta next Saturday.

SMU routs Navy to secure spot in AAC title game

Associated Press

DALLAS — Preston Stone threw three touchdown passes before suffering an injury in the second quarter and SMU cruised over Navy 59-14 on Saturday to advance to the American Athletic Conference championship game.

Stone had already thrown for 322 yards on 14-for-19 passing when he went down awkwardly while being sacked with six minutes left in the first half. He was helped off the field and then taken by cart to the dressing room.

SMU (10-2, 8-0) will travel to New Orleans to play No. 18 Tulane on Saturday. After Stone, redshirt freshman Kevin Jennings is the backup followed by Iowa transfer Alex Padilla. Jennings took over for Stone and Padilla also saw action, as did fourth-string freshman Keldric Luster.

Tyler Lavine rushed for three touchdowns, Kelvontay Dixon had 125 yards re-

ceiving and two touchdowns on four catches and Isaiah Iwokobia had a 74-yard pick-6 in the third quarter for SMU's final points.

Navy (4-4, 5-6) scored on Daba Fofana's run in the final minute of the quarter after Eli Neidenreich recovered a muffed punt at the 1. In the first minute of the second quarter, long snapper Will Benton recovered a muffed Navy punt in the end zone. The punt went through the returner's legs but contacted his towel tucked into the back of his pants.

Boise State 27, Air Force 19: Ashton Jeanty went over 100 yards both rushing and receiving and scored two touchdowns to lead the host Broncos to a victory win over the Falcons on Friday, their third straight which led to a berth in the Mountain West Conference championship game against UNLV.

With San Jose State (6-2) upsetting UNLV (6-2), a three-way deadlock was cre-

ated and computer rankings were used as a tiebreaker. The matchup was announced Sunday, and it will mark the Broncos' sixth Mountain West title game appearance in the last seven seasons.

Boise State scored first and led thereafter, but didn't have the game in hand until Kaonohi Kaniho's interception at midfield with 13 seconds left.

Jeanty turned a screen pass into a 75-yard touchdown late in the first half that ended with the Broncos leading 17-6. He burst through the middle for a 50-yard score and a 24-12 lead early in the third quarter.

Late in the third quarter, Jayden Goodwin made Air Force's second interception and it led to Dylan Carson's 2-yard TD run to trail 24-19.

Jonah Dalmas kicked a 52-yard field goal with 4½ minutes left for the final points.

Air Force (8-4, 5-3) has lost four straight.

Late TD pass saves Alabama's playoff hopes

Associated Press

AUBURN, Ala. — Jalen Milroe stood in the pocket for what felt like an eternity before spotting Isaiah Bond and launching the pass that kept Alabama's playoff hopes alive.

And etched "fourth-and-31" in Iron Bowl lore in the process.

Milroe and Bond rescued No. 8 Alabama's chances of making the College Football Playoff, connecting for a last-minute touchdown on fourth-and-goal from the 31 to beat Auburn 27-24 on Saturday.

"I'll never forget this game, ever in my life," Milroe said. Neither will fans who witnessed Alabama's fourth straight victory in the bitter rivalry.

Milroe found Bond in the left corner of the end zone with 32 seconds left, and the Crimson Tide (11-1, 8-0 Southeastern Conference, No. 8 CFP) came out on top in the latest improbable finish at Jordan-Hare Stadium.

Milroe — who was given all

the time he needed to throw by Auburn — insisted he never had doubts: "One hundred percent. I saw IB one-on-one and I knew we were going to score."

Alabama has won 10 straight since losing at home to Texas on Sept. 9, but still needs to beat No. 1 Georgia in next week's SEC Championship game to make the playoff.

Trailing by four with 1:43 left, Alabama had first-and-goal at the Auburn 7 before moving backward. The Tide lost 18 yards on a bad snap and were pushed back 5 more yards with an illegal downfield pass on third down after Milroe crossed the line of scrimmage.

Then came a play that Bond called "The Gravedigger," the latest example of what Alabama coach Nick Saban called the "weird stuff" his teams have experienced at Jordan-Hare.

"We've been on both sides of the good fortune and the misfortune, and I've gotta admit, we had good fortune," Saban said.

"But it still comes down to ability to execute."

Bond said he was just thinking "it's mine" once Milroe's final pass was in the air.

"Big-time players make big-time plays," he said. "That's the one quote my mom instilled in me as a young child."

Alabama nearly returned an interception for another touchdown on the last play. But this game will be remembered around the state for fourth-and-31. Auburn will be second-guessed for not trying to pressure Milroe, who stood in the pocket for at least five seconds before throwing.

Ja'Varrius Johnson had scored on a 27-yard touchdown catch and a 12-yard run to put the Tigers (6-6, 3-5) — 12½-point underdogs, according to FanDuel Sportsbook — in position for the upset in coach Hugh Freeze's first Iron Bowl.

"It's a lot of hurt in that locker room, and it stinks," Freeze said. "Our kids gave themselves

a chance to win the Iron Bowl tonight, and it's going to stick with us for a while."

Milroe passed for 259 yards and two touchdowns and ran for 107 yards. Jermaine Burton had 107 yards receiving, including a 68-yard touchdown. Bond had five catches for 75 yards.

Payton Thorne passed for 91 yards and a touchdown and ran for 58 yards for Auburn. Jarquez Hunter ran for 93 yards and Damari Alston gained 85.

A muffed punt gave Alabama the ball on the Auburn 30 with 4:48 left. But cornerback Nehemiah Pritchett upended a scrambling Milroe a yard shy of the first down on third-and-20. Roydell Williams took a pitch and converted the fourth down, setting up the go-ahead score.

Midway through the third quarter, Thorne hit a wide-open Johnson for a touchdown that put Auburn ahead 21-20. Alex McPherson's 21-yard field goal made it 24-20 with 10 minutes left.

Michigan tops Ohio State for 3rd straight win in rivalry

Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — With more than two years of excellence being questioned and their coach banned from the Big House, J.J. McCarthy, Blake Corum and No. 3 Michigan stared down No. 2 Ohio State again and earned a victory that will go down as one of the biggest in the history of college football's winningest program.

Rod Moore's interception in Michigan territory with 25 seconds left sealed a 30-24 win for the Wolverines on Saturday, running their winning streak over the Buckeyes to three games while staying unbeaten with Jim Harbaugh serving out a suspension.

McCarthy, a third-year quarterback who could leave Michigan having never lost to Ohio State, said Harbaugh's message to the Wolverines on Friday night echoed that of his old coach, the late Bo Schembechler.

"The whole mantra: the team, the team, the team," McCarthy said. He said Har-

baugh told them: "We are that team."

Moore's pick set off a celebration on the home team's sideline. McCarthy took a knee, Michigan fans poured over the brick walls onto the field and the Wolverines (12-0, 9-0) were off to their third straight Big Ten title game.

In a season of high expectations that now has a championship-or-bust feel, Michigan is a victory away from a third consecutive College Football Playoff appearance.

"We're not done," said Corum, who ran for 88 yards and two TDs.

For coach Ryan Day and the Buckeyes (11-1, 8-1), it's another year of lamenting a loss in the most important game on the schedule for Ohio State and wondering what has happened to the program that spent a decade and a half dominating Michigan.

Day is now 1-3 against the Wolverines, losing his last three. Before that skid, Ohio State had won eight straight and 15 of 16 against Michigan, including a 7-0 record

under Day's predecessor, Urban Meyer.

"We're all disappointed," Day said. "We know what this game means to so many people. To come up short is crushing."

McCarthy went 16-for-20 for 148 yards and a touchdown.

Michigan went 3-for-3 on fourth downs, implemented its backup quarterback for a couple of plays to gain 22 yards on the ground and executed a halfback pass to set up a fourth-quarter field goal that put Michigan up 10.

After Ohio State cut the lead to 27-24 with 8:05 left on a 14-yard touchdown pass from Kyle McCord to All-American Marvin Harrison Jr., Michigan proceeded to drain seven minutes off the clock and James Turner kicked a 37-yard field goal to make it 30-24 with 1:05 remaining.

McCord, Harrison and the Buckeyes had 1 minute to go 81 yards with no timeouts. They made it to the Michigan 37 before McCord's second interception of the day on a wobbly pass toward Harrison closed it out. McCord was hit as he threw.

Davis scores 32 as Lakers beat Cavaliers

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Anthony Davis scored 23 of his season-high 32 points in the second half and grabbed 13 rebounds, LeBron James had 22 points and the Los Angeles Lakers beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 121-115 on Saturday night.

James added six rebounds, six assists and two steals in beating Cleveland for the 18th time in 21 career games. The 39-year-old attended St. Vincent-St. Mary High School in nearby Akron and spent 11 seasons with the Cavaliers, leading them to the 2016 NBA championship.

“Tonight was an A.D. game for us,” James said. “He needs to touch the ball, and we want him to be aggressive offensively and anchor our defense. He did a great job attacking the basket and guarding the glass.”

Austin Reeves had 15 points

and 10 assists, Christian Wood scored 13 points and Max Christie had 12 for the Lakers, who won their third straight on the road. Los Angeles shot 52.2% and had 34 assists on 47 baskets.

“Any time you can get that assist number up, it means you’re playing the game the right way,” Reeves said. “The team did a really good job trying to make winning plays.”

Donovan Mitchell, who missed the previous four games with a right hamstring strain, shot 4-for-18 and had 22 points and six assists for Cleveland. Jarrett Allen added 21 points and 14 rebounds, and Evan Mobley finished with 18 points and six assists.

76ers 127, Thunder 123: Joel Embiid just missed his team’s first triple-double of the season with 35 points, 11 rebounds and nine assists, and vis-

iting Philadelphia ended Oklahoma City’s winning streak at six.

Embiid made six free throws in the final 9.8 seconds. The 76ers had a nine-point lead with 49 seconds left shrink to two after Chet Holmgren’s basket with 2.5 seconds to go.

Clippers 107, Mavericks 88: Paul George had 25 points and nine rebounds, Terance Mann added 17 points and host Los Angeles beat Dallas for its fourth victory in five games.

James Harden had just eight points and seven assists, while Kawhi Leonard missed his first nine shots before finishing with eight points for the Clippers.

Nets 112, Heat 97: Mikal Bridges scored 24 points, Cam Johnson added 19 points and 10 rebounds and host Brooklyn routed short-handed Miami to snap a three-game losing streak.

Brooklyn got double-figure

scoring from its five starters, with Dorian Finney-Smith scoring 16 points, Nic Claxton chipping in 13 and Spencer Dinwiddie finishing with 14 points and 11 assists.

Hawks 136, Wizards 108: Trae Young had 26 points and 10 assists and visiting Atlanta handed Washington its ninth consecutive loss.

Atlanta had lost three of four entering this game, but the Hawks had no trouble with the rebuilding Wizards. They went on a 10-2 run to take a 70-58 half-time lead and were up by 29 after three quarters.

Jazz 105, Pelicans 100: Colin Sexton scored 10 of his 16 points in the fourth quarter in host Utah’s comeback victory over New Orleans.

Utah was without top scorers Lauri Markkanen (hamstring) and Jordan Clarkson (illness).

Rangers beat Bruins in Eastern Conference showdown

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jimmy Vesey’s goal put the Rangers ahead late in the second period, Chris Kreider scored twice and Jonathan Quick made 27 saves as New York beat the Boston Bruins 7-4 on Saturday in a matchup of the top teams in the Eastern Conference.

Vesey’s fourth goal of the season came during a delayed penalty at 16:37 off a scramble in front of the Boston net. It gave the Rangers the lead to stay en route to their seventh win in eight games.

Kreider scored on the power play and short-handed for the fourth time in his career. He leads the Rangers with 13 goals.

“We did a good job carrying the offense with all four lines,” Kreider said. “We got two points. We can enjoy that tomorrow and get back at it the next day.”

Nick Bonino, K’Andre Miller, Tyler Pitlick and Artemi Panarin also scored for New York. Vincent Trocheck had two assists for the Rangers (15-3-1), who are 13-1-1 in their last 15 games and have 15 wins in 19 or fewer games for the first time in franchise history.

“We were ready to go at puck drop,” Miller said. “We knew it would be a battle for a full 60 minutes and we would need all

20 guys.”

Sharks 4, Canucks 3: Mikael Granlund broke a tie 22 seconds into the third period, Ty Emberson scored his first career NHL goal and host San Jose beat Vancouver for its fourth victory in the first 21 games.

Granlund scored for the first time since joining the Sharks in the Erik Karlsson trade this offseason. The veteran forward sped from his own end, deked Filip Hronek with an inside-out move and beat goalie Casey DeSmith.

Coyotes 2, Golden Knights 0: Connor Ingram made 34 saves for his first shutout of the season and second in the NHL, Clayton Keller broke a scoreless tie with 9:22 left and visiting Arizona beat Vegas to end a three-game losing streak.

Lawson Crouse added an empty-net goal with 1:17 left, his 10th goal this month and of the season. He has scored in five of his past six games.

Flyers 1, Islanders 0 (SO): Samuel Errson made 25 saves in regulation and overtime and stopped four more attempts in a shootout, Tyson Foerster scored in the fourth round of the tiebreaker and visiting Philadelphia outlasted New York.

Errson had his first shutout of the season

and second in the NHL. He stopped Bo Horvat, Oliver Wahlstrom, Mathew Barzal and Kyle Palmieri in the shootout to help the Flyers snap a two-game skid.

Avalanche 3, Flames 1: Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and an assist, Ivan Prosvetov stopped 30 shots and host Colorado beat Calgary for its sixth victory in seven games.

Ryan Johansen added a goal and Jonathan Drouin had a first-period power-play score for Colorado, the seventh straight game in which the Avalanche scored on the power play.

Kings 4, Canadiens 0: Trevor Moore scored twice, Pheonix Copley made 18 saves for his third career shutout and host Los Angeles beat Montreal for its fifth consecutive victory.

Carl Grundstrom and Trevor Lewis also scored. The Kings have won nine of 11 to improve to 13-3-3.

Devils 7, Sabres 2: Tyler Toffoli scored twice, Vitek Vanecek needed just nine saves and host New Jersey routed Buffalo to snap a three-game losing streak.

Penguins 3, Maple Leafs 2: Erik Karlsson scored the deciding goal in the final minute of the second period and host Pittsburgh held off Toronto.