

## US shoots down 2nd drone from Yemen

By **DOUG G. WARE**  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A Navy warship for the second time in recent weeks shot down a drone in the Middle East launched by Iranian-backed rebels in Yemen, Pentagon officials said Wednesday.

The USS Carney shot down the drone because it was approaching the Navy vessel near the Bab el-Mandeb strait, a waterway that connects the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden near the Arabian Sea, according to a defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity. Much of Yemen's southern coastline borders the strait and Gulf of Aden.

"At approximately 11 a.m. Yemen time while in the South Red Sea, a U.S. Navy ship shot down an unmanned aerial vehicle launched from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen," the defense official said. "Although its intentions are not known, the [drone] was heading toward the ship."

The confrontation on Wednesday did not cause injuries to American personnel or damage to U.S. property, the official said, adding the Carney was escorting a supply ship and another vessel carrying military equipment to the region when the shoot-down occurred.

The USS Carney is an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer that's been in the region for weeks. The defense official also said the destroyed drone was an Iranian-made KAS-04.

The Houthis in Yemen are one of many militant groups sponsored and aligned with the Iranian government.

"The Houthis and Iran have a long-standing relationship," Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon's chief spokesman, said Tuesday. "When it comes to our forces, we are going to do whatever we need to do to ensure they stay protected."

The shootdown comes after several weeks of increased militant attacks against U.S. forces at various locations throughout the Middle East.

Iranian-supported groups, for example, have launched dozens of attacks targeting multiple U.S. bases in Iraq and Syria, and the Houthi rebels in Yemen have also previously engaged with American troops.

In mid-October, the USS Carney shot down several enemy drones and rockets fired by the Houthis in Yemen. The Pentagon called it a self-defense strike, but officials said they were not certain where the rockets and drones were targeted. Ryder

said they could have been aimed at Israel, just days after the Oct. 7 Hamas attack that killed hundreds of Israeli civilians and touched off a new conflict between the long-time adversaries.

"These missiles [and drones] were deemed a threat, and so the Carney took action," Ryder said after the October incident. "We have the capability to defend our broader interests in the region and to deter regional escalation. ... The crew of the Carney did just that."

The Carney has been in the Middle East as part of the U.S. effort to stabilize the region and deter other countries or groups from escalating the Israeli-Hamas conflict. The ship is armed with missiles, torpedoes and several guns and is part of the military's Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System, a program that provides defense against short- and intermediate-range missiles.

Wednesday's shootdown came one day after another Iranian-made drone flew within 1,500 yards of the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, which was patrolling international waters in the Persian Gulf. Navy officials said the drone violated safety protocols and endangered U.S. service members on the aircraft carrier.

## Rescue efforts continue for downed Osprey in Japan

By **HANA KUSUMOTO**  
AND **ALEX WILSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

TOKYO — Search-and-rescue efforts continued Thursday for an Air Force CV-22B Osprey that crashed the previous afternoon with eight aboard in southwestern Japan.

The tiltrotor aircraft — stationed at Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo and assigned to the 353rd Special Operations Wing — was on a routine training mission off Yakushima, an island in Kagoshima prefecture, when it went down, according to Air Force Special Operations Command.

"The cause of the mishap is

currently unknown," the command said in a statement released several hours after the incident. "The crew's condition are unknown at this time."

One of the eight crewmembers has been confirmed dead, a spokesman for the Kyushu Defense Bureau, an arm of Japan's Ministry of Defense, said by phone Thursday.

The Osprey had been en route to Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, from Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni near Hiroshima, he added. The individual recovered Wednesday was found near an empty, 20-person life raft and what appeared to be aircraft wreckage, a spokesman

for Japan's 10th Regional Coast Guard Headquarters said by phone hours after the crash.

The body was returned to the U.S. military on Thursday, a coast guard news release said.

### Japan grounds Ospreys

The Kagoshima Airport Office said an Osprey made an emergency landing request for Yakushima Airport at 2:38 p.m., according to a Yomiuri newspaper report. A witness quoted by public broadcaster NHK said he saw the Osprey suddenly turn upside down and fire near its left propeller before it fell into the water.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Hi-

rokazu Matsuno, during a news conference Thursday morning, called the incident tragic.

"Such accidents cause great concern to the residents living in the area and it is regrettable," he said.

The Japan Ground Self-Defense Force grounded its Ospreys for the time being, Matsuno said, adding that the Japanese government has urged the U.S. side to confirm its tiltrotor aircraft are safe before flying them in Japan.

A Self-Defense Force training flight planned for Thursday was canceled as Japan grounded all 14 of its Ospreys, The Associated Press reported.

# USS Indianapolis, drones team up in Persian Gulf drill

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

A U.S. Navy littoral combat ship coordinated with unmanned vessels and a flying drone to destroy a target boat during an exercise in the Persian Gulf, service officials said.

The exercise Monday came amid increasing encounters between Iranian drones and the U.S. military in Middle East waters, including one this week described by Navy senior officials as unsafe and unprofessional.

The Freedom-class USS Indianapolis networked with the drones to identify the target, which was destroyed by a MARTAC T-38 Devil Ray surface drone armed with missiles, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. 5th Fleet said in a statement Wednesday.

The exercise relied on a person at Task Force 59's Robotics Operations Center in Bahrain to make decisions, according to the statement.

The results prove "these unmanned platforms paired with our manned combat ships can enhance fleet lethality," Capt. Colin Corridan, the task force's commodore, said in the statement.

The exercise involving USS Indianapolis was the second time in just over a month the Navy used a drone in the Middle East to fire lethal munitions. The earlier go-around also used a T-38 Devil Ray to destroy a target boat, the service said.

Other drones in the Monday exercise included a Flexrotor aircraft, an Arabian Fox

MAST-13 and an additional T-38.

Task Force 59 is known for its experimentation with drones in patrolling Middle East waters.

The unit only recently began working on arming drones, Stars and Stripes reported earlier in November.

In September, underwater, surface and aerial drones tracked Iranian military vessels over several days during patrols in and around the Strait of Hormuz, the Navy said last month.

The exercise on Monday came two days before the destroyer USS Carney shot down a drone coming toward the ship that was launched from Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen, U.S. officials said. The Houthis are backed by Iran.

On Tuesday, an Iranian drone came within 1,500 yards of the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower during routine flight operations in the central Persian Gulf, Navy officials said.

Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, 5th Fleet commander, characterized Iran's drone flight as "unsafe, unprofessional and irresponsible."

Days earlier, the destroyer USS Thomas Hudner shot down multiple one-way attack drones, which also originated from Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen, U.S. officials said.

Iran-linked militants have launched dozens of attacks on land-based U.S. military forces in Syria and Iraq since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war on Oct. 7.

## Tires of Navy plane stuck in Hawaii bay resting on reef

*Associated Press*

KANEHOE BAY, Hawaii — Tires from a large airplane that's been stuck in a Hawaii bay for more than a week are resting on parts of a reef, according to video the U.S. Navy released Wednesday as it figures out a plan to remove the aircraft.

There were no injuries to the nine people who were on board when the plane landed Nov. 20 in shallow water just offshore of Marine Corps Base Hawaii at Kaneohe Bay. The base is about 10 miles from Honolulu.

The Navy is investigating what caused the plane to overshoot a runway.

The underwater footage shows the "two points of contact the aircraft has with the coral and the remainder of the aircraft floating above," the Navy said.

The video shows tires on the coral as tiny fish swim through

rock crevices.

A Navy team removed nearly all of the estimated 2,000 gallons of fuel on the plane, Rear Adm. Kevin Lenox said Monday.

Cmdr. Mark Anderson, who is leading the Navy's mobile diving and salvage unit working at the site, said the plane was sitting on a mixture of coral and sand. The left engine is resting on coral. The plane rises a little with the tide, so the full weight of the plane is not on the coral, he said Monday.

Kaneohe Bay is home to coral reefs, an ancient Hawaiian fishpond and a breeding ground for hammerhead sharks.

Sierra Club of Hawaii Executive Director Wayne Tanaka said the video underscores potential damage to the reef.

"It confirms what we've known: We have a jet plane sitting on coral reef," he said. "We don't know how much it moved, how much it could move."

## Somalia intensifies patrols amid fears of piracy revival

*Associated Press*

BOSASO, Puntland — Somalia's maritime police force on Thursday intensified patrols in the Gulf of Aden following a failed pirate hijacking of a ship earlier this week.

The commander of the maritime force in the semiautonomous region of Puntland, Abdullahi Mohamed Ahmed, told The Associated Press that patrols in the waters had doubled and were on a 24-hour rotation to deter pirates.

"Here now we have many challenges. We had initially dealt with the pirates and stopped their activities, but recently on top of al-Shabab and ISIS we have had to look out for

them again."

On Sunday, the U.S. military said it had captured five men who had attempted to hijack an Israeli-linked tanker off the coast of Yemen.

Yemeni Houthi rebels have conducted recent attacks on commercial vessels on the Gulf of Eden, seen as part of a rise in violence in the region due to the Israel-Hamas war. But the Pentagon said this latest attempt was carried out by Somali nationals.

That is the first in many years and has led the Somali government to appeal for international support to deter a resurgence of piracy in the Horn of Africa.

# Truce in Gaza extended as more freed

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Israel and Hamas agreed at the last minute Thursday to extend their cease-fire in Gaza by another day to allow more hostages and prisoners to be released. But any further renewal of the truce, now in its seventh day, could prove more daunting since Hamas is expected to set a higher price for many of the remaining hostages.

Hamas freed two Israeli women Thursday afternoon and more hostage releases were expected to follow, the Israeli military said. At least 10 Israelis a day, along with other nationals, have been

released during the truce, in return for Israel's release of at least 30 Palestinian prisoners.

International pressure has mounted for the truce to continue as long as possible after weeks of Israeli bombardment and a ground campaign following Hamas' deadly Oct. 7 attack on Israel that triggered the war. Thousands of Palestinians in Gaza have been killed and more than three-quarters of the population of 2.3 million have been uprooted, leading to a humanitarian crisis.

Israel has vowed to resume the fighting — with the goal of dismantling Hamas — once the

cease-fire ends.

The talks appeared to be growing tougher, with Hamas having already freed most of the women and children it kidnapped Oct. 7. The militants are expected to make greater demands in return for freeing scores of civilian men and soldiers.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other top officials on his third visit to the region since the start of the war, said he hoped the cease-fire could be extended and more hostages could be released.

"This process is producing re-

sults. It's important, and we hope that it can continue," he said.

Qatar and Egypt, which have played a key role in mediating, are seeking to prolong the deal by another two days, according to Diaa Rashwan, the head of Egypt's State Information Service.

On Thursday morning, Palestinian gunmen opened fire on people waiting for buses along a main highway entering Jerusalem, killing at least three people and wounding several others, according to Israeli police.

The two attackers, brothers from a neighborhood in annexed east Jerusalem, were killed.

## Russian missile strikes tear through eastern Ukraine

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian missiles tore through apartment buildings in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk region, local officials said Thursday, killing at least two people and burying families under rubble as the Kremlin's forces continued to pound the fiercely contested area with long-range weapons.

Russian military units simultaneously launched six S-300 missiles toward the Donetsk region during the night, according to Ukrainian Internal Affairs Minister Ihor Klymenko. Another two were fired separately in the same area, the Ukrainian air force said.

The simultaneous missile strikes hit three Donetsk cities — Pokrovsk, Novohrodivka and Myrnohrad, Klymenko said. The cities lie 15-25 miles from the front line.

The battlefield has seen few major changes in recent months. A Ukrainian counteroffensive that started in June dented deep Russian defenses in some areas but has failed to change the complexion of the 22-month war.

Moscow has held firm in most of the areas it occupies while using the long-range weapons to inflict damage on Ukraine, including civilian areas.

Emergency workers pulled the body of a 62-year-old man from the wreckage of a de-

stroyed multi-story building in Novohrodivka. Another death was reported in the same city by Ukraine's Emergency Service. Four more people may be under the rubble, including a child, authorities said.

In Pokrovsk, the strikes destroyed a multi-story building, nine houses, a police office and cars. Emergency crews helped rescue a man with a 6-month-old baby, covered in blood, in his hands, officials said.

The head of the city administration, Serhii Dobriak, said it was fourth time Pokrovsk came under attack in the past month.

"They are striking the city center, the houses," he said. "They are just destroying the civilian population."

## Former Secretary of State Kissinger dies at age 100

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the diplomat with the thick glasses and gravelly voice who dominated foreign policy as the United States extricated itself from Vietnam and broke down barriers with China, died Wednesday, his consulting firm said. He was 100.

With his gruff yet commanding presence and behind-the-scenes manipulation of power, Kissinger exerted uncommon in-

fluence on global affairs under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, earning both vilification and the Nobel Peace Prize. Decades later, his name still provoked impassioned debate over foreign policy landmarks long past.

Kissinger's power grew during the turmoil of Watergate, when the politically attuned diplomat assumed a role akin to copresident to the weakened Nixon.

"No doubt my vanity was

piqued," Kissinger later wrote of his expanding influence. "But the dominant emotion was a premonition of catastrophe."

A Jew who fled Nazi Germany with his family in his teens, Kissinger in his later years cultivated the reputation of respected statesman, giving speeches, offering advice to Republicans and Democrats alike and managing a global consulting business. He turned up in President Donald Trump's White House on multiple occasions. But Nixon-era doc-

uments and tapes, as they trickled out over the years, brought revelations — many in Kissinger's own words — that sometimes cast him in a harsh light.

Never without his detractors, Kissinger after he left government was dogged by critics who argued that he should be called to account for his policies on Southeast Asia and support of repressive regimes in Latin America.

Kissinger's consulting firm said he passed away at his home in Connecticut.

# Fake Facebook accounts targeted US voters

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Someone in China created thousands of fake social media accounts designed to appear to be from Americans and used them to spread polarizing political content in an apparent effort to further divide the United States ahead of next year's elections, Meta said Thursday.

The network of nearly 4,800 fake accounts was attempting to build an audience when it was identified and eliminated by the tech company, which owns Facebook and Instagram. The accounts sported fake photos, names and locations as a way to appear like everyday American Facebook users weighing in on political issues.

Instead of spreading fake content as other networks have

done, the accounts were used to reshare posts from X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, that were created by politicians, news outlets and others. The interconnected accounts pulled content from both liberal and conservative sources, an indication that its goal was not to support one side or the other but to exaggerate partisan divisions and further inflame polarization.

The newly identified network shows how America's foreign adversaries exploit U.S.-based tech platforms to sow discord and distrust, and it hints at the serious threats posed by online disinformation next year, when national elections will occur in the U.S., India, Mexico, Ukraine, Pakistan, Taiwan and other nations.

"These networks still struggle to build audiences, but they're a warning," said Ben Nimmo, who leads investigations into inauthentic behavior on Meta's platforms. "Foreign threat actors are attempting to reach people across the internet ahead of next year's elections, and we need to remain alert."

Meta Platforms Inc., based in Menlo Park, Calif., couldn't definitively link the Chinese network to the Chinese government, but it did determine the network originated in that country. The content spread by the accounts complements Chinese government propaganda and disinformation that has sought to inflate partisan and ideological divisions within the U.S.

To appear more like normal Facebook accounts, the network

would sometimes post about fashion or pets. Earlier this year, some of the accounts abruptly replaced their American-sounding user names and profile pictures with new ones suggesting they lived in India. The accounts then began spreading pro-Chinese content about Tibet and India, reflecting how fake networks can be redirected to focus on new targets.

Meta often points to its efforts to shut down fake social media networks as evidence of its commitment to protecting election integrity and democracy. But critics have said the platform's focus on fake accounts distracts from its failure to address its responsibility for the misinformation already on its site that has contributed to polarization and distrust.

## Cities must replace lead pipes in 10 years under Biden plan

Associated Press

Most U.S. cities would have to replace lead water pipes within 10 years under strict new rules proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency as the Biden administration moves to reduce lead in drinking water and prevent public health crises like the ones in Flint, Mich., and Washington, D.C.

Millions of people consume drinking water from lead pipes and the agency said tighter standards would improve IQ scores in children and reduce high blood pressure and heart disease in adults. It is the strongest overhaul of lead rules in more than three decades, and will cost billions of dollars. Pulling it off will require overcoming enormous practical and financial obstacles.

"These improvements ensure that in a not too distant future, there will never be another city and another child poisoned by their pipes," said Mona Hanna-Attisha, a pediatrician and clean water advocate.

The Biden administration had previously said it wants all of the nation's roughly 9 million lead pipes to be removed, and rapidly. Lead pipes connect water mains in the street to homes and are typically the biggest source of lead in drinking water. They are most common in older, industrial parts of the country.

Lead crises have hit poorer, majority-Black cities like Flint especially hard, propelling the risks of lead in drinking water into the national consciousness. Their impact reaches beyond public health. After the crises, tap water use declined nationally, especially among Black and Hispanic people. The Biden administration has said investment is vital to fix this injustice and ensure everyone has safe, lead-free drinking water.

"We're trying to right a long-standing wrong here," said Radhika Fox, head of the EPA Office of Water. "We're bending the arc towards equity and justice on this legacy issue."

## Jobless applications increase; ongoing claims most in 2 years

Associated Press

Slightly more Americans filed for jobless claims last week, pushing the overall number of people in the United States collecting unemployment benefits to its highest level in two years.

Applications for unemployment benefits rose by 7,000 to 218,000 for the week ending Nov. 25, the Labor Department reported Thursday.

About 1.93 million people, however, were collecting unemployment benefits the week that ended Nov. 18, approximately 86,000 more than the previous week and the most in two years. Continuing claims have risen in nine of the past 10 weeks.

Jobless claim applications are seen as representative of the number of layoffs in a given week.

Analysts have said the continuing claims are rising because many of those who are already unemployed may now be

having a harder time finding new work.

And while the labor market remains strong, some softness is beginning to show.

Hiring has slowed from the breakneck pace of 2021 and 2022 when the economy rebounded from the COVID-19 recession. Employers added a record 606,000 jobs a month in 2021 and nearly 400,000 per month last year. So far in 2023, monthly hiring has averaged a still-solid 239,000, but it's come in below 200,000 in three of the last five months.

Employers are also posting fewer job openings.

The Federal Reserve has raised its benchmark interest rate 11 times since March 2022 to slow the economy and rein in inflation that hit a four-decade high last year. The job market and economic growth remained surprisingly resilient, defying predictions that the economy would slip into a recession this year.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

**Boy, 12, arrested after chase with forklift**

**MI** ANN ARBOR — Police in Michigan have arrested a 12-year-old boy who they said led them on a chase in a stolen forklift.

Police were called to Forsythe Middle School on a report of a stolen forklift, MLive.com reported. Officers found the forklift heading south through the city and gave chase at speeds between 15 and 20 mph.

The driver, later identified as a 12-year-old Ann Arbor boy, finally stopped the forklift and was taken into custody.

**Woman's decorative yard art may have to go**

**MN** ST. PAUL — Iris Logan was having a hard time growing grass in the front yard of her St. Paul home, so she covered the space with stones, statues and decorative art. More than 30 years later, it's something of a local landmark.

But to a city inspector, it's a nuisance. Logan, 70, has been given notice to clean up the "planters, wood, metal cans, large rocks and miscellaneous debris" cited after a recent inspection, the St. Paul Pioneer Press reported. The City Council will take up the matter soon.

Logan said the city's actions forced her to create the mosaic in the first place because workers on a road repair project dug so deep around one of her trees that its roots were exposed. She brought in bricks and dirt, planted flowers and added stones — and just kept adding.

Logan recently received written notice that a city official will recommend to the City Council

that she be given until Dec. 22 to clean things up. She appealed the order.

**Man gets life for killing parents with machete**

**WI** KENOSHA — A Kenosha man has been sentenced to life in prison after admitting to fatally stabbing his father and stepmother with a machete after they stopped him from sexually assaulting a teen.

A Kenosha County Circuit Court judge sentenced Jesus Medrano III to life in prison without the possibility of extended supervision, the Kenosha News reported.

Medrano, 27, had faced two first-degree intentional homicide charges in the 2021 deaths of his father, Jesus Medrano Jr., 49, and stepmother, Latrice Myers-Medrano, 36.

He admitted to stabbing them to death with a machete Jan. 6, 2021, after the couple stopped him from sexually assaulting a teenage relative who lived with them at their Kenosha home.

**Man pleads guilty to threatening school**

**NH** PORTSMOUTH — A Maine man charged with using social media to threaten to commit a shooting at a New Hampshire high school has changed his plea to guilty, court documents stated.

Police charged Kyle Hendrickson with criminal threatening with a firearm in April. They said he posted a video with a gun outside Portsmouth High School in which he threatened to "shoot up the school."

A federal grand jury subsequently indicted Hendrickson

in September on charges of interstate threatening communications and possessing a firearm in a school zone. Hendrickson now intends to plead guilty to those charges.

**License plate design gets intense backlash**

**KS** TOPEKA — For some outsiders, Kansas conjures up images from "The Wizard of Oz:" flat, unending plains that are filmed in black and white to symbolize the drab life of the classic movie's heroine, Dorothy. So, when Kansas seeks to promote itself a little with a new license plate, it might be a problem if people see it as dull or "ugly as sin."

In response to resounding criticism of the proposed navy blue and deep gold plate, Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly announced she had slammed the brakes on its production — only six days after her office unveiled the design. Facing a threat that the GOP-controlled Legislature would intervene, she promised a public vote on several possible designs.

The now-disfavored design was mostly gold with a navy strip across the top, navy numbers and no art. It was a sharp break with the current plate, which is pale blue with navy letters and numbers and features an embossed representation of the state seal, mostly in white.

**County sued over death of pet dog shot by cops**

**MD** PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY — Roommates who sued a Maryland county claim police officers illegally entered

their apartment without a warrant, detained them at gunpoint without justification and unnecessarily shot their pet dog, which was left paralyzed and ultimately euthanized.

The dog, a boxer mix named Hennessey, did not attack the three officers who entered the apartment before two of them shot the animal with their firearms and the third fired a stun gun at it, according to the federal lawsuit.

The lawsuit seeks at least \$16 million in damages over the June, 2, 2021, encounter, which started with Prince George's County police officers responding to a report of a dog bite at an apartment complex where the four plaintiffs lived.

The lawsuit claims the officers panicked and fired their weapons at the dog after it followed one of the plaintiffs out of the bedroom and approached its primary owner, Erica Umana.

**More claims made about ex-cop in assault case**

**MO** ST. LOUIS — Authorities allege that a former suburban St. Louis police officer who is charged with sexually assaulting several arrestees also covertly took photos of people in public bathrooms.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that Marcellis Blackwell, 34, of St. Louis, is not charged with the latest allegation. Blackwell had worked for the North County Police Cooperative for about a year when he was charged with taking some people he arrested to isolated areas before he turned off his body camera and abused them.

— From Associated Press

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# Milroe, Beck face similar expectations

Associated Press

Carson Beck and Jalen Milroe had to replace big-name quarterbacks at programs with national title-or-bust expectations.

No sweat, right?

Beck has kept No. 1 Georgia rolling after replacing two-time national champion quarterback Stetson Bennett. Milroe and No. 8 Alabama rebounded strongly from a rocky start in replacing No. 1 NFL Draft pick and 2021 Heisman Trophy winner Bryce Young.

Both quarterbacks have been good enough to help set up a meeting Saturday in the Southeastern Conference championship game, with playoff hopes potentially on the line. Milroe's own resurgence after a Week 3 benching for the South Florida game played a major role in helping the Crimson Tide rally from an early loss to No. 7 Texas to win 10 straight.

"I think his transformation at the quarterback position has

helped us transform our entire offensive team," Alabama coach Nick Saban said. "The confidence that he's playing with, the confidence that our players have in him. I think we've done a pretty good job of trying to utilize the skill set that he has.

"He's learned that the most important thing at his position is to distribute the ball. He's done a really, really good job of that."

That includes delivering one of the most improbable plays of the season. Milroe's fourth-and-31 touchdown pass to Isaiah Bond with 32 seconds left lifted Alabama to a 27-24 victory over Auburn in the Iron Bowl, preserving the Tide's still-shaky playoff chances.

"Absolutely insane," Beck said. "Just a crazy play."

Beck and the Bulldogs, meanwhile, have preserved a winning streak that has stretched to 29 games. His turning point may have come in the SEC opener against South Carolina,

when Beck rallied Georgia from a 14-3 halftime deficit to win 24-14.

"I think our confidence kind of shot up from there," Beck said. "We've been able to pick up steam as the season has gone along."

Beck has thrown for 3,495 yards and 22 touchdowns against six interceptions, while completing 72.4% of his passes.

Milroe has thrown for 2,526 yards and 21 touchdowns, also with six interceptions. He has run for 439 yards and 12 TDs. Milroe is third in passing efficiency and Beck eighth.

Georgia coach Kirby Smart compared Beck to "a bigger, physical version" of Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson.

"He is playing in a different speed than anybody else when you watch it," Smart said.

Most importantly, they've both won. And Milroe has done something even Young couldn't do last season: lead the Tide to

the SEC title game.

First, he had to spend the South Florida game watching backups Tyler Buchner and Ty Simpson share the snaps. The offense sputtered badly in a 17-3 win.

Then Milroe was back, leading the Tide to a perfect SEC season and making their biggest play in the Iron Bowl.

Milroe's exuberant postgame celebration was also notable, when he yelled in part: "Give me the Heisman!" Milroe tried to downplay his words a couple of days later.

"That was an emotional moment, so things came out that was all through emotion," he said. "But the biggest thing was I was just so proud to be in the moment."

Beck and Milroe are considered long shots for the Heisman, but they're both at least in the conversation for getting to New York as a finalist. Like Bennett did last season and Young the year before.

## Army, Navy visit New England with Pats picking sides

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — New England long-snapper Joe Cardona has the rare weekend off coming up — perfect timing for the Navy graduate to take in the Army-Navy game at the Patriots' home stadium.

"I've been very fortunate to play in a lot of big games here in New England. But, realistically, all of them pale in comparison to those Army-Navy games," Cardona said on Wednesday after popping up before practice to wish the current team good luck. "It's always a special opportunity for me to get to see these guys, get to see Navy play. But even more so, getting to share my home field with them and getting to share New England with them because this is an area that's ready for this game, that's for sure."

Army and Navy will meet for the 124th time on Dec. 9 at Gillette Stadium, the home of the six-time Super Bowl champions — and two specific Patriots in particular. Cardona is a Navy graduate and still an active member of the Naval Reserves, and Patriots coach Bill Belichick has been a supporter of the Naval Academy after growing up on the Annapolis campus while his father, Steve, spent 34 years there as an assistant coach.

"Well, he was raised wrong," Army coach Jeff Monken said with a laugh. "Unfortunately, his dad got a job at Navy and he worked there a long time. And coach grew up there. Had his dad got a job at Army, I'm sure he'd be on the right side of the rivalry."

Monken, who spent five years

as a Navy assistant, said he met Belichick when the Patriots coach stopped by in the offseason after one of the team's Super Bowl wins because he wanted to watch tape of the Army running game. A library on campus of books on football strategy and history is named after Steve Belichick.

"The Belichick name, it's affiliated with the Navy program. And when you hear 'Belichick' and 'Gillette Stadium,' you think of winning," Navy defensive lineman Jacob Busic said. "There's banners out there, the Super Bowl banners, the history that the Belichick family has with the Naval Academy and to be able to play in this stadium ... there's no better place to play this football game."

Bill Belichick, whose current team is 2-9, declined to com-

ment on the Army-Navy game, saying his team first had to worry about Sunday's game against the Los Angeles Chargers. The Patriots then have a Thursday night matchup in Pittsburgh that at least gives them the weekend off to attend the college game.

Cardona told the players at Wednesday's news conference that he was proud of them and reminded them that sailors and Marines stationed all around the world will be watching the game — rooting for Navy, but more importantly expecting the team to play hard. Busic said Cardona is himself a reminder that Navy athletes can reach "the big stage."

"That kind of play style, that mentality, carried him this far, and he made it here to the NFL," Busic said.

# Texas sets sights on last Big 12 title

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Jahdae Barron can still feel the sting from sweat dripping into his eyes when he looked toward the south end zone of Darrell K Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium last summer and saw the years high on the wall: 1996, 2005 and 2009.

All signify Big 12 titles won by Texas. And in the 14 years since the last one? Nothing.

For Barron and the Longhorns, it's time to add another.

"Throughout summer workouts and practice (and) when we warm up every day ... (coaches) tell us to face the side with all the national championships and Big 12," the senior defensive back said. "We've been looking at that, shoot, every day, in summer when it was 110 (degrees) and we were sweating and dying."

Texas can close out its 28th and final Big 12 season with championship year 2023 for the stadium wall on Saturday when the No. 7 Longhorns (11-1, No. 7

CFP) face No. 19 Oklahoma State (9-3, No. 18 CFP) in the Big 12 championship game in Arlington, Texas.

The Longhorns will leave the league for the Southeastern Conference next year and a bookend title to go with the league's first in 1996 would be quite the sendoff.

Back in 2009, when the Longhorns were coming out of a decade of 10-win seasons, the program seemed primed for a run of Big 12 titles. Instead, the Longhorns fired or hired four head coaches while reaching the title game just twice in that span.

And just like his players, third-year Texas coach Steve Sarkisian has seen the numbers on the stadium wall every morning.

"I'm in (the stadium) every day, and my office looks right into it," Sarkisian said. "And to think in the last 27 years there's only been three conference championships and we're playing for one on Saturday where

we can put our year up in that stadium forever—that means a lot. That's something that we don't take lightly."

Just two years ago, Texas was 5-7 in Sarkisian's first season in Austin.

There are many current Longhorns who remember the misery of that season.

"Battle wounds. Battle scars. Trauma forms bonds," senior linebacker Jaylon Ford said. "When you go through a 5-7 season like we went through, five straight losses ... You have to really look around and find brothers. The people that stayed, we had to wrap our arms around each other and push through. We made it through and formed our way to the top."

Texas started its final season in the Big 12 with Sarkisian and his players rallying around an unofficial "embrace the hate" motto, and the Longhorns knew they would have to punch their way through some tough environments.

The season got a huge early bounce with a big road win at Alabama, a future SEC opponent. That 34-24 victory turned the Longhorns into potential national championship contenders.

Texas survived some close games against Houston, TCU and Kansas State, and won two games without starting quarterback Quinn Ewers. Standout running back Jonathon Brooks was lost for the season three weeks ago with a knee injury.

Texas finally clinched a final Big 12 title game berth with a 57-7 romp over Texas Tech.

There are even bigger prizes on the horizon if it beats Oklahoma State on Saturday. Texas has been hovering just outside the top four spots in the College Football Playoff. The Longhorns would still need help to get in, but it's possible.

Lose Saturday, however, and the Big 12 title honors in the stadium stop at 2009.

Forever.

## Penix, Huskies need offense to click again vs. Ducks

Associated Press

SEATTLE — While he's had one big game after another, Rome Odunze can see not all is right with the offense for No. 3 Washington.

It hasn't looked quite right since Odunze caught the winning touchdown to beat Oregon in October — the same team the Huskies will see in the Pac-12 championship game on Friday.

"I think we need to clean a lot of things up," Odunze said. "In several different moments, we're not able to execute and move the ball. It comes down to our attitude and effort on every single play and they need to improve immediately."

Ask around and you'll get different answers from the Huskies about where things stand on the offensive side heading into a second meeting with the fifth-ranked Ducks.

Odunze expressed his worries following Washington's 24-21 win over Washington State on Saturday that completed the first 12-0 regular season in Pac-12 history even as the conference is ready to break apart. But it was also the second straight game and third in the past six that the Huskies were held under 25 points.

Quarterback Michael Penix Jr. was more dismissive of the concerns, while offensive coordinator Ryan Grubb and head coach Kalen DeBoer fell somewhere in the middle.

"I feel like we played good complementary football toward the end of the game, but for the offensive side of the ball, we've got to play better. And we will," Penix said after the Apple Cup. "I trust and believe in everybody on that side of the ball. We just look forward to the next opportunity. But at the same time, we understand that we've got to play better."

No matter the actual concern level among those involved, there's no debating that Washington hasn't carved up defenses with the ease it displayed leading up to the 36-33 win over Oregon on Oct. 14.

The Huskies know the offense must get better in short order.

Penix put himself at the top of the Heisman Trophy list with his performance in the first meeting against Oregon, only to see his numbers slowly diminish in the following weeks. He threw for a season-low 162 yards against Oregon State and had only 204 yards passing against Washington State.

In four of his past five games, Penix's completion percentage has been under 58%. In the first

five games of the season, his low was 72.5%. The Huskies have also been more turnover prone, with 10 of their 16 on the season coming in the final six games.

"It's statistical evidence that it hasn't been as effective and I know everybody worries about how much the ball is going down the field or not going down the field, but I think we also made a lot of those plays that got us some big wins," Grubb said.

He's right. Despite the decreased numbers, the Huskies have unquestionably been tested and to date overcome all those challenges with a lot of big plays in big moments. It's been Odunze in the middle of a lot of those.

"I feel like at this point we've proven that we're a resilient team and that we're willing to go through the adversity and grind out tough games," Odunze said.

# Jets begin Rodgers' 21-day practice window

Associated Press

FLORHAM PARK, N.J. — Aaron Rodgers' improbable comeback from a torn Achilles tendon has taken the next step.

The New York Jets opened the 21-day practice window for the quarterback Wednesday — exactly 11 weeks after he had surgery — with Rodgers cleared for some football activities.

Coach Robert Saleh said the four-time NFL MVP, who turns 40 on Saturday, will be limited at practice — as he was listed on the team's injury report — and is not cleared for contact. Saleh said there's "no added risk" in taking this step, emphasizing it's not necessarily a signal that Rodgers will play again this season as much as it is the next part of the quarterback's rehabilitation process.

"Instead of throwing with staff members," Saleh said, "he's throwing with teammates."

At the end of the 21-day period, the Jets will have to make a decision whether to activate him or keep him on injured reserve for the rest of the season. That period will expire Dec. 20, four days before the Jets' home game against the Washington Commanders.

"We're not there yet," Saleh said. "A lot of guys coming off (injured reserve) are usually not ready to play football. There's usually still a little bit of a health concern there. So you use these 21-day windows to see where they're at."

"We're so far away from that. But the mindset for this is more of a progression in his rehab. He's been cleared for functional football activity. He's not cleared to fully play football."

During the early portion of practice open to reporters, Rodgers walked onto the field in his red No. 8 noncontact jersey during warmups and embraced left tackle Mekhi Becton in the trainers' area. Rodgers found his way to the quarterbacks group during individual drills, tossed some short passes and took a few dropbacks.

"Science rules," wide receiver Allen Lazard said with a laugh. "Being around him the time I've been around him, knowing his mindset — more so his stubbornness — just to kind of prove everyone else wrong, it's very on brand."

Rodgers tore his Achilles tendon four snaps into his debut with the Jets on Sept. 11 and had surgery two days later. The operation included a "speed

bridge" procedure, which helps expedite the healing process. Rodgers has been progressing quickly in his rehabilitation and is still aiming to make an unprecedented quick return to the field.

"I think it's sooner than anybody (anticipated)," Saleh said. "I think it's a credit to him. I know we're getting caught up in trying to create a narrative around him, but the true narrative is he's old-school in the sense he is driven. Is there motivation to be the first to ever do it? Sure, but that's OK. That's his 'why' — that's why he's (doing it)."

"He loves this organization, he wants to be with his teammates, he wants to be here."

But Rodgers acknowledged Tuesday during his weekly appearance on "The Pat McAfee Show" that the factors in him returning to play this season are two-fold. The doctors must clear Rodgers — and the Jets must be in the AFC playoff hunt.

"It's always been, first, am I healthy?" Rodgers said. "Then, are we alive? Are we in it? Are we playing good enough to make a run? Can I step in and protect myself and play at the level that I'm capable of playing? But it's health first and are we alive for

the playoffs, second."

The Jets (4-7) have lost four in a row and host the NFC South-leading Atlanta Falcons on Sunday. Tim Boyle will make his second start in a row at quarterback in place of the benched Zach Wilson, who took over when Rodgers went down.

Some fans, media and even medical professionals have wondered if Rodgers is perhaps rushing to come back too soon and risk re-injury. Running back Cam Akers, then with the Los Angeles Rams, set the benchmark for returns from a torn Achilles tendon during the 2021 season when he played just five months after being injured and helped the team during its run to the Super Bowl.

Rodgers could beat that by several weeks if he comes back this season.

"I promise Aaron is not going to do anything that puts himself in harm's way if he's not healthy to play," Saleh said. "Aaron is very, very smart. That's not something he's going to put himself at risk for. With that said, though, he is driven. He is achieving things that have never been achieved with regards to this injury and it's the progression with regard to rehab he's on."

## Kane could make debut with Red Wings next week

Associated Press

After skating at Madison Square Garden on Wednesday morning, Patrick Kane would have loved to play his first game for the Detroit Red Wings at night against the New York Rangers.

Six months removed from an invasive operation only two other NHL players have come back from, Kane will give his surgically repaired right hip a little more time.

After signing a prorated \$2.75 million contract for the rest of the season with the Red Wings, a more realistic possibility for his debut is Tuesday in his hometown of Buffalo against the Sabres — one of the several interested teams Kane had to choose from. Home games against San Jose on Dec. 7 and Ottawa

on Dec. 9 are also candidates.

"We'll just take it day to day and keep getting better every day and then make a decision," Kane said on a video call with reporters Wednesday. "Get me up to speed, a few practices with the team, work on a few things in the gym and don't really rush into it."

The 35-year-old winger is roughly six months removed from undergoing hip resurfacing surgery. Kane said doctors cleared him for contact two months ago.

He feels significantly better than the last time he played: Game 7 of the Rangers' first-round series at New Jersey on May 1. Lateral movement is back after the nagging hip injury hampered him for quite some time.

"I'm in a good spot," Kane said. "The hip

feels good and everything like that. So now I think we're just kind of easing into it and making sure I'm ready to go instead of just kind of throwing me into the fire."

A three-time Stanley Cup champion and 2016 NHL MVP with Chicago, Kane said former Blackhawks teammate Alex DeBrincat being with Detroit factored into his decision.

"Just the chemistry we've had on the ice the last couple of years in Chicago there (and) he's become one of my better friends around the league off the ice," Kane said of DeBrincat. "I really like kind of where they're going as far as the team and they're really building something that I think is going to have a lot of success here, so I'd like to be part of that."