

EU follows US, hits Russia with sanctions

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The European Union on Thursday heaped more economic sanctions on Russia, adding to President Donald Trump's new punitive measures the previous day against the Russian oil industry. Russian President Vladimir Putin called Washington's move an "unfriendly act" that could backfire by spiking global oil prices.

The American and European sanctions are intended as part of a broadened effort to choke off the revenue and supplies that fuel Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, compelling Putin to negotiate an end to the war.

Speaking to reporters in Moscow, Putin acknowledged that the "serious" U.S. sanctions will have "certain consequences" for Russia, but maintained that they will not significantly impact its economy.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who has long campaigned for the international community to punish Russia

more comprehensively for attacking his country, hailed the new restrictions.

"We waited for this. God bless, it will work. And this is very important," Zelenskyy said in Brussels, where EU countries attending a summit announced the latest round of Russia sanctions.

Despite U.S.-led peace efforts in recent months, the war shows no sign of ending after nearly four years, and European leaders are increasingly concerned about the threat from Russia.

Ukrainian forces have largely held Russia's bigger army at bay in a slow and ruinous war of attrition along a roughly 600-mile front line that snakes along eastern and southern Ukraine. Almost daily Russian long-range strikes have taken aim at Ukraine's power grid before the bitter winter, while Ukrainian forces have targeted Russian oil refineries and manufacturing plants.

Energy revenue is the linchpin of Russia's economy, allow-

ing Putin to pour money into the armed forces without worsening inflation and avoiding a currency collapse.

The EU measures especially target Russian oil and gas. They ban imports of Russian liquefied natural gas into the bloc, and add port bans on more than 100 new ships in the Russian shadow fleet of hundreds of aging tankers that are dodging sanctions.

The latest sanctions bring the total number of such ships to be banned to 557.

The measures also target transactions with a cryptocurrency increasingly used by Russia to circumvent sanctions; prohibit operations in the bloc using Russian payment cards and systems; restrict the provision of artificial intelligence services and high-performance computing services to Russian entities; and widen an export ban to include electronic components, chemicals and metals used in military manufacturing.

A new system for limiting the movement of Russian diplomats within the 27-nation EU will also be introduced.

International crude prices jumped more than \$2 per barrel Thursday on news of the additional sanctions.

The U.S. sanctions against Russian oil companies Rosneft and Lukoil came after Trump said that his plan for a swift meeting with Putin was on hold because he didn't want it to be a "waste of time." It was the latest twist in Trump's hot-and-cold efforts to end the war as Putin refuses to budge from his demands.

However, the sanctions don't take effect for almost a month, until Nov. 21, potentially giving Putin a chance for a change of heart.

Chris Weafer, CEO of the Macro-Advisory Ltd. consultancy, said "that's a window where they hope Russia will more seriously engage, and if it does, then those sanctions could be suspended."

Italy permit rule change could have wider reach

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Recent changes to Italian immigration rules could bring greater scrutiny for dependents of U.S. forces in Italy, as well as Defense Department civilian employees and contractors in the country.

Italy recently changed how those Americans apply for and receive a sojourner's permit, the document that allows them to live and work there.

The impact of the modifications is significant, as they affect all holders of paper permits

and first-time applicants, the Navy said in a newsletter sent to commands at U.S. Naval Support Activity Naples.

They also may affect permit holders' ability to travel in and out of the Schengen Zone, the newsletter said.

Under NATO's Status of Forces Agreement, DOD military dependents, civilians and contractors must have a sojourner's permit to reside and work in Italy.

They are required to have the paper permit in their possession when traveling and present it

when asked by police, immigration officials or other authorities.

Active-duty or reserve service members are not required to have sojourner's permits as part of the SOFA.

Those required to have the permit could be stopped and questioned while traveling to any of the 29 countries participating in the EU's Entry/Exit System implemented earlier this month, the Navy Region Europe, Africa, Central legal services office said in the newsletter.

Those countries include Germany, Italy and Spain, where large numbers of DOD personnel live and work.

People with a valid mission visa in their official passport may continue to travel freely within the Schengen area, the legal services office said.

Officials aren't certain how the changes to Italy's sojourner process, which now requires an electronic permit instead of a paper document, would impact current holders or applicants assigned to U.S. bases under SOFA, the Navy said.

US hits boats in Pacific in anti-drug effort

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military on Wednesday launched its ninth strike against an alleged drug-carrying vessel, killing three people in the eastern Pacific Ocean, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said, expanding the Trump administration's campaign against drug trafficking in South America.

It followed another strike Tuesday night, also in the eastern Pacific, that killed two people, Hegseth posted on social media hours earlier. The attacks were departures from the seven previous U.S. strikes that had targeted vessels in the Caribbean Sea. They bring the death toll to at least 37 from attacks that began last month.

The strikes represent an expansion of the military's targeting area as well as a shift to the waters

off South America where much of the cocaine from the world's largest producers is smuggled. Hegseth's social media posts also drew a direct comparison between the war on terrorism that the U.S. declared after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and the Trump administration's crackdown.

"Just as Al Qaida waged war on our homeland, these cartels are waging war on our border and our people," Hegseth said, adding "there will be no refuge or forgiveness — only justice."

Later Wednesday, he referred to the alleged drug-runners as "the 'Al Qaida' of our hemisphere."

Republican President Donald Trump has justified the strikes by asserting that the United States is engaged in an "armed conflict" with drug cartels and proclaiming the criminal organizations un-

lawful combatants, relying on the same legal authority used by President George W. Bush's administration for the war on terrorism. Asked about the latest boat attack, Trump insisted that "we have legal authority. We're allowed to do that." He said similar strikes could eventually come on land.

"We will hit them very hard when they come in by land," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office. "We're totally prepared to do that. And we'll probably go back to Congress and explain exactly what we're doing when we come to the land."

Lawmakers from both political parties have expressed concerns about Trump ordering the military actions without receiving authorization from Congress or providing many details.

Appearing alongside Trump,

Secretary of State Marco Rubio defended such strikes, saying, "If people want to stop seeing drug boats blow up, stop sending drugs to the United States." Trump said the strikes he is ordering are meant to save Americans and "the only way you can't feel bad about it ... is that you realize that every time you see that happen, you're saving 25,000 lives."

The U.S. military has built up an unusually large force in the Caribbean Sea and the waters off the coast of Venezuela since this summer, raising speculation that Trump could try to topple Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. Maduro faces charges of narcoterrorism in the U.S. In his posts on the strikes, Trump has repeatedly argued that illegal narcotics and the drug fentanyl carried by the vessels have been poisoning Americans.

Military has an unusually large force in Caribbean

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military has built up an unusually large force in the Caribbean Sea and the waters off the coast of Venezuela since this summer, when the Trump administration first began to shift assets to the region as part of its so-called war against narcoterrorism.

The Navy has eight warships in the region — three destroyers, three amphibious assault ships, a cruiser and a littoral combat ship that's designed for coastal waters.

The three amphibious assault ships make up an amphibious readiness group and carry an expeditionary unit of Marines. As a result, those ships also have on board a variety of Marine helicopters, Osprey tiltrotor aircraft and Harrier jets that have the capability of either transporting large numbers of Marines or striking

targets on land and sea. Destroyers and cruisers typically deploy with a missile loadout that contains Tomahawk cruise missiles that can strike hundreds of miles from launch point.

A U.S. Navy submarine, the USS Newport News, also is operating in the broader area of South America and is capable of carrying and launching cruise missiles.

In addition, a squadron of advanced U.S. Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II jets have been sent to an airstrip in Puerto Rico. The planes were first spotted landing on the island in mid-September.

MQ-9 Reaper Air Force drones also have been spotted operating out of Puerto Rico.

All told, there are more than 6,000 sailors and Marines that are now operating in the region based on the ships that have been confirmed by defense officials.

DOD announces post-rule change new press corps

Associated Press

Several conservative news outlets said Wednesday they had agreed to a new press policy rejected by virtually all legacy media organizations and will take their place in the Pentagon to cover Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and the U.S. military.

The new Pentagon press corps will include the Gateway Pundit, the National Pulse, Human Events, podcaster Tim Pool, the Just the News website founded by journalist John Solomon, Frontlines by Turning Point USA and LindellTV, run by "MyPillow" CEO Mike Lindell.

The Pentagon's announcement came less than a week after dozens of reporters from outlets like The New York Times, The Associated Press, CNN and The Washington Post turned in their access badges rather than agree

to a policy the journalists say will restrict them to covering news approved by Hegseth.

The journalists who left the Pentagon haven't stopped working covering the U.S. military. Many have been reporting aggressively, for example, on stories about strikes against boats in central America alleged to be part of the drug trade.

By not being in the Pentagon, "reporters will have to work harder, there's no question about it," said Barbara Starr, a longtime Pentagon reporter retired from CNN.

"But the real price is paid by the American people and the American military families," Starr said. "Military families who have their sons and daughters serving, they want to know everything and they want to know it fast."

Government shutdown now second longest in US history

Bloomberg News

The U.S. government shutdown, now in its 22nd day, has become the second-longest in history as the stalemate between the two parties over expiring health care subsidies persists.

With President Donald Trump expected to leave later this week for a trip to Asia, lawmakers and congressional aides say they see a real possibility the closure could extend into November and surpass the 35-day shutdown of Trump's first term.

A Tuesday meeting at the White House between Trump and Senate Republicans appeared to only strengthen the GOP resolve to refuse to negotiate with Democrats, who have demanded as their price for reopening the government that Congress provide relief to 22 million Americans whose health care premiums will spike in January.

"Our message has been very simple: We will not be extorted on this crazy plot of theirs,"

Trump said.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries have asked to meet with Trump before his Asia trip, but the president late Tuesday said he would only talk to them after the shutdown ends.

The Senate needs the votes of at least eight Democrats to overcome a filibuster on the House-passed temporary spending bill, which expires on Nov. 21.

Senate Republican Leader John Thune has publicly promised Democrats a floor vote on renewing expanded Affordable Care Act subsidies after the government reopens.

But Democrats, skeptical that the House would ever take such a vote, say that is not enough.

"The bottom line is that's no deal, that's a partisan plan that leaves the American people high and dry," Schumer told reporters.

The shutdown's economic disruption will deepen this week as civilian federal workers, who

were partially paid earlier this month, are set to miss their first full paycheck on Friday.

The White House has also warned that it may not be able to use extraordinary — and potentially illegal — accounting moves to continue to pay the military and to prevent federal food aid from drying up next month.

Anna Wong, Bloomberg Economics chief U.S. economist, said the shutdown will cause a slight temporary increase in the unemployment rate but revert back to 4.3% when the government reopens.

But the effect, she noted, is particularly acute in the Washington, D.C., region, with its high concentration of federal workers, as well as contractors, vendors and services businesses that won't receive back pay.

House Republicans have been home since Sept. 19 and Speaker Mike Johnson plans to keep them away from the Capitol for the rest of October so long as the shutdown persists.

US national debt passes \$38 trillion

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In the midst of a federal government shutdown, the U.S. government's gross national debt surpassed \$38 trillion Wednesday, a record number that highlights the accelerating accumulation of debt on America's balance sheet.

It's also the fastest accumulation of a trillion dollars in debt outside of the COVID-19 pandemic — the U.S. hit \$37 trillion in gross national debt in August this year.

The \$38 trillion update is found in the latest Treasury Department report, which logs the nation's daily finances.

Kent Smetters of the University of Pennsylvania's Penn Wharton Budget Model, who served in President George W. Bush's Treasury Department, told The Associated Press that a growing debt load over time leads ultimately to higher inflation, eroding Americans' purchasing power.

The Government Accountability Office outlines some of the impacts of rising government debt on Americans — including higher borrowing costs for things like mortgages and cars, lower wages from businesses having less money available to invest, and more expensive goods and services.

The Trump administration says its policies are helping to slow government spending and will shrink the nation's massive deficit. A new analysis by Treasury Department officials states that from April to September, the cumulative deficit totaled \$468 billion.

In a post on X Wednesday, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that's the lowest reading since 2019.

The Joint Economic Committee estimates that the total national debt has grown by \$69,713.82 per second for the past year.

Trump backs off his planned surge of federal agents into San Francisco

Associated Press

ALAMEDA, Calif. — President Donald Trump said Thursday that he's backing off a planned surge of federal agents into San Francisco after speaking to the mayor.

Trump posted on social media that Mayor Daniel Lurie said the city was making progress in reducing crime. Trump said he agreed to let San Francisco keep trying on its own.

Trump's post came after Lurie said the two spoke Wednesday night and Trump said he planned to call off a federal deployment to the city.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents had already begun arriving to support federal efforts to track down immigrants in the country illegally, and protesters were gathering outside a U.S. Coast Guard base where they were located.

A few hundred people, many singing hymns and carrying signs saying "No ICE or troops in the Bay," referring to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, gathered shortly after dawn outside Coast Guard Island in Alameda.

Police used at least one flash-bang grenade to clear a handful of

demonstrators from the entrance as CBP vehicles drove through.

Organizers urged protesters to remain peaceful, as a line of Coast Guard officers in helmets watched from just outside the entrance.

The San Francisco Chronicle, citing an anonymous source with knowledge of the operation, reported Wednesday that more than 100 CBP and other federal agents would arrive this week. Lurie and California Gov. Gavin Newsom, both Democrats, condemned the move, saying it was meant to provoke violent protests.

Vance criticizes Israel's vote on West Bank

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — U.S. Vice President JD Vance criticized on Thursday a symbolic vote in Israel's parliament the previous day about the annexation of the occupied West Bank, saying it amounted to an "insult" and went against the Trump administration policies.

Hard-liners in the Israeli parliament had narrowly passed a preliminary vote in support of annexing the West Bank — an apparent attempt to embarrass Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu while Vance was still in the country.

The bill, which required only a simple majority of lawmakers present in the house on Wednesday, passed with a 25-24 vote. But it was unlikely to pass multiple rounds of voting to become

law or win a majority in the 120-seat parliament. Netanyahu, who is opposed to it, also has tools to delay or defeat it.

On the tarmac of Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion airport before departing Israel, Vance also unveiled new details about U.S. plans for Gaza, saying he expected reconstruction to begin soon in some " Hamas-free " areas of the territory. But he warned that rebuilding the territory after a devastating two-year war could take years.

"The hope is to rebuild Rafah over the next two to three years and theoretically you could have half a million people live (there)," he said.

That would account for about a quarter of Gaza's population of roughly 2 million, 90% of whom were displaced from

their homes during the war. Out of every 10 buildings that stood in Gaza prewar, eight are either damaged or flattened. An estimated cost of rebuilding Gaza is about \$53 billion, according to the World Bank.

The Israeli parliament's vote has stirred widespread condemnation, with over a dozen countries — including Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia — rebuking the vote in a joint statement that called all Israeli settlements in the West Bank a violation of international law.

Netanyahu's office said in a statement that the "vote on annexation was a deliberate political provocation by the opposition to sow discord."

Vance said that if the vote was a "political stunt, then it is a very stupid political stunt."

"I personally take some insult to it," Vance said. "The policy of the Trump administration is that the West Bank will not be annexed by Israel."

The deputy Palestinian ambassador to the United Nations, Majed Bamy, told the U.N. Security Council on Thursday that Palestinians "appreciate the clear message" the Trump administration has sent in opposition to annexation.

Israeli media referred to the nonstop parade of American officials visiting to ensure Israel holds up its side of the fragile ceasefire as "Bibi-sitting." The term, utilizing Netanyahu's nickname of Bibi, refers to an old campaign ad when Netanyahu positioned himself as the "Bibi-sitter" whom voters could trust with their kids.

China focuses on self-reliance in science in economic plan

Associated Press

BEIJING — China's ruling Communist Party said Thursday it will focus on speeding up self-reliance in science and technology, a long-running push that has become more pronounced as the U.S. has imposed increasingly tight controls on access to semiconductors and other high-tech items.

The announcement by state media came in a communique after a four-day meeting that

approved a draft of the party's next five-year development plan.

China faces "profound and complex" changes and rising uncertainty, it said. The communique did not directly mention the trade war with President Donald Trump.

China's leader Xi Jinping is expected to meet Trump for talks in South Korea next week.

Since returning to the White House, Trump has ramped up

tariffs on imports in an effort to compel manufacturers to shift factories to the United States. That has added to pressure on the Chinese economy at a time when the leadership is struggling to resolve a prolonged downturn in the property market and stoke stronger domestic demand.

But China has managed to keep exports growing by shifting to other markets, and the statement signaled the govern-

ment is confident it can counter external threats with domestic policy tools, said Gary Ng, a senior economist at Natixis, a French investment bank.

The communique contained few surprises, largely echoing the policy direction set out by Xi, who wants to build China into a tech leader and global power with a robust military able to command respect and exert international influence.

Tropical Storm Melissa lumbers through Caribbean

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Tropical Storm Melissa lumbered through the Caribbean Sea on Thursday, bringing a risk of dangerous landslides and life-threatening flooding to Jamaica and southern Hispaniola — an island shared by the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Officials urged residents in flood-prone areas to seek higher

ground.

The storm was blamed for downing a large tree that killed an elderly man in the coastal town of Marigot in southern Haiti, while five other people were injured in flooding in the Artibonite area, according to the Civil Protection Agency.

The slow-moving storm was centered about 220 miles southeast of Kingston, Jamaica, and

about 280 miles southwest of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. It had maximum sustained winds of 45 mph and was moving northwest at 2 mph, the U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami said.

A hurricane watch was in effect for Jamaica and the southwestern peninsula of Haiti from the border with the Dominican Republic to Port-au-Prince.

"The storm has been craw-

ling and moving erratically," the center said.

Melissa was expected to remain over open water this week, but move closer to Jamaica and southwestern Haiti in upcoming days. It was expected to strengthen significantly by late Friday and become a major hurricane by the end of the weekend, possibly reaching Category 4 status by Tuesday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

State Capitol evacuated after device brought in

WY CHEYENNE — The Wyoming Capitol, including the governor's office, was evacuated Tuesday after a person found a suspected explosive device in front of the building and brought it inside.

The grounds were searched with drones and bomb-sniffing dogs following discovery of the device on the state seal between the building's front steps and the street, according to a statement from the Wyoming Highway Patrol, which provides security for the Capitol.

The evacuation began around 9:45 a.m. after the discoverer, whose identity wasn't released, brought the object indoors. Authorities announced in late afternoon the building would not reopen Tuesday.

Gov. Mark Gordon was among those evacuated, as well as other members of the Wyoming Stable Token Commission who were meeting in a basement-level room near the Capitol, located in Cheyenne.

Authorities did not elaborate on what was found except that it appeared homemade and not a factory produced object such as a military round, Wyoming Highway Patrol spokesperson Aaron Brown said.

Task force aims to better house typhoon evacuees

AK ANCHORAGE — Officials have identified more than 1,000 available hotel rooms plus additional rental options in Alaska's largest city for the hundreds of people displaced to Anchorage after the remnants of a typhoon rav-

aged their villages earlier this month.

Becky Windt Pearson, Anchorage's municipal manager, told a news conference Tuesday that leaders are working to expedite moving people from two large shelters in the city to more private accommodations in line with the aims of a state-led task force formed to address housing needs for evacuees.

More than 650 people were brought to Anchorage by military aircraft as part of a mass evacuation after the remnants of Typhoon Halong walloped parts of western Alaska on Oct. 11-12. The storm brought lashing — in some places, hurricane-force — winds and damaging storm surge. It brought widespread devastation to the Yup'ik communities of Kipnuk and Kwigillingok, which saw record high water levels.

About 338 people stayed Monday night at the Anchorage shelters, according to the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

State officials have acknowledged it may not be possible for everyone to return home before winter arrives.

Mom of baby abandoned at subway stop is charged

NY NEW YORK — The mother of a newborn girl who was abandoned at a busy midtown Manhattan subway station with her umbilical cord still attached was arrested early Wednesday, city police said.

The 30-year-old Queens woman was taken into custody shortly before 3 a.m. and charged with abandoning and endangering a child.

The baby was left Monday in a passageway at the 34th Street-

Penn Station subway stop during the typically crowded morning rush hour. The subway stop is attached to the broader Penn Station complex — the country's busiest rail hub, which sits underneath the Madison Square Garden arena.

The arrest came after police on Tuesday released images of a woman wanted for questioning for what happened with the child in an attempt to identify her. The woman was recorded in a 2-second security camera video clip on a busy city sidewalk carrying something that appears to be wrapped in a bundle and holding it like someone would hold a baby.

The infant was found untended and wrapped in a blanket, police said. She was taken to a hospital for an evaluation and listed in stable condition.

Sea cucumbers wash ashore by the thousands

OR SEASIDE — Thousands of sea cucumbers have washed up on the beach in the Oregon coastal town of Seaside thanks to a combination of heavy surf and low tide.

The partially translucent, pink gelatinous creatures are called skin breathing sea cucumbers. They normally burrow into the sand along the low tideline and farther out. But on Tuesday, they were scattered across more than 2 miles of Seaside Beach, said Tiffany Boothe, the assistant manager of the Seaside Aquarium.

"They are literally littering the tideline," Boothe said. They're about a half-inch long but can grow to about 6 inches.

The phenomenon can occur whenever surf and tide condi-

tions coincide, which can mean a few times a year or once in a few years.

The sea cucumbers aren't capable of returning to their natural habitat on their own so they will dry up and die, Boothe said. They'll provide nutrients for the beach hoppers, beach fleas and other invertebrates living along the tideline that will feast on them. Birds don't eat them.

Library board seeks limits for trans-themed books

AL MONTGOMERY — An Alabama board is seeking to prohibit public libraries from placing books that "positively" depict transgender themes and topics in teen and children's sections.

The Alabama Public Library Service Board of Directors is considering a proposed rule change that expands the existing requirement for youth sections to be free of "material deemed inappropriate for children." The new proposal said that includes any material that "positively depicts transgender procedures, gender ideology, or the concept of more than two biological genders."

The state board on Tuesday held a lengthy and sometimes heated and emotional public hearing ahead of next month's expected vote.

John Wahl, the chairman of the library board, said he expects the board to approve the rule change, or an amended version of it, when they meet next month. He said libraries could stock the materials in adult sections where parents could access them for their children.

Wahl is also chair of the Alabama Republican Party.

— From wire reports

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Spurs rout Mavericks in Flagg's debut

Associated Press

DALLAS — Victor Wembanyama had 40 points and 15 rebounds in a highlight-reel return, helping the San Antonio Spurs spoil No. 1 overall pick Cooper Flagg's debut in a 125-92 rout of the Dallas Mavericks.

Flagg, the second-youngest player to start in his NBA debut by two days behind LeBron James, didn't score until the first possession of the second half, finishing with 10 points and 10 rebounds.

The 18-year-old from Duke had more trouble getting into the flow than the second overall choice. Dylan Harper came off the San Antonio bench midway through the first quarter, started the run that put the Spurs in control and scored 15 points. Reigning Rookie of the Year Stephon Castle scored 22 points for the Spurs.

Wembanyama dominated the matchup of two of the three most recent top draft picks, with the 2023 No. 1 choice adding three blocks to several spectacular dunks and a couple of buckets with fouls that sent Davis and Dereck Lively II to the bench.

Knicks 119, Cavaliers 111: OG Anunoby had 24 points and 14 rebounds, Jalen Brunson scored 23 points and host New York beat Cleveland on Wednesday night in their first game under coach Mike Brown.

Karl-Anthony Towns added 19

points and 11 rebounds for the Knicks, who had a 17-point lead in the first half, fell behind after Donovan Mitchell led a comeback, then regained the lead for good with a 14-0 run early in the fourth quarter.

Hornets 136, Nets 117: Brandon Miller scored 25 points in his first game since Jan. 15, Miles Bridges added 18 points and 11 rebounds, and host Charlotte defeated Brooklyn in its season opener.

The Hornets had a franchise-record nine players finish in double digits in scoring including rookies Kon Knueppel and Ryan Kalkbrenner, both of whom started. It marked the first time in Hornets history two rookies started the season opener.

Magic 125, Heat 121: Paolo Banchero and Franz Wagner scored 24 points each, Desmond Bane added 23 in his Magic debut and host Orlando beat Miami in the season opener for both teams.

Miami led 39-38 after the first quarter, the highest-scoring quarter in the 143-game history of the intrastate series.

76ers 117, Celtics 116: Tyrese Maxey scored 40 points and VJ Edgecombe added 34 in his NBA debut to help visiting Philadelphia rally to beat Boston in their season opener.

Edgecombe scored the most points in an NBA debut since Wilt Chamberlain had 43 on Oct. 24,

1959.

Bucks 133, Wizards 120: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 37 points and 14 rebounds, and Milwaukee never trailed in a season-opening home victory over Washington.

Milwaukee's Kevin Porter Jr. scored 10 points before leaving with a sprained left ankle late in the first quarter.

Raptors 138, Hawks 118: RJ Barrett scored 25 points and Brandon Ingram added 16 points and nine rebounds in his Toronto debut as the Raptors ran away from Atlanta for a road victory in the season opener for both teams.

Toronto shot 57% from the field, including 69% on 2-pointers, as the Raptors repeatedly beat the Hawks in transition for easy buckets.

Bulls 115, Pistons 111: Nikola Vucevic had 28 points and 14 rebounds, Matas Buzelis scored 21 points and host Chicago regrouped after blowing a 23-point lead to beat Detroit in the season opener for both teams.

Josh Giddey added 19 points and 11 assists, and the Bulls went from leading by 23 in the second quarter to knotted near the end of the game.

Grizzlies 128, Pelicans 122: Ja Morant scored 35 points, including a key basket with 32.9 seconds to play, and host Memphis beat New Orleans in the season opener for both teams.

Morant's basket gave the Grizzlies a 122-118 lead. Olivier-Maxence Prosper, Kentavious Caldwell-Pope and Morant hit free throws in the closing seconds to seal the victory.

Jazz 129, Clippers 108: Walker Kessler had 22 points and nine rebounds, Lauri Markkanen scored 20 and host Utah beat Los Angeles.

Brice Sensabaugh added 20 points off the bench for Utah, which set a team record for points in a season opener.

Timberwolves 118, Trail Blazers 114: Anthony Edwards had 41 points and Minnesota rallied late in the fourth quarter for a season-opening road win over Portland.

The Blazers went ahead 46-40 midway through the second quarter on Kris Murray's 3-pointer. But Jaden McDaniels answered on the other end with an emphatic dunk over Portland's 7-foot-1 rookie Yang Hansen.

Suns 120, Kings 116: Devin Booker scored 31 points, Jordan Ott was victorious in his head coaching debut and host Phoenix overcame a 20-point deficit to beat Sacramento.

Veteran guard Dillon Brooks added 22 points in his Suns debut and brought his usual swagger, irritating Kings star DeMar DeRozan with physical defense in the fourth quarter. Grayson Allen scored 18 points.

Devils maintain streak, beat Wild for 6th straight win

Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — Nico Daws made 29 saves, Paul Cotter, Brenden Dillon and rookie Arseny Gritsyuk scored and the New Jersey Devils beat the Minnesota Wild 4-1 on Wednesday night for their sixth straight victory.

New Jersey began the streak after an opening loss at Carolina, winning three each at home and on the road. The winning

streak is the Devils' longest since a 13-game run early in the 2022-23 season.

Cotter opened the scoring with 3:39 left in the first, jamming a loose puck past goalie Filip Gustavsson for his first of the season.

Dillon made it 2-0 with his second goal this season — and second in two nights — at 6:08 of the middle period.

Sabres 4, Red Wings 2: Jack

Quinn had a goal and two assists, Colten Ellis stopped 27 shots in his NHL debut and host Buffalo beat Detroit.

Claimed off waivers from St. Louis earlier this month, Ellis stopped two breakaways and withstood a flurry of shots after Detroit pulled goalie John Gibson with about three minutes left.

Gibson had 27 saves and Dylan Larkin had an assist to be-

come the first Detroit defenseman with a season-opening points streak of seven games since Brian Rafalski in 2008-09.

Canadiens 2, Flames 1, OT: Mike Matheson scored on a one-timer off Ivan Demidov's crossing pass a minute into overtime to give Montreal Canadiens a road victory over the Calgary.

The Flames are 1-6-1, with the victory coming in their opener.

Wolf stopped 26 shots.

Rookie pitchers star ahead of World Series

Associated Press

NEW YORK—Trey Yesavage and Roki Sasaki are barely babes in the woods when it comes to Major League Baseball experience.

Which only makes their post-season success more impressive.

Both in the minors last month, Yesavage and Sasaki are suddenly two of the most important pitchers in the World Series as the Toronto Blue Jays take on the defending champion Los Angeles Dodgers beginning Friday night.

Neither one has turned 24 yet or appeared in more than 17 big league games.

"It's remarkable, really. You're talking about a big stage," Blue Jays manager John Schneider said during the playoffs when asked about several green rookies excelling this October — including Yesavage and Sasaki.

The 22-year-old Yesavage, a first-round draft pick by Toronto in July 2024 from East Carolina University, rocketed through four minor league levels this season. He struck out 160 batters in 98 innings combined at Dunedin, Vancouver, New Hampshire and Buffalo before making his major league debut Sept. 15 with the Blue Jays in a heated pennant

race.

"Every stop of the way, I learned something new," Yesavage said.

The right-hander from Pennsylvania went 1-0 with a 3.21 ERA in three outings totaling 14 innings — then found himself on the mound against Aaron Judge and the New York Yankees as the No. 2 starter in Toronto's playoff rotation.

"You have to kind of look at what the stuff is doing in real time," Schneider said. "Will this work? And if it works, you go for it."

How did Yesavage handle such pressure? Featuring a dominant splitter from his unusually high release point, he set a franchise postseason record by striking out 11 in 5⅓ hitless innings to earn a Division Series win.

Not too shabby for a guy who gave up seven runs and seven hits over 7⅓ innings against Yankees minor leaguers when he faced their Double-A team in June and Triple-A affiliate in August.

"You've got to treat it like you're in control and you're confident in your own stuff," Yesavage said. "If you're up there worried about the hitter and his talent, you're not going to execute how you want to."

Two weeks later, the poised

Yesavage escaped a pair of bases-loaded jams by inducing double-play grounders against the Seattle Mariners in Game 6 of the American League Championship Series. He took a shutout into the sixth inning of a 6-2 win that continued the Blue Jays' season.

Yesavage's three career regular-season appearances were the fewest in postseason history for a starting pitcher facing elimination. His two playoff wins eclipse his total at Double-A and Triple-A combined.

Next, he figures to receive an early World Series assignment against Shohei Ohtani and the powerhouse Dodgers.

"I think that teams do a good job of welcoming guys in," Schneider said. "It's kind of our job to make sure the transition is as easy as it can be, and veteran players making it easy for young guys to come into an environment that's really stressful. I think that players have really gotten a lot better a lot quicker."

Back in spring training, hardly anyone anticipated Yesavage reaching the majors this season — but much was expected of the 23-year-old Sasaki after his ballyhooed arrival from Japan.

A tantalizing starter in his home country, he began the sea-

son in Los Angeles' rotation but struggled to adjust and throw strikes. Sasaki looked sad and teary-eyed in the dugout following a rough Dodger Stadium debut, and he went 1-1 with a 4.72 ERA in eight starts before landing on the injured list in May with a right shoulder impingement.

After all that hype, Sasaki almost became an afterthought. Five rehab starts with Triple-A Oklahoma City yielded unimpressive results — but then he came out of the bullpen twice in the minors and something clicked.

The right-hander finally re-joined LA on Sept. 24, made two terrific relief appearances and quickly found himself closing playoff games, stabilizing a suspect Dodgers bullpen with his 100 mph fastball.

"As a starter, I understand that there's always ups and downs. So, I kind of take that same approach with pitching as a reliever," Sasaki said through a translator after saving Game 3 of the NLCS against the Milwaukee Brewers.

Sasaki has a 1.13 ERA in seven October outings covering eight innings. He is the first pitcher to earn each of his first three career saves in the postseason since saves became an official statistic in 1969.

Giants name Vols' Vitello manager in unprecedented hire

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO—The San Francisco Giants hired University of Tennessee coach Tony Vitello as their manager on Wednesday for his first job in professional baseball.

San Francisco president of baseball operations Buster Posey made an unprecedented gamble on a coach with no previous experience in the pros. The 47-year-old Vitello will make the jump after spending his entire career in the college ranks.

"Tony is one of the brightest, most innovative and most respected coaches in college baseball today," Posey said. "Throughout our search, Tony's leadership, competitiveness and commitment to developing players stood out."

Posey said the Giants look forward to the

energy and direction Vitello brings, given that his passion for baseball aligns with the club's values.

"I'm incredibly honored and grateful for this opportunity," Vitello said in San Francisco's announcement. "I'm excited to lead this group of players and represent the San Francisco Giants. I can't wait to get started and work to establish a culture that makes Giants' faithful proud."

Vitello guided Tennessee to regular success in the Southeastern Conference since being hired in June 2017. That included leading the program to its first NCAA title last year to go with six regional appearances, five NCAA super regional berths and three College World Series trips.

He has had 10 players from the Volunteers selected in the first round and 52 Tennessee players overall in MLB's amateur draft. Among those is San Francisco outfielder Drew Gilbert.

Tennessee athletic director Danny White congratulated Vitello on the job and said university officials were focused on players and the coaching staff in an "evolving process" while they finalize the next steps to replace him.

"We are committed to continuously investing in the program at a championship level across all areas," White said. "Furthermore, the upcoming \$109 million renovation of Lindsey Nelson Stadium will transform it into one of the premier baseball venues."

Brees and Fitzgerald lead 2026 HOF list

Associated Press

Quarterback Drew Brees and receiver Larry Fitzgerald advanced to the next stage of consideration for the 2026 Pro Football Hall of Fame class in their first year of eligibility.

Six other players in their first year of eligibility advanced from the original list of 128 modern-era nominees for this year's class to the 52 that will be considered by the full selection committee.

The other players in their first year of eligibility who advanced in voting by a screening committee are quarterback Philip Rivers, tight ends Greg Olsen and Jason Witten, running backs Frank Gore and LeSean McCoy, and offensive lineman Maurkice Pouncey.

Four players have already guaranteed themselves spots in the final 15 after making it down to the final seven players in the 2025 class, with Willie Anderson, Torry Holt, Luke Kuechly and Adam Vinatieri taking those spots.

The other returning finalists are Eli Manning, Fred Taylor, Steve Smith Sr., Reggie Wayne, Jahri Evans, Marshall Yanda, Terrell Suggs and Darren Woodson.

In addition to the 15 modern-era finalists, the selection committee will consider three seniors, one coach and one contributor for the class of 2026. Between four and eight new members will be elected in the second year of this current format.

Only four people got in last year for the smallest class in 20 years.

Brees and Fitzgerald are the top new candidates this year.

Brees is second all time to Tom Brady with 80,358 yards passing and 571 touchdown passes. He spent the first five seasons of his career with the San Diego Chargers before signing as a free agent with the Saints in 2006, where his career took off as he helped lift a city still recovering from Hurricane Katrina.

Brees delivered New Orleans its first Super Bowl title following the 2009 season, when he won MVP of the game after beating Peyton Manning and the Colts. Brees made the Pro Bowl 13 times in his career, won AP Offensive Player of the Year in 2008 and 2011, was an All-Pro in 2006 and was a second-team All-Pro four times.

Fitzgerald spent his entire career with the Cardinals after be-

ing drafted third overall in 2004. His 1,432 catches and 17,492 yards receiving in 17 seasons rank second all time to Jerry Rice.

Fitzgerald topped 1,000 yards receiving nine times — tied for the fourth most ever — and helped Arizona reach its only Super Bowl following the 2008 season. He set single-season records that postseason with 546 yards receiving and seven TD catches, including a go-ahead 64-yard score with 2:37 to play in the Super Bowl before the Pittsburgh Steelers rallied for a 27-23 win.

Kuechly's career was brief but impactful. The first-round pick by the Carolina Panthers in 2012 was an All-Pro five times, with seven Pro Bowl nods and a Defensive Rookie of the Year award.

Over his eight-year career, Kuechly led all linebackers in the NFL in tackles (1,090), takeaways (26), interceptions (18) and passes defended (66).

Vinatieri was one of the most clutch kickers in NFL history, making the game-winning field goals in the first two Super Bowl victories during the Patriots' dynasty.

He helped launch the run with one of the game's greatest kicks —

a 45-yarder in the snow to force overtime in the "Tuck Rule" game against the then-Oakland Raiders in the 2001 divisional round. He made the game-winning kick in OT to win that game and then hit a 48-yarder on the final play of a 20-17 win in the Super Bowl against the Rams.

Vinatieri is the NFL's career leader in points (2,673) and made field goals (599) over a 24-year career with New England and Indianapolis. He also leads all players with 56 field goals and 238 points in the postseason.

Holt was a key part of the Rams' "Greatest Show on Turf," helping the team win the Super Bowl in his rookie season in 1999 and getting back there two years later. He led the NFL in yards receiving in 2000 and in catches and yards in 2003 when he made his only All-Pro team.

Holt finished his career with 920 catches for 13,382 yards and 74 TDs.

Anderson was considered one of the top right tackles in his era after being a first-round pick by the Bengals in 1996. He spent nearly his entire career with Cincinnati and made three straight All-Pro teams from 2004-06.

NFL moving Pro Bowl festivities to Super Bowl week

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The NFL is moving its Pro Bowl festivities to Super Bowl week beginning this February, the latest adjustment for the all-star event that became a flag football game a few years ago.

Commissioner Roger Goodell announced the change Wednesday at the league's annual fall owners meeting.

"We've spent a lot of time evolving our Pro Bowl, talking about how to make our Pro Bowl more attractive, both for our players participating but also our fans," Goodell said. "We spent a great deal of time talking about the objectives, and the objectives really are to celebrate and honor our incredible players, and second is to use our game as a global platform."

The plan is to hold the Pro Bowl Games on Tuesday night, Feb. 3, at the Moscone Center

in San Francisco, the venue hosting the Super Bowl experience fan fest. The largest ballroom holds 4,000 people, making it a more intimate event than in previous years, with a focus on television.

It remains a flag football game between the AFC and NFC — a format that began in the winter of 2023 — though executive VP of international events Peter O'Reilly did acknowledge the Pro Bowl could become more internationally focused in the leadup to the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.

"Flag has become a global game," Goodell said. "Our players have embraced playing that in the all-star format, and we think it's really important to continue that initiative."

NFL owners unanimously approved players participating in the '28 Games, though work is still being done to finalize the agreement with the union.

The 49ers are hosting the Super Bowl on Sunday, Feb. 8, at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, Calif. It returns to SoFi Stadium in Inglewood outside Los Angeles in 2027 and is set to take place at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta in 2028.

Beginning in 2026, there will be two new coaches, replacing Peyton and Eli Manning, though O'Reilly said the brothers would remain involved in the event in some capacity. The league is not committing to Tuesday night beyond next year, according to O'Reilly, who said it's a process of continuing to learn about what's best for the Pro Bowl.

Goodell said the league met with 15-20 players for an hour over the summer to get their thoughts on the event that was branded as the Pro Bowl in 1951 and was played in LA before becoming a staple in Honolulu annually until 2012 and moving around since.