

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## US to cut more Iraq, Afghanistan troops

By COREY DICKSTEIN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The United States will withdraw almost half of its troops from Iraq this month and make a similar cut to its force in Afghanistan by November, the top U.S. general overseeing operations in the Middle East announced Wednesday.

The decisions were announced by Marine Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, commander for U.S. Central Command, during a visit to Baghdad almost exactly six years after the U.S. first launched military operations against the Islamic State along the Iraq-Syria border. They also come as President Donald Trump has continued to denounce U.S. involvement in long-running wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan, from which he vowed to disentangle U.S. troops since his

2016 election campaign.

“In recognition of the great progress the Iraqi forces have made and in consultation and coordination with the government of Iraq and our coalition partners, the U.S. has decided to reduce our troop presence in Iraq from about 5,200 to 3,000 troops during the month of September,” McKenzie said during a U.S. military ceremony in Baghdad. “This reduced footprint allows us to continue advising and assisting our Iraqi partners in rooting out the final remnants of ISIS in Iraq and ensuring its enduring defeat.”

The general was less specific on Afghanistan drawdown plans, which he shared after the Iraq announcement with a small group of reporters on a phone call, a defense official confirmed. McKenzie’s new plan accelerates the ongoing drawdown in Afghanistan, aim-

ing to reduce the 8,600 troops there to some 4,500 “by the late October-November time frame,” the official said.

McKenzie has been clear that he believes the U.S. must retain some troops in Iraq to aid the ongoing ISIS fight and in Afghanistan to fight terrorist groups there, including the Afghan branch of ISIS.

While U.S.-backed troops in Iraq — primarily, the Iraqi military — and militia forces in Syria known as the Syrian Democratic Forces have ousted ISIS from the vast territory that the terrorist group once controlled across eastern Syria and northern Iraq, the group remains a threat in both countries. Officials believe the group retains tens of thousands of fighters, largely in underground sleeper cells. McKenzie said last month that he believes ISIS leaders aim to retake the

territory that the group lost.

Three weeks ago, Trump hosted new Iraq Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi at the White House, where the two leaders were said to be negotiating a withdrawal of at least some American forces. In public remarks, Trump said he hoped to remove American troops from Iraq soon. Al-Kadhimi, however, requested the U.S. retain some troops in his country.

The U.S. has maintained about 5,200 troops in Iraq since it began a bombing campaign against ISIS in September 2014 that expanded to a ground operation by the end of that year. Former President Barack Obama ordered troops to return to Iraq for the first time since the last American forces left the country at the end of 2011, which was also during his administration.

## Report: Palau offers to host new military bases

By SETH ROBSON

*Stars and Stripes*

The Republic of Palau, east of the Philippines in the Western Pacific, has offered to host new U.S. military facilities, including ports and air bases, The Wall Street Journal reported Tuesday.

The offer came during a visit last week by Defense Secretary Mark Esper that coincided with bomb-clearing and airfield repair by U.S. Marines on the islands of Peleliu and Angaur, the newspaper reported.

“Palau’s request to the U.S. military remains simple — build joint-use facilities, then come and use them regularly,” Palauan President Tommy Remengesau Jr., who visited the

White House last year, wrote in a letter to Esper, according to the report.

Palau officials didn’t respond to requests for comment Wednesday, and Indo-Pacific Command referred inquiries to the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

“The government of Palau is not only receptive, but is enthusiastic about the United States military broadening and deepening its operations, exercises and training in and around Palau,” Heino Klinck, deputy assistant secretary of defense for East Asia, told the Journal.

The offer “suggests that Palau is feeling vulnerable to China’s strategic ambitions and is seeking a counterweight,”

Jeff Kingston, director of Asian studies at Temple University’s Tokyo campus, said in an email Wednesday.

The islands occupy territory east of the Philippines that’s becoming more important to U.S. military planners contemplating China’s massive military buildup and occupation of disputed sea territory to the west.

Palau, with a population just under 18,000, includes 340 islands covering nearly 180 square miles of land, just slightly less than Guam, where the U.S. military is building massive new bases for Marines to facilitate the drawdown of forces from Okinawa.

In addition to Guam, the U.S.

has military facilities on other Pacific islands, such as Kwajalein and Wake Island.

The U.S. and Australia also have plans to establish a presence on Papua New Guinea’s Manus Island, to the south, by refurbishing a World War II-era navy base.

A plan to build facilities for visiting American forces on military bases in the Philippines, which has a mutual defense pact with the U.S., has proceeded at a snail’s pace since it was agreed to in 2014. Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte has tried to terminate the agreement that governs visiting U.S. forces and offered warm words for China and Russia.

# McConville: War advised as 'last resort'

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon's top leaders only advise presidents to send American troops into combat when absolutely necessary, the Army's top general said Tuesday, one day after President Donald Trump accused military brass of being beholden to the weapons industry.

"I can assure the American people that the senior [Pentagon] leaders would only recommend sending our troops to combat when it's required for national security and [it is] the last resort," said Gen. James McConville, the Army's chief of staff. "We take this very, very seriously in how we make our recommendations and ... I feel strongly about that."

Trump speculated Monday during a White House news briefing that top Pentagon leaders did not particularly like him because he was seeking to end long wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

"I'm not saying the military's in love with

me — the soldiers are," Trump said. "The top people at the Pentagon probably aren't because they want to do nothing but fight wars so all of those wonderful companies that make the bombs and make the planes and make everything else stay happy."

McConville, speaking during a virtual event hosted by the Defense One news organization, declined to comment specifically on Trump's assertion. He said the military must remain out of politics.

"We live in a political environment, but we're an apolitical organization," the general said. "And, I think, it really must remain that way, especially with an election coming up."

McConville said many of the top uniformed officials — generals and admirals — who advise presidents on sending troops into harm's way have children serving in the military. Many of their children have served in combat or could be sent to war, if those leaders urge presidents to take military action, he said.

McConville has three children and a son-

in-law now serving in the Army, most of whom have served combat deployments.

Trump's comments were not directed specifically at top generals, admirals or Defense Secretary Mark Esper, Mark Meadows, Trump's chief of staff, claimed Tuesday. He insisted they were instead aimed at the "Military Industrial Complex."

Trump's statements came after he faced backlash for media reports that he called fallen and captured American service members "losers" and "suckers" in 2018 when he canceled a visit to a French cemetery for Marines killed in the Battle of Belleau Wood during World War I.

Trump and other White House officials have denied the accusations first raised by unnamed sources in a story by The Atlantic on Thursday. Other news organizations including The Associated Press and Fox News on Friday reported they had confirmed some of The Atlantic's initial reporting.

## US, allies' ships sail to Guam after RIMPAC

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

*Stars and Stripes*

Warships of the U.S., Australian, Japanese and South Korean navies are sailing together from Hawaii to Guam following the Aug. 31 conclusion of Rim of the Pacific exercise, according to a Navy statement Wednesday.

The demonstration, which began Wednesday, is intended to "improve collective readiness and response to any situation," the statement said. The navies will train and work together throughout the trip.

"This exercise provides opportunities that can enhance a steadfast and flexible coordination system," Capt. Kim Sung Hwan, commodore of the South Korean navy's Maritime Task Squadron 71, said in the statement. "It will also serve as an opportunity to strengthen joint response capabilities for

various security situations by building up the friendship and coordination system between participating nations."

The four nations recently completed two weeks of Rim of the Pacific drills, in which they also trained with forces from Brunei, Canada, France, New Zealand, the Philippines and Singapore. The biennial exercise held in waters off Hawaii represents the world's largest international maritime exercise, according to the Navy.

The multinational sail comes as North Korea criticized the United States, South Korea and Japan "for deepening military cooperation even in the middle of the pandemic," according to a Tuesday report by the South Korean state-run Yonhap News Agency, which cited a North Korean propaganda website, Meari.

## Navy bans the use of some 'herbal' products

BY CHAD GARLAND

*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy has banned sailors and Marines from using shampoos, lotions and soaps made with hemp or cannabidiol, one of the main active compounds in cannabis plants, it said in a statement.

At issue is the possibility that such products could contain too much of the psychoactive compound found in pot called tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, and their use could "negatively impact mission readiness and disqualify a sailor from continued service," said the statement released Friday.

The Navy banned the use of topical products made with hemp or its derivatives in a July 24 administrative message, saying it's impossible for consumers to determine how much THC such products contain based on label claims that may be untrustworthy.

The policy's goal is to prevent service members from unknowingly consuming THC in any amount, the Navy said.

The new rule follows a ban imposed last summer by the Navy on the ingestion of products containing hemp or hemp derivatives without a valid prescription, after a 2018 farm bill removed low-THC hemp from the Controlled Substances Act.

The Navy's previous policy only banned the ingestion of hemp-derived products or use of others, such as transdermal patches, that are designed to put CBD into the bloodstream.

The new rule still allows for the use of CBD-containing products that have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration, if a service member has a valid prescription. The rules do not prohibit the use of "durable hemp goods" such as rope, twine or clothing.



# Vaccine study halted after unexplained illness

Associated Press

Late-stage studies of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine candidate are on temporary hold while the company investigates whether a recipient's "potentially unexplained" illness is a side effect of the shot.

In a statement issued Tuesday evening, the company said its "standard review process triggered a pause to vaccination to allow review of safety data."

AstraZeneca didn't reveal any information about the possible side effect except to call it "a potentially unexplained illness." The health news site STAT first reported the pause in testing, saying the possible side effect occurred in the United Kingdom.

An AstraZeneca spokesperson con-

firmed the pause in vaccinations covers studies in the United States and other countries. Late last month, AstraZeneca began recruiting 30,000 people in the U.S. for its largest study of the vaccine. It is also testing the vaccine, developed by Oxford University, in thousands of people in Britain, and in smaller studies in Brazil and South Africa.

Two other vaccines are in huge, final-stage tests in the U.S., one made by Moderna Inc. and the other by Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech. Those two vaccines work differently than AstraZeneca's, and the studies have already recruited about two-thirds of the needed volunteers.

Temporary holds of large medical studies aren't unusual, and investigating any serious or unexpected reaction is a mandatory

part of safety testing. AstraZeneca pointed out that it's possible the problem could be a coincidence; illnesses of all sorts could arise in studies of thousands of people.

"We are working to expedite the review of the single event to minimize any potential impact on the trial timeline," the company statement said.

It's likely the unexplained illness was serious enough to require hospitalization and not a mild side effect such as fever or muscle pain, said Deborah Fuller, a University of Washington researcher who is working on a different COVID-19 vaccine that has not yet started human testing.

"This is not something to be alarmed about," Fuller said. Instead, it's reassuring that the company is pausing the study to figure out what's happening.

## Lawmakers seek Medal of Honor for Black D-Day hero

BY STEVE BEYNON

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Four congressional lawmakers are pushing to award the Medal of Honor posthumously to a Black Army medic who was wounded on D-Day and spent the next 30 hours treating injured men on the beach until he finally collapsed from his own wounds.

Cpl. Waverly B. Woodson Jr. was with the all-Black 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion and treated 200 troops on the battle-ripped landing area known as Omaha Beach, the stretch of French coastline that saw the worst fighting on D-Day when allied troops launched their amphibious invasion of Nazi-occupied France.

On Tuesday, Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., backed by Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., introduced legislation to award Woodson

with the Medal of Honor. The same measure was also introduced in the House by Rep. David Trone, D-Md. and backed by Rep. Anthony Brown, D-Md.

Van Hollen said the award is long overdue, and upgrading Woodson's Bronze Star to a Medal of Honor would right a historical wrong. He is confident both chambers of Congress will quickly and unanimously approve the medal. However, a lack of documentation partly due to records being lost in a fire has gridlocked the effort.

"Beyond that 1973 fire that destroyed 80% of Army personnel records. There are very few records left from WWII," said Linda Hervieux, a journalist who wrote "Forgotten: The Untold Story of D-Day's Black Heroes, at Home and at War," which chronicles Woodson's segregated battalion. "Only 1% of Army records from WWII have been retained. The Army maintains

that in order to recommend a Medal of Honor they need a trail of records, which do not exist in this case."

In the early hours of June 6, 1944, Woodson landed with his unit on Omaha Beach as part of the Allied invasion. Despite having been struck by shrapnel in the inner thigh and rear when the landing craft that Woodson was in hit a mine and was blasted by a shell, he spent 30 hours saving the lives of his fellow soldiers, according to Hervieux. Woodson set up a casualty collection point at a rocky embankment on the beach, which provided some protection from the fire from German machine guns.

Roughly 4,400 Allied troops died in the Normandy landings.

"He dug out bullets, cleaned wounds, reset broken bones, and did an amputation while the battle raged around him," Brown said in a news conference.

## Lawmakers: Don't force tax deferral on federal workers

The Washington Post

Top Senate lawmakers urged the Trump administration Tuesday to halt its plans to implement a mandatory payroll tax deferral for millions of federal employees, arguing that these workers should not be treated as political "pawns."

The issue stems from an order issued by President Donald Trump in August, which allows participating employ-

ers to cease withholding their workers' payroll taxes until the end of the year. Private-sector employees may be able to opt out of the plan, but federal workers do not appear to have a choice — meaning they will see a slight boost to their pay now then owe even more in 2021.

The forced nature of the president's order frustrated roughly two dozen lawmakers led by Democratic Maryland Sen. Chris Van Hollen, who blasted

it as a "payroll tax scheme" and demanded answers in a sharply critical letter sent to the Treasury Department and the Office of Management and Budget, which are overseeing implementation of the deferral.

"We urge you to let federal workers and uniformed service members choose whether to defer their payroll tax obligations ... rather than forcing them to participate," wrote Van Hollen along with

Sens. Susan Collins, R-Maine, Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and 19 other lawmakers, all of whom are Democrats.

Spokespeople for the two federal agencies did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Military and civilian employees also are subject to the deferral, a payroll processor for the Pentagon confirmed over the weekend.

# California fires raging amid gusty winds

Associated Press

SHAVER LAKE, Calif. — Wildfires raged unchecked across parts of the Western U.S. on Wednesday amid gusty and dry conditions, but forecasters said some weather relief was in sight that could help firefighters who have been overwhelmed by the blazes.

In California, winds stoked unprecedented numbers of fires that have forced rescues and evacuations. In Washington, more acres burned in a single day than firefighters usually see all year. Fires also forced people to flee in Oregon and Idaho.

In California on Tuesday, 14 firefighters were forced to deploy emergency shelters as flames overtook them and destroyed the Nacimiento Station, a fire station in the Los

Padres National Forest on the state's central coast, the U.S. Forest Service said.

They suffered burns and smoke inhalation, and three were flown to a hospital in Fresno, where one was in critical condition.

Over the past three days, helicopters were used to rescue hundreds of people stranded in the burning Sierra National Forest, where a fire has destroyed 365 buildings, including at least 45 homes. About 5,000 buildings were threatened, fire officials said.

Flames threatened the foothill community of Auberry between Shaver Lake and Fresno.

In Southern California, fires burned in the mountains of Los Angeles, San Ber-

nardino and San Diego counties, with the potential for the region's notorious Santa Ana winds to push flames out of wilderness and into communities.

People in a half-dozen foothill communities east of Los Angeles were being told to stay alert because of a fire in the Angeles National Forest.

"The combination of gusty winds, very dry air, and dry vegetation will create critical fire danger," the National Weather Service warned.

More than 14,000 firefighters are battling fires. Two of the three largest blazes in state history are burning in the San Francisco Bay Area, though they are largely contained after burning for three weeks.

## Police: Pot farm was 'organized-crime type' operation

Associated Press

AGUANGA, Calif. — An illegal marijuana growing operation where seven people were fatally shot in a small, rural Southern California town had the markings of organized crime, authorities said Tuesday.

More than 20 people lived on the property, which had several makeshift dwellings, a nursery and vehicles used in production, Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco said. Marijuana was processed to honey oil, a highly potent concentrate made by extracting the high-inducing chemical THC from cannabis.

All seven victims and witnesses were Laotian, Bianco said. Six people were found dead on the property, and a woman

who was shot there died later at a hospital.

"This was not a small operation," Bianco said. "This is a very organized-crime type of an operation."

Illegal grows are common in and around Aguanga, a single stop-sign town of about 2,000 people north of San Diego with horse ranches along dirt roads. Still, the scale of the Labor Day massacre stunned residents and showed how violence permeates California's illegal marijuana market.

The state broadly legalized recreational marijuana sales in January 2018. But the illicit market is thriving — in part because hefty legal marijuana taxes send consumers looking for better deals in the illegal economy.

Before dawn Monday, Riverside County

sheriff's deputies responded to a 911 call of an assault with a deadly weapon and shots fired at the Aguanga home. Investigators seized more than 1,000 pounds of marijuana and several hundred marijuana plants.

Despite there being no arrests or identified suspects, the sheriff's statement called the deaths "an isolated incident" that did not threaten people in Aguanga.

Reached by phone, property owner Ronald McKay expressed surprise, saying he didn't know a shooting had taken place at either of the rentals, a mobile home and the house.

McKay said the home had been rented for three years and the mobile home for two.

## Police leaders in New York town quit amid protests

Associated Press

Top police leaders in Rochester, N.Y., announced their retirements Tuesday amid nightly protests over the handling of the suffocation death of Daniel Prude, whose family filed a federal lawsuit alleging a cover-up by law enforcement.

Police Chief La'Ron Singletary, 40, Deputy Chief Joseph M. Morabito and two commanders retired, while two more deputy chiefs and a commander gave up top leadership positions and returned to lower ranks.

The announcements came more than five months after the death of Prude, 41, a Black man who died several days after an encounter with police March 23 in New York's third-largest city.

There have been nightly protests in the city since the release Wednesday of police body camera video of the arrest.

"The events that have unfolded today have taken us completely by surprise, as they have everyone else," the Rochester police union, known as the Locust Club, said in a prepared

statement. The union blamed the "problems of leadership" on the mayor.

"The members of the Rochester Police Department and the Greater Rochester Community know my reputation and know what I stand for," Singletary said in his own prepared statement. "The mischaracterization and the politicization of the actions that I took after being informed of Mr. Prude's death is not based on facts, and is not what I stand for."

Singletary, who spent his entire career in the Rochester

Police Department, was appointed chief in April 2019. He will stay on through the end of the month, Warren said. Both the mayor and Singletary are Black.

"This is great news," said Iman Abid, speaking for Free the People ROC, which has held protests since details of Prude's death emerged. "It says to the people that people are able to move things and to shape things. The police chief wouldn't retire if it weren't for something that he felt he was accountable to."



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## No kidding: Goat gets in patrol car, eats papers

**GA** DOUGLASVILLE — A Georgia sheriff's deputy delivering civil papers returned to her patrol vehicle to find an eager — and hungry — new driver.

The Douglas County deputy was serving the documents near Douglasville when she heard something in her patrol car and was met by a goat climbing into the open driver's side.

The animal munched on some paperwork and knocked over a drink before managing to bump the deputy to the ground.

Officials said the deputy was not physically harmed — and she managed to retrieve the soggy paperwork before the animal scampered off.

## Ex-school nurse accused of stealing kids' meds

**TN** JACKSBORO — A former school nurse in Tennessee has been charged with stealing prescription medications belonging to students.

A grand jury in Campbell County indicted Sherry Lancaster last week on six counts of obtaining drugs by fraud and five counts of theft, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation said in a news release.

The statement said Lancaster, 56, worked as a nurse in the Campbell County school system and allegedly used her position to steal prescriptions belonging to students.

## Police: Man treated after raccoon attack

**NJ** TEWKSBURY — A 79-year-old man had minor injuries after being attacked by a raccoon while walking his dogs in a New Jersey park, authorities said.

Tewksbury police say the animal bit the man's pants leg and refused to let go before the victim was able to fight it off in Christie Hoffman Farm Park.

Chief Tim Barlow said the man told police he went to a hospital for treatment of scratches to his arm. His two dogs were unhurt.

Minutes earlier, police said, a person was chased by a raccoon in the park but managed to get away without injury.

Police said the raccoon was located and killed and will be tested for rabies.

## City plans 'reverse' Christmas parade

**VA** FREDERICKSBURG — A Virginia city is already making plans for how to safely hold its annual Christmas parade during the coronavirus pandemic.

Instead of the usual format, Fredericksburg will host a "reverse parade," with stationary floats and spectators who drive by, the Free Lance-Star reported.

The set-up will be similar to a drive-through holiday lights display and will allow for spacing between parade entrants.

The theme is "Light up the Season."

## Man charged after going 187 mph on highway

**NC** FOUR OAKS — Authorities in North Carolina said a man faced numerous charges after speeding at nearly 190 mph along Interstate 95 over the weekend.

A State Highway Patrol trooper attempted to stop the driver after he sped through a work zone on the interstate, TV station WRAL reported. The car reached a maximum of 187 mph in an area with a posted limit of 65.

Troopers said the man eventually crashed into bushes in the Four Oaks area while attempting to avoid stop sticks. No one was injured.

The driver, who was not immediately identified, was charged with speeding in a work zone, failing to stop and fleeing to elude arrest.

## Handcuffed man jumps into bay, drowns

**FL** TREASURE ISLAND — A handcuffed Florida man died after bolting from police custody and jumping into Boca Ciega Bay, where he drowned, authorities said.

Treasure Island police arrested Donnie Brownlow Jr., 33, after responding to a domestic disturbance, the Tampa Bay Times reported. He was in custody on charges of domestic battery, obstruction, felony driving while license suspended and violation of probation.

An officer was escorting Brownlow to a van when he made a run for it, the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office said.

Paramedics pulled Brownlow from the water and performed CPR. Brownlow was brought to the Palms of Pasadena Hospital, where he died.

## Annual river cleanup a monthlong event in '20

**MA** GREENFIELD — The annual four-state effort to remove trash from the 410-mile Connecticut River is still going on this year, but with some changes because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Rather than the usual two-day event, the 24th annual Connecticut River Conservancy's Source to Sea Cleanup is a monthlong event that will last all September so volunteers can practice safe social distancing.

The event involves thousands

of volunteers cleaning the river and its tributaries on foot or by boat in New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Last year, more than 3,600 volunteers hauled in nearly 67 tons of trash.

## Southern Resident orcas have new member

**WA** SEATTLE — The Southern Resident killer whales welcomed a new member to their family. Mother orca Tahlequah, J35, gave birth to a calf.

KOMO-TV reported two years ago Tahlequah carried her dead calf for 17 days and 1,000 miles. Her grief gripped the hearts of people all around the world.

According to Ken Balcomb, the founder for the Center for Whale Research, the calf appears "robust." The gender has not been announced.

## City's new electric scooters ready to roll

**MS** VICKSBURG — Electric scooters are just days away from being available in a Mississippi city.

Blue Duck, a San Antonio, Texas-based company, announced it will begin rolling out an electric scooter service in downtown Vicksburg on Sept. 17, The Vicksburg Post reported. It will be the first fleet of electric scooters launched in the state.

"Vicksburg will be the first in the state of Mississippi to have electric scooters available to our residents and visitors," Mayor George Flaggs Jr. said.

Scooters will be sanitized "at least twice a day" to help combat the coronavirus, the company said.

From wire reports

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# NFL ready to kick off amid pandemic

Associated Press

Never has the NFL doubted it would open its season on time. For months, it has steadfastly stuck to its plans, even as the coronavirus pandemic has altered the course of every other sport — on all levels.

With its kickoff game of Super Bowl champion Kansas City hosting Houston rapidly approaching, possibly with fans in the stands, America's most popular sport must recognize the challenges off the field could be more daunting than those on it. Particularly after 77 false positive COVID-19 tests last weekend.

"We're going to have to be flexible and adaptable," says Dr. Allen Sills, the league's chief medical officer and, in 2020, for good reason, its most visible executive. "I think that's something we'll continue to track and monitor. If this taught us anything, projecting three, four weeks down the road is a hazardous business."

Many would say playing a collision sport not only is hazardous but foolhardy. The NFL did have 67 players opt

out of the season. But it seems the vast majority of players, coaches, executives and, for certain, owners, want to stick to the script. Even with the risk COVID-19 presents.

"I just really thought about all the things that could happen," says Broncos star linebacker Von Miller, who has recovered from the coronavirus. "This season is different from any other season. I weighed the positives and the negatives, and I came to my own decision that I can play. I thought about me having asthma. I went over everything that I possibly could with my agent, and we just thought about it."

"I feel like every player should do that. Every player should think about everything they could do."

Miller, it turns out, might miss the season, but it has nothing to do with COVID-19. The Broncos star suffered an ankle injury on Tuesday that could be season-ending, according to a person with knowledge of the situation.

The person, speaking on condition of anonymity because the team hadn't addressed

Miller's injury, said the team was awaiting results of an MRI on Miller.

The NFL believes it has thought of everything it can do to provide the safest environment for its games in regards to the virus. Still, some clubs are planning to open the gates to fans, with the Dolphins announcing plans for about 13,000 folks in the stands on Sept. 20.

Yes, there are competitive imbalance issues there, but if one municipality allows fans and another doesn't, is it up to the league to step in?

"It's very hard," Vikings coach Mike Zimmer says. "Some stadiums, they're allowing people in, and it looks like we're not going to have any fans there early, which really stinks because we have such unbelievable fans, and they make that place rocking every Sunday. But the best way to have home-field advantage is to play really good: execute, make tackles, don't make mistakes, don't commit penalties, turnovers, all those things."

Some teams have huge advantages heading into a season like no other, with or without

anyone in the seats.

## Stability

Looking for clubs with a distinct edge when the 16-game (maybe) season kicks off? Try New Orleans, Kansas City, San Francisco, Buffalo, Baltimore and Seattle. Yep, 2019 playoff teams that made few significant changes are in the best shape.

"We've added a few different guys player-wise," 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan says, "and we have added a couple of different coaches, but the foundation of our team and especially our defense and our defensive coordinator, that hasn't changed. I do think that helps a lot, especially where we left off."

Teams that could struggle mightily after an offseason of constant upheaval are the Giants, Panthers, Browns, Raiders, Jaguars and Lions — all non-playoff clubs a year ago.

Don't expect an easy transition for top draft pick Joe Burrow, either. A young quarterback going to a tailender is difficult enough under normal circumstances.

## Golden Knights shut out Stars, even series at 1 apiece

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — After running into a hot goalie late last round and being shut out in the opener of the Western Conference finals, pressure mounted in the minds of the Vegas Golden Knights in Game 2.

When Paul Stastny scored to end a lengthy goal drought by Vegas forwards, the entire mood changed. William Karlsson and Tomas Nosek made it three goals in less than 10 minutes, Robin Lehner stopped all 24 shots he faced and the Golden Knights rediscovered their winning ways and beat the Dallas Stars 3-0 Tuesday night, evening the series.

"We were snake-bitten for a while there and think every-

body was gripping their stick a little tight," forward Chandler Stephenson said. "We're at our best when we have that swagger and we're making plays and tough to defend. It was nice to get that mojo back tonight and even the series."

Stastny's second-period goal was the first by a Vegas forward with an opposing goalie in net in 276:24, dating to Game 4 against Vancouver last round. His and Karlsson's were the kind of goals the Golden Knights became accustomed to scoring — ones that are difficult or impossible for someone like Anton Khudobin to stop.

After getting flustered by hot Vancouver Canucks goalie Thatcher Demko and failing to crack Khudobin in a hard-hit-

ting Game 1 that was played at the Stars' pace, Vegas finally looked like the team that earned the top seed in the West and steamrolled through the first round and halfway through the Vancouver series.

The return of enforcer Ryan Reaves was just one element of that. With Reaves suspended a game for an illegal check to the head, DeBoer didn't start his physical fourth line as he had in 34 consecutive games since the All-Star break in January.

William Carrier, Nosek and Reaves started and came out hitting. Reaves hit Dallas captain Jamie Benn twice in the first 30 seconds, and the Golden Knights dictated the physicality the way the Stars did two nights earlier.

After no goals in the first

period, Stastny scored on a redirection in front from Max Pacioretty. With agitating Stars winger Corey Perry in the penalty box minutes later, Karlsson scored on the power play with Mark Stone sliding in front to screen Khudobin.

Defenseman Shea Theodore, the only Vegas player to beat Demko in the final three games of that series, was in some pain on the bench early in the second after losing an edge, and it appeared he scored on the power play to make it 3-0. Dallas coach Rick Bowness successfully challenged for goalie interference to waive it off, but Nosek finished off a perfect tic-tac-toe passing play later in the period to give the Golden Knights the three-goal lead for real.



## NBA roundup

## Heat oust Bucks, move into East finals

Associated Press

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — Jimmy Butler and the Miami Heat are headed to the Eastern Conference finals.

Giannis Antetokounmpo could only watch.

The fifth-seeded Heat finished off an upset of the NBA's best regular-season team Tuesday, topping the Milwaukee Bucks 103-94 in Game 5 of their East semifinal series — while Antetokounmpo, the league's reigning MVP, couldn't play because of a sprained right ankle.

"We have deep, deep respect for that franchise and it's unfortunate that Giannis couldn't play tonight," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said.

Butler and Goran Dragic each scored 17 points for the Heat, who won the series 4-1 and will face either Boston or Toronto when the NBA's final four gets underway next week. It's Miami's first time in the East finals since 2014, and the first time Butler has gotten this deep in the playoffs.

"It means a lot," Butler said. "But that's not my goal. That's not my guys' goal. That's not the organization's goal. We want to win 'it.' We want a championship and I think that's what we're focused on. These next eight are going to be much harder than the previous eight. We know that. But we're ready for them."

Jae Crowder scored 16, Tyler Herro scored 14, Bam Adebayo had 13 and Kelly Olynyk had 12 for the Heat.

Khris Middleton had 23 points for Milwaukee, which got 15 points and 14 rebounds from Brook Lopez. Donte DiVincenzo scored 17, Wesley Matthews and Marvin Williams each had 11 and Eric Bledsoe had nine assists for the Bucks.

The decision to not let Antetokounmpo play came down about 45 minutes before game time.

"I wanted to play," Antetokounmpo said. "You know I wanted to play. I know I wanted to play. My coach knows I wanted to play, but at the end of the day, the organization put

my health over Game 5. That's big."

Antetokounmpo did what he could — cheering from the bench throughout, rebounding for teammates during pregame warmups and again at half-time, offering words during timeouts.

And the Bucks were inspired from the jump.

But the NBA's No. 1 overall seed in these playoffs — a league-best 56-17 in the regular season — just didn't have enough. A very memorable ride ended, after a season where Milwaukee likely had a back-to-back MVP, the best record in the game and led a player boycott earlier in these playoffs to reiterate the primary mission of this restarted season: using the NBA platform to highlight a need to end racial injustice.

"You always want to realize those expectations, but the relationships, the character, what this group did ... it would be great if you could have both, but I think if you're going to choose one, I'd like to be with guys with high character who

stand for something," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said.

**Lakers 112, Rockets 102:** LeBron James scored 36 points, Rajon Rondo sparked a fourth-quarter rally and Los Angeles beat Houston to take a 2-1 lead in their Western Conference playoff series.

James earned his NBA-record 162nd playoff victory, surpassing former Lakers guard Derek Fisher's 161.

Rondo had 21 points and nine assists as the Lakers broke open a close game in the final period. He scored eight straight points during a 10-0 run early in the fourth quarter that put the Lakers ahead for good. Rondo assisted on the other basket during that stretch.

Anthony Davis had 26 points and Kyle Kuzma added 14. James Harden scored 33 points and Russell Westbrook had 30 for the Rockets.

Rockets forward Robert Covington was taken to the locker room after colliding with Davis in the fourth quarter.

## Thunder decide to part ways with Donovan after 5 years

Associated Press

Billy Donovan won't return as coach of the Oklahoma City Thunder after five seasons, the team announced Tuesday night, ending a largely successful run that ought to make him an attractive candidate for jobs around the league.

Donovan, who was at the end of his contract, took the Thunder to the playoffs every year and was a finalist for NBA Coach of the Year this season after his squad outperformed expectations and pushed the Houston Rockets to seven games in the first round of the playoffs.

Donovan went 243-157 with Oklahoma City.

"I have a great respect and admiration for the players I

coached in Oklahoma, and I also want to thank the coaches I worked with, who gave unbelievable time and expertise to our common goal," Donovan said in a statement.

The Thunder and Donovan described his departure as a mutual decision. Oklahoma City general manager Sam Presti said he couldn't give Donovan the assurances he wanted about the future.

"In knowing where he is and the caliber of coach he is, I wouldn't want to mislead him and tell him it was going to be a certain way and then have it not be that way," Presti said. "But ultimately, it was also five years and I think in his mind, it may have been time to move on. I totally respect that and I

have a great deal of respect for him. I wish him nothing but the best."

Before his run in Oklahoma City, Donovan led the University of Florida to two national championships and four Final Four appearances in 19 seasons.

Donovan inherited All-Stars Kevin Durant and Russell Westbrook when he was hired before the 2015-16 season. The Thunder reached the Western Conference Finals, where they squandered a 3-1 lead against the Golden State Warriors.

Durant left for the Warriors that offseason, shaking the franchise and its fans. But the Thunder bounced back — Westbrook was the league MVP and set a league record for triple-

doubles in a season. It was the first of three straight seasons that Westbrook averaged a triple-double. The Thunder lost to the Rockets in the first round of the playoffs.

The Thunder tried to assemble enough stars to compete with Golden State, trading for Paul George and Carmelo Anthony before the 2017-18 season. It didn't go as planned — the team went 48-34 and lost to the Utah Jazz in the first round of the playoffs.

In 2018-19, the Thunder went 49-33 and George finished third in the MVP balloting. Oklahoma City lost in the first round again when Portland's Damian Lillard hit a deep game-winning three-pointer over George in Game 5.

# Zverev moves into US Open semifinals

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The disqualification of Novak Djokovic from the U.S. Open, and the absences of Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer, presented quite an opportunity to Alexander Zverev and the other men left in the tournament — all in their 20s, all seeking a first Grand Slam title.

Who would falter? Who would rise to the occasion? Done in by double-faults and bothered by an officiating decision, Zverev stumbled at the start of Tuesday's quarterfinal against Borna Coric. Then, suddenly, Zverev soared.

Down a set and a break early, then so close to trailing by two sets to one, Zverev grabbed 14 of 15 points in a pivotal stretch on the way to earning his first semifinal berth at Flushing Meadows with a 1-6, 7-6 (5), 7-6 (1), 6-3 victory over Coric.

"The Novak news shocked us all," Zverev said, "and obviously for us younger guys, we see that as a massive opportunity. But we have to put our head down and do our job."

It was a scratchy contest — both men generated more unforced errors than winners through two sets, and Zverev finished with 12 double-faults — and the winner acknowl-

edged afterward that the way he played at the outset was "not the level for the quarterfinal match in a Grand Slam."

But Zverev got more aggressive as things went on, including essentially hitting two first serves instead of a softer, slower second following a fault, and that helped lift him to his second consecutive major semifinal, after getting that far at this year's Australian Open.

Next for the 23-year-old from Germany will be a match against No. 20 Pablo Carreno Busta of Spain, who edged No. 12 Denis Shapovalov of Canada 3-6, 7-6 (5), 7-6 (4), 0-6, 6-3.

In women's action Tuesday,

two-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka set up a semifinal against 28th-seeded Jennifer Brady, a 25-year-old from Pennsylvania who's never been this far at a major tournament.

Osaka, the former No. 1-ranked player who won the U.S. Open two years ago, played far cleaner tennis than her opponent in a 6-3, 6-4 win over 93rd-ranked Shelby Rogers at night.

Rogers finished with 27 unforced errors, Osaka with eight.

Earlier, Brady defeated No. 23 seed Yulia Putintseva of Kazakhstan 6-3, 6-2.

## MLB roundup

# Rangers down Angels to snap 6-game losing streak

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Lance Lynn pitched seven strong innings, Elvis Andrus homered and the Texas Rangers snapped a six-game losing streak with a 7-1 win Tuesday night over the Los Angeles Angels, who had won five in a row.

Lynn (5-2), the first major league pitcher to make 10 starts this season, struck out six, walked two and limited the Angels to one run on four hits. The right-hander had lost his previous two starts, allowing 10 runs (nine earned) — more than he had allowed combined his first seven starts.

Andrus put the Rangers ahead to stay with a solo shot in the second. They went ahead 3-0 with two unearned runs in the fourth on second baseman Matt Thaiss' two-out error.

Andrew Heaney (3-3) had won his last two starts and had pitched 10 consecutive scoreless innings before Andrus went deep. The lefty also gave up five runs (over 3<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> innings) in his first start at the Rangers' new ballpark on Aug. 9.

**Athletics 4-4, Astros 2-5:** Yuli Gurriel hit a tiebreaking

sacrifice fly in the seventh inning set up by an Oakland error, and visiting Houston won to split a doubleheader and end a six-game losing streak.

In the opener, as ash from nearby wildfires fell inside the Coliseum and Khris Davis homered off previously unbeaten Zack Greinke to help the A's win.

**Blue Jays 2, Yankees 1:** Jonathan Davis homered in his first at-bat of the season and host Toronto won its third straight game, a day after routing New York 12-7.

**Twins 7-4, Cardinals 3-6:** Matt Wieters hit 14 foul balls during a 19-pitch at-bat that finished with a flyout during a wild rally that sent host St. Louis over Minnesota for a doubleheader split.

Josh Donaldson, Nelson Cruz and Miguel Sano all homered, leading the Twins to a victory in the first game. Cruz also homered in the second game to tie him for the MLB lead with 15.

**Phillies 6-2, Red Sox 5-5:** Bobby Dalbec homered for his fourth straight game, his two-run shot in the sixth inning enough to help visiting Boston beat Philadelphia and split a

doubleheader.

Alec Bohm hit a two-out, two-run single in the seventh inning to rally the Phillies in the opener.

**Giants 6, Mariners 5:** Pinch-hitter Darin Ruf homered with one out in the seventh inning and host San Francisco ended Seattle's winning streak at six games.

**Royals 8, Indians 6:** Maikel Franco drove in the go-ahead run with a sacrifice fly in the eighth inning and had an RBI single in the ninth as visiting Kansas City beat Cleveland to snap a seven-game losing streak.

**Nationals 5, Rays 3:** Juan Soto drove in a run in his return to the lineup and host Washington used strong relief pitching to beat Tampa Bay and sweep the two-game series.

**Tigers 8, Brewers 3:** Spencer Turnbull allowed three hits in six scoreless innings, and host Detroit broke the game open with five runs in the fifth on their way to a victory over Milwaukee.

**Marlins 8, Braves 0:** Sixto Sanchez combined with four relievers on a four-hitter and Jorge Alfaro hit one of three

homers for visiting Miami in a victory over Atlanta.

**Orioles 11, Mets 2:** Rookie Ryan Mountcastle hit a two-run homer, Rio Ruiz added a three-run shot as visiting Baltimore hit four homers and cruised past New York.

**Pirates 5, White Sox 4:** Pinch-runner Jason Martin scored the winning run on catcher Yasmani Grandal's error in the bottom of the ninth inning as host Pittsburgh rallied against Chicago.

**Cubs 3, Reds 0:** Alec Mills pitched six sharp innings, David Bote drove in two runs and host Chicago beat Cincinnati.

**Padres 14, Rockies 5:** Wil Myers homered twice, including San Diego's seventh grand slam of the season, Austin Nola hit a three-run shot and Mike Clevinger was impressive in his home debut in a rout of Colorado.

**Dodgers 10, Diamondbacks 9 (10):** Rookie Gavin Lux hit two homers, including a three-run shot in the 10th inning, and visiting Los Angeles rallied from four runs down to beat Arizona.